

SHOPPING, RESTAURANTS, PLACES TO SEE & ACTIVITIES

Local shops

The nearest shop is in the village (Vellano). They serve fresh bread, cheese and meats and all the basic essentials. They are closed on Sundays: only open early morning until 12pm and then later afternoon (5-7pm). The shop is located next door to the Patrizia hairdressers. The owners are lovely and very helpful.

The next closest food shop is a delicatessen/basic groceries shop in Pietrabuona at the bottom of the hill (halfway to Pescia) near the Post office, next door to the farmacia, which has a clear green cross sign. It also has a blue beaded curtain at the door and is open 8.00-12.30 then 16.30-19.00 (closed Mondays). It is called Amanda's and is run by a lovely woman who can speak perfect English. She makes lovely food, and has all the basics. Ask her for the specials of the day and about any catering requirements.

IN PESCIA

Opening Hours for most of the shops, apart from the supermarket: open mornings around until 13.30 and then shut until 16.30. They then open again usually 16.30 to 19.00/19.30.

Supermarket: There is a great supermarket in Pescia, by the roundabout, at the end of the town (just follow the river). It is called ESSELUNGA. It is open every day including Sunday. There is also a COOP, next to the bridges. There is also a Lidl, on the other side of the river, open every day, (Sundays 08;30-20;00).

There are some reusable shopping bags above the microwave-feel free to use them but please return.

Saturday market

Is held in Piazza Mazzini in Pescia centre on Saturdays and there is a great fruit and vegetable market in the adjoining smaller square.

Piazza Mazzini

There are a number of really useful shops in Piazza Mazzini, good shoe shops, great coffee/pastry shop, kitchen shops, various clothing shops, a toyshop plus banks in the square. On the other side of the river (next door to the hospital) is a department store a lovely old-fashioned traditional store called Gianninos. The building has a big G on the roof.

Great Wine Cooperative

For the best (and best value) wine go to the local wine cooperative and seek out great white and especially red (we like the Sangiovese/cabernet) wines as well as superb olive oils and honeys -all at superb value as it is direct from the Chianti vineyards. It is directly to the left of the old mercato, almost opposite the tourist information point on the corner of the old market structure (concrete domed building) and has a big wine barrel in the shop. Open mornings and afternoons, except Sundays and Mondays. It may be shut for 2 weeks in August as many Italians take their holidays then.

The Village- VELLANO

It is well worth exploring fully as it has some spectacular views and friendly people. The entrance to the village is from higher up on the road and there are other walk able routes up. Don't think the road you pass through is all there is to the Village. There is a small piazza at the very top.

LOCAL RESTAURANTS - ALL WITHIN EASY REACH

In the village, the Trattoria Manero (with the glass box with amazing views of the valley) is a small traditional restaurant with good grilled meats and great pasta dishes. They serve whatever is available and fresh on the day. They will explain the menu-its not written.

On Saturdays, at The Circolo, great pizzas are served at great value. Donatella can make a booking for you. It's a great experience.

Below the house-in Sorana (the opposite hill top town to Vellano) after a 10-minute drive down the hill (turn right out of the house and follow the lane down – with care) there are 2 classic Italian trattoria below the house in the direction of Sorana. (Left at the bottom of the hill then right towards Sorana/Castelvecchio).

They are:

Trattoria da Sandrino (at Ponte di Castelvecchio) Tel: 0572 407014. Traditional food and good value. Friendly and welcoming. (only indoor)

A little bit further along: *Restaurant da Carla*. A traditional lunch/dinner place very popular with locals- so again great value and good traditional foods. This area (Sorana) is very famous for the white fagioli beans, which you will see on your way. Lovely outdoor veranda area.

In Pietrabuona: (First village at the bottom of the main road on the way into Pescia). Next to the builders yard on the road is a discreet restaurant entrance with a sign often showing fresh porcini. The restaurant is DA NERONE. Again this is a much larger restaurant inside than you might expect and serves superb grilled meats, pastas and pizzas with regular specials. They are very nice and proud about their food.

