

Italy – Wildlife & Culture of Tuscany

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Fly Pisa; transfer to Maremma
Day 2/4	A daily programme of natural history walks from our base at Maremma
Day 5/7	Siena Casentino and Florence
Day 8	Transfer Pisa, fly London

Departs

May

Focus

Birds, plants and butterflies, plus the chance to enjoy a little of Italy's fine cuisine, Gothic and Renaissance art and architecture

Grading

Day walks only. Grade A/B

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ITA09) or brochure

Highlights

- A superb natural history holiday – focusing on birds, flowers, butterflies and reptiles
- Fantastic cuisine that fully lives up to Tuscany's reputation for excellent food and wine
- A warm and friendly welcome on this two-centre tour
- Beautiful culture to enjoy at Florence and Sienna



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N.B. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Introduction

Tuscany is, in so many ways, the very essence of Italy. The name alone conjures up the vivid images so beloved of painters – rolling landscapes outlined by dark cypress trees and enlivened by vibrant splashes of red poppies, the whole bathed in that wonderful light seemingly peculiar to Italy. Olive groves, vineyards and magnificent hill-top towns nestle alongside some of the most famous artistic and cultural treasures in Europe. The modern Italian language was born here from the famous works of Dante and Boccaccio, whilst the region also witnessed the birth of the great Renaissance period. The center of it all was Florence, where important works of art testify to the genius of the likes of Leonardo da Vinci, Brunelleschi, Donatello, Masaccio and Michelangelo. Tuscany is also home to such other cultural gems as the medieval cities of Sienna and Pisa and the smaller San Gimignano. This exciting tour will enable us to combine some of these wonders with the rich natural history of the region.

It is worth noting this tour runs back to back with our Go Slow...in Tuscany (ITA18) tour for those wishing to spend more time in this special part of Italy.

Day 1

London – Maremma

We depart from London to Pisa in the morning, arriving approximately two hours later and transferring to our minibus for the three and a half hour scenic drive to Maremma in the south-west of Tuscany. We will be keeping our eyes open during the journey for some of the colourful roadside flora found in the region.

If time allows, enroute we will break our journey at the stunning little medieval town of San Gimignano, where we will have lunch, if we have not already had it along the way, and have the chance to get a "taste" of the town. Perched on a hill, with its famous towers silhouetted against the sky, it dominates the Elsa Valley and resists all efforts to bring it into the modern world. It is known as one of the most spectacular towns in Italy. Its towers, which once numbered 72 but are now considerably reduced, were built as symbols of power and wealth of the local families. It was originally an Etruscan village and was named after the bishop of Modena who is said to have saved the city from Attila the Hun. Most of its towers were built during the 12th and 13th centuries. In 1348 the plague devastated the population, leading to a reduction in power and submission to Florence in 1353. Unfortunately, there will not be time to spend long in the town but we should get the chance to wander some of its old streets or visit the cathedral to admire the spectacular 14th century frescoes.



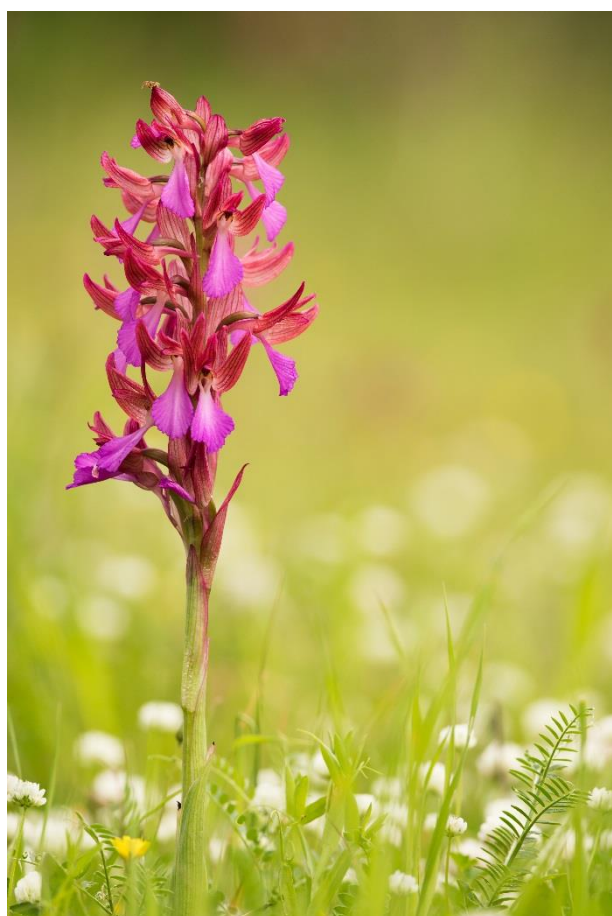
On arrival in Maremma, we will settle into our accommodation, the Fattoria Il Duchesco, which is set amongst beautiful scenery within the Regional Park of Maremma, and produces wonderful local Tuscan wine.

Day 2

Orbetello & Bosco di Patanella

This morning we will visit the WWF reserve at the Orbetello Oasi. This area, which is inland from Monte Argentario, used to be an island a long time ago. Over many thousands of years two narrow sand spits were formed by inshore currents between the mountain and the mainland, creating a brackish lagoon. The ancient walled town of Orbetello, once one of the region's leading commercial and trade centers, was built on a peninsula sticking into the lagoon and when the Romans built a causeway linking the town to the Argentario, this formed a third spit of land and divided the lagoon. The Orbetello Lagoon completely surrounds the town of Orbetello and the area became protected in 1971 and was turned into a Natural Reserve in 1980. A variety of habitats such as fresh water ponds, fields, sandy causeways and woods occur in the region.

Orbetello Lagoon is also a RAMSAR Site, on account of its strategic importance during bird migration, and



at the time of our visit such species as Greater Flamingo, Glossy Ibis, Little Bittern, Squacco and Purple Heron, Little Egret, Great Egret, Stone Curlew, Black-winged Stilt, Black Tern, Whiskered Tern, Bee-eater, Golden Oriole, Crested Lark, Collared Flycatcher, Zitting Cisticola and Great Reed Warbler may all be seen.

The site also holds numerous butterflies, amongst them Swallowtail, Scarce Swallowtail, Glanville Fritillary, Black-veined White, Spotted Fritillary, Common Blue and Holly Blue, whilst such orchids as *Anacamptis papilionacea* (Pink Butterfly), *Serapias parviflora* (Small-flowered Tongue-orchid) and *Anacamptis morio* (Green-winged Orchid) are found here.

After a leisurely picnic lunch we will visit our second WWF reserve of the day, Bosco di Patanella. The variety of butterflies on this walk can be excellent, more orchids such as *Serapias lingua* (Tongue Orchid), *Serapias cordigera* (Heart-shaped Tongue Orchid) and *Limodorum abortivum* (Violate Bird's-nest Orchid) may be found together with an extensive salt marsh flora, and the birdwatching is also good. Species may include Long-eared Owl, but the real star of the show will be the potential for breeding Great-spotted Cuckoo.

Day 3

Giglio Island & Argentario Promontory

Today is one of our busiest days and we will spend the whole day visiting Giglio Island and the Argentario Promontory, part of the National Park of the Tuscan Archipelago.

Surrounded by crystal clear waters, the main attraction of picturesque Giglio Island is our exploration of its coast in search of Audouin's Gulls, one of the rarest gull species in the world and a Mediterranean endemic. Here we will also hope to see Scopoli's and Yelkouan Shearwater, European Storm Petrel, Peregrine Falcon (*brookei* race) and Blue Rock Thrush. Our boatman will supply us with a freshly prepared and cooked Pasta lunch.



We will survey the whole of the island's perimeter by boat during which time we may be lucky enough see Bottlenose Dolphins, and if time permits, we will enjoy a break in Giglio's nice port and perhaps a coffee or an ice cream in its little piazza.

In the afternoon we will spend a few hours enjoying the rocky and scrubby hillsides above the Port of Porto Santo Stefano, on the beautiful Argentario Promontory, an area of bays, small islands and cliffs covered with the typical Mediterranean maquis.

The botanists in our party will relish time spent here, an area which a rich and varied flora. Some 42 species of Orchid have been recorded here throughout the season. Amongst those we may see are *Serapias parviflora* (Small-flowered Tongue Orchid), *Orchis italica* (Naked Man Orchid), *Anacamptis morio* (Green-winged Orchid), *Anacamptis papilionacea* (Pink Butterfly Orchid), *Neotinea maculata* (Dense-flowered Orchid) and *Orchis anthropophora* (Man Orchid). We will also hope to find flowering *Gladiolus italicus* (Field Gladiolus), *Asphodelus aestivus* (Common Asphodel), *Anemone hortensis* and (*Ornithogalum umbellatum*) (Common Star of Bethlehem) amongst other species.

Day 4

Parc Regionale della Maremma

Today we will spend the day visiting the nearby Regional Park of Maremma, one of the most outstanding environments on the peninsula with a rich variety of scenery and natural history. The park was established in 1975 and is an excellent example of successful conservation and management. It is located along the coast close to Grosseto, the capital city of the region. Stunning countryside combines all the ecosystems typical of southern Tuscany – wetlands, rocky coastlines, cliffs, sand dunes and pristine beaches backed by stands of umbrella pines, Mediterranean maquis and forested hills. Herds of the region's celebrated

grey/white cattle and wild Maremma horses graze accompanied by Cattle Egrets, amongst picturesque farms, pastureland and olive groves.