In/Near Pescia

In the town itself there is a friendly restaurant- great for a quick lunch- on the main street out from the square, called Trattoria Pucci

Collodi

There are a couple of restaurants in Collodi, just beyond Pescia, on the road to Lucca. Collodi is the birthplace of Collodi who wrote Pinocchio. There is also a large Villa with gardens and restaurant.

Lucca A spectacular town with numerous restaurants and fine dining opportunities, often tucked away in courtyards. This town is not to be missed. The more hidden the better in Lucca. Our personal favourite is Trattoria Canuiela, in Via del Canuiela, just south of the Piazza Antetheatro. It has a lovely garden at the back of the restaurant and is beautiful food and wines.

Buca di Sant Antonio is a great restaurant also. You will find many options on trip advisor etc.

UP THE MOUNTAIN - DON'T THINK IT'S ALL DOWNHILL:

If you follow the road from Vellano by continuing up the mountain and drive for approximately 10 minutes you will come to a village Macchino. Push on just a little further - another 4 minutes along - just stay on the main road after Macchino - and you will come to Goraiolo.

Here there are 2 great restaurants.

Our personal favourite restaurant is LOCANDA ZACCO (on the junction - you can't miss it). It is absolutely lovely food. A little more expensive than the others but really great food and wine and family run. Matteo is the owner and is always there,

Only open for dinner apart from high season. Closed Monday or Wednesday (please check cards in house book). Locandazacco.com Tel No: +39 0572 698028.

Opposite is another popular local Restaurant called Trattoria Goraiolo, which is very popular with locals especially for Sunday lunch and does great grilled meats. Specialises in pasta, steaks and porcini.

MONTECARLO

This town is easily reached (5 mins from Pescia) and is a wine producing area. The village at the top has a castle and nice street with restaurants and bars. Just outside the village are the following restaurants, which we recommend:

Antico Ristorante Forassiepi +39 0583 229475

Osteria del Vecchio Olivo +39 0583 228847

Buonamico winer resort & restaurant -www.buonamicowineresort.it – Tel No +39 0583 1809796

LOCAL EXCURSIONS & TRIPS

No 1 Trip that must be done: A visit to the walled town of LUCCA.

Follow the signs to Lucca from Pescia and in approx. 25 mins from Esselunga you are there. Enter the town through the walls (you arrive at Porta Elisa), and then turn sharp right to Parking. There is a good underground car park with easy walking into the centre of the town.

Lucca is an amazing fully walled town- the walls were designed as a defence by Leonardo da Vinci. In the very centre it is all pedestrianized and is great for a day's wander. Beautiful town, a UNESCO heritage site and elegant shops. There is more information in the guidebooks and some maps should be on the shelf. Please just replace if you use them and if you discover something please get some cards and brochures for others to enjoy.

You can also hire bikes -also with carriers for small children and 4-wheeled carello for groups- you can cycle on the top of the walls around the whole town and it is a great experience - or of course just walk. Highly recommended. To reach the hire places walk to the very end of Via Filungo. You will also see others around.

Visit the wineries and the small walled town of MONTECARLO

Just outside Pescia between Pescia and Lucca. Maps on the shelf.

Here there is an attractive hilltop town, an ancient castello (open weekends only) and several restaurants with panoramic views. You can also stop and do wine tasting at many of the small vineyards that surround the town. Some offer lunch and wine tasting. We recommend Tenuta Buonamico and Tenuta di Montechiari.

Florence - FIRENZE - by Train

From the train station in Pescia (clearly signposted and just next to the large structure that is the one of the largest flower markets in Europe) you can take hourly trains to 'Firenze', It is far easier than driving into Florence, which is very difficult to park in. The trains take 1 hr and 10mins and there is free parking at the station for the day.

DON'T FORGET TO VALIDATE YOUR TICKETS AT THE STATION - or you will get fined. The fares are approx. 6 euros per person return. If you take your passports you can also gain free entry into several of the museums. If you want to visit the Uffizi gallery you must book tickets on line for a timed entry before leaving, otherwise the queues are incredible. Be prepared for the tourists! There is much more information in the guidebooks - again if you use please make sure they are returned to the house.

Montecatini Terme & Montecatini Alto -A circular tour.

A nice circular tour, first via the mountain and countryside then back via the towns. Drive up the mountain to Goraiolo then follow the signs to Montecatini Alto. You drive down the other side of the mountain and follow down to Terme. Park next to the Funicular railway (takes approx. 40 mins) and then take the little railway high up to the small totally pedestrianized Montecatini Alto. Maybe take some lunch here and wander around. Once you take the railway back down to Terme you can walk through the park to see the original Thermal baths. If you ask they can arrange treatments. Again there is more information in the guidebooks. The Tenucci Baths are quite splendid architecturally and with their paintings. The town is all 1920's and art deco glamour. Then drive directly back via Pescia.

The Sea

It is very easy to reach the sea, once you are on the Autostrada. (takes 45-60 mins from the house). Follow the A11 Autostrada. If you go right to the end (Pisa Nord-A11) come out onto the Aurelia (turn left and then first right to Marina di Vecchiano you will reach a quiet sandy long beach with good seafood bars and beach cafes. We love it here, it is very unspoilt. We usually eat fantastic spaghetti vongole and swordfish at the Osteria del Parco before going down the jetty to the beach -cards in the house.

You can visit here the Parc Migliarino- a dune and long sand beach (not managed) also visit the Torre di Lago Puccini- where Puccini's museum is. NOTE: THERE IS A PUCCINI FESTIVAL THAT SHOWS OPEN AIR PUCCINI OPERAS THROUGHOUT JULY AND AUGUST BY THE LAKE. Look up Festival Pucciniano.

Further along the coast northwards is the town of Viareggio, full of great seafood restaurants and Lidos. Marina di Pietrasanta and just inland the artistic town of Pietrasanta (Saints stone) all with white marble. Just a few minutes further on the seafront is the chic, glamorous (and expensive) seaside resort of Forte dei Marmi. Tricky to find the exact centre but once you do its very nice to stroll around. There is a pier and you can also hire beach umbrellas for the day. The prices can vary dramatically depending where you are on the coast.

Pistoia

Is another really great renaissance town, well worth a visit, with a lovely central square, cathedral and a baptistry. The town invented the Pistol - named after it. Again lovely to wander and some good shops and restaurants. See more info in the guidebooks. A good trip for a morning or afternoon. These towns are often missed for the more famous sights of Florence and Pisa but they retain a more authentic Italian feel. The quickest way is to go to the motorway and head towards Firenze - it is a couple of exits along. Or you can head there over the mountain which is picturesque but longer.

DON'T FORGET FOR MANY OF THE TOWNS IF YOU HIT THEM AT 12.00 MOST OF THE SHOPS ARE SHUTTING AND ONLY OPEN AGAIN AT 16.30 so take a leisurely late lunch and enjoy or head off early morning or for late afternoon and have dinner.

Further a field: -

Pisa (1.5 hrs) very easy to drive and see the Piazza dei Miracoli, leaning tower and cathedral. The town around is also great - make sure you explore more than just the tower.

Near Florence (1.5 hrs) There is an amazing winery and restaurant, with extraordinary architecture -called Antinori Chianti Classico. If you have the time and energy, you must go. Look up the photos on the web.

Siena – (approx. 1.45 mins from the house). Follow the autostrada to Firenze, then Roma, then Siena-Arezzo. When you come out of the toll gates after Florence turn right for the sign to Siena and the dual carriageway ends at Siena town. Amazing. The Palio and its preparations take place every year in early July and between the 12th-16th August. The preparations can be very interesting to watch.

ACTIVITIES

You can go horseriding (early mornings and sunset rides) near Lucca -see luccahorseriding.com.

Canoeing on the lakes near the sea (45 mins away) Circolo Canoa Kayak Massarosa, Via della Torbiera, Località San Rocchino, Massarosa (LUCCA)
Tel: +39 320 4810351

The club "Canoa Kayak Massarosa" has a recent history: it was founded on December 2000 and it has immediately had a great success.

This activity takes place in "Cava di San Rocchino", situated between Massarosa and Viareggio, inside the Regional Park of Migliarino San Rossore - Massaciuccoli. The reservoir of San Rocchino is linked to the Lake of Massaciuccoli through a rich net of canals.

Wine Tasting - see recommendations above

There is more information in the house book, restaurant cards, tourist books and maps etc.

Please feel free to use, but please remember to replace! ENJOY!!