The flora is typically Mediterranean and together with the wealth of flowers here, we will also enjoy the butterflies that they attract (if the sun is out!). Species include *Cistus monspeliensis* (Narrow-leaved Cistus) and *Cistus salvifolius* (Sage-leaved Cistus), *Arbutus unedo* (Strawberry Tree), *Teucrium fruticans* (Shrub Germander), *Myrtis communis* (Myrtle), *Rosmarinus officinalis* (Rosemary), *Juniperus phoenicea* (Phoenician Juniper), and a variety of heathers and rockroses, whilst on the sandy beaches *Ononis spinosa* (Spiny Restharrow), *Anthyllis barba-jovis* (Jupiter's Beard) and Chamomile *Anthemis maritimus* are found.



In addition to the Pond Terrapin *Emys orbicularis*, such varied habitats support a wide selection of birds, including such species as Purple Heron, Yelkouan Shearwater, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Montagu's Harrier, Peregrine Falcon, Eurasian Scops Owl, Stone Curlew, Great Spotted Cuckoo, European Roller, Hoopoe, Subalpine and Dartford Warbler, and Zitting Cisticola. Mammals including Fallow and Roe Deer, Wild Boar and Red Fox are quite easily seen in the area, especially around sunset. The maquis should allow us to see such butterflies as Cleopatra, Brimstone and Green-underside Blue.

Day 5

Siena & Moggiona

Our journey today will take us through a spectacular landscape of rolling hills dotted with trees laden with spring blossom, passing by many small medieval towns and castles. After a drive of approximately one and a half hours we will reach the city of Siena, one of the greatest medieval towns in Europe and a treasure-house of Gothic architecture and art masterpieces. We hope to have enough time to at least enjoy its principal sights which are all within walking distance of its main large piazza – il Campo – home to the renowned Palio or bareback horse race and some say the most beautiful square in Italy and even in the world! Close by are the Gothic masterpieces of the Duomo and the Palazzo Pubblico.

Later this afternoon we will continue our journey to Moggiona, a drive of approximately two and a half hours, where we will be based for our final three nights in the excellent I Tre Baroni Hotel.

Day 6

National Park of Foreste Casentinesi

Today we will spend the day exploring in and around the National Park of Foreste Casentinesi, an area of fir and beech forests. Surrounded by these forests is the imposing Camaldoli Monastery built in 1017 and the associated higher Hermitage. The monks who live there have dedicated themselves to the production of medicinal plants and herbs. We will explore the forest in search of its woodland birds, such as Woodlark,



Western Bonelli's Warbler, Firecrest and Gird Bunting and other wildlife (including three species of newt!), whilst keeping an eye out for Wolf tracks. The botany here is very different to that of the coast. This upland forest supports woodland species such as *Cardamine bulbifera* (Bulbous Bitter-cress) and *Cardamine heptophylla* (Seven-leaflet Bitter-cress), together with the orchids *Neottia ovata* (Twayblade), *Orchis purpurea* (Lady Orchid) and *Cephalanthera longifolia* (Sword-leaved Helleborine).

Day 7

Florence

Today we will start the day enjoying some local habitat in the close surrounds of our excellent accommodation before spending the majority of the day exploring the wonderful city of Florence. Enjoying its famous architecture, scenic squares, parks and gardens. As we travel to and from Florence we will look to make short stops at a couple of sites for wildlife and after a most varied day we will make our way back to Moggiona and our final meal together.

Day 8

Fly Pisa - London

Today we must transfer back to Pisa for our return flight to London. We have found that many clients enjoy spending additional nights in Florence after the main tour, in order to enjoy one of Italy's historic and culturally rich cities. Should this be of interest to you your Operations Team would be more than happy to arrange this, please contact the Naturetrek Office for further information.

Grading

Graded A/B and all walks are optional day walks.

We will explore this spectacular region and enjoy its natural history by means of day walks of between five and 10 kilometres in length. Our pace will be gentle, and we will frequently be merely pottering as we take a closer look at the plants, butterflies and birds. We may have the support of two minibuses (depending on group size) to allow maximum flexibility, and provide options to each day's programme.

Weather

Mostly warm and sunny.

Food and accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday. We will be staying at two excellent, family run hotels and the food on this tour is of a high standard and you will have the chance to sample all the delicious local specialties along with the area's superb wines!

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting flights, at the time of booking.

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