

FLORENCE

Patron tour, June 2025

Tour overview:

- **Monday 16 June** | Arrival in Florence and group dinner.
- **Tuesday 17 June** | Visit to Medicean Gardens: Villa La Petraia and Castello in the Florence area.
- **Wednesday 18 June** | Full day trip to Lucca to visit Villa Reale di Marlia, Palazzo Pfanner, Villa Torrigiani.
- **Thursday 19 June** | Villa Medici in Fiesole and Villa Gamberaia in Settignano. Final night group dinner in Florence.
- **Friday 20 June** | Departure for flights back to Edinburgh.

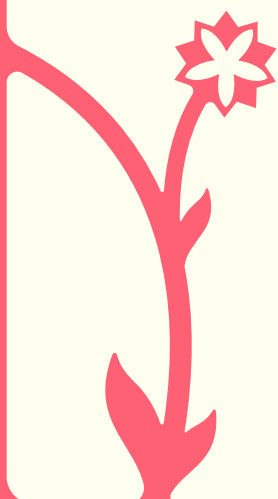
Included in Tour Cost:

- Return flights to Florence.
- Airport transfers.
- Four nights in Florence at a four-star hotel.
- All guided tours of the Gardens, many of which are privately owned.
- All breakfasts and three lunches.
- Two dinners.
- All coaches to the gardens and their entrance fees.

Accommodation:

Hotel Santa Maria Novella

Piazza Santa Maria Novella 1, 50123 Firenze



Day 1 – Tuesday 17 June

Medicean Gardens

The Medicean Gardens of Villa La Petraia and Castello are both UNESCO world heritage sites.

Villa Medici at **Castello** was one the first Renaissance gardens fully conceived and laid out by an artist. Cosimo I de' Medici commissioned Niccolò Pericoli, known as Il Tribolo in 1538. The garden's complex allegorical theme centres on the return of spring ushered in by Medici rule over Tuscany and was inspired by Botticelli's Primavera once housed in the villa. It features high quality statuary like 'Appennino' or 'January' by Bartolomeo Ammannati, 'Hercules' and 'Antaeus' by Giambologna, and the mysterious 'Grotto of the Animals' (recently restored). Known for its exotic plants from its inception, significant survivors are the Arabian Jasmine, Jasminum sambac gifted to Grand Duke Cosimo III and the historical citrus collection.

Villa La Petraia came into Medici ownership in 1544 and Cosimo later gifted it to his son Ferdinando who commissioned the famous 'lunettes', a significant pictorial record of all the Medici villas. These were painted by Justus Utens and are on display in the villa - unmissable for every garden history enthusiast. The Villa interior was embellished during the Medicean age with stunning frescoes by Volterrano. Later the villa became the favourite dwelling of King Vittorio Emanuele II of Savoy in 1865-1870 and transformed following the eclectic style of the period.



Day 2 – Wednesday 18 June

Villa Reale di Marlia, Palazzo Pfanner, Villa Torrigiani in Lucca

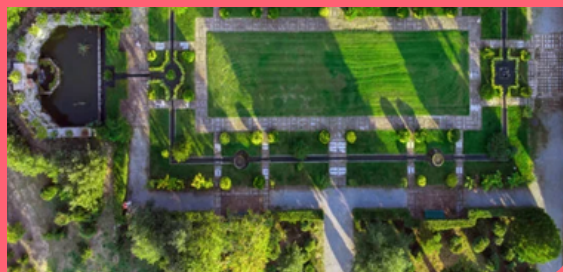
This full day excursion will be devoted to Lucca and its villas.

Villa Reale di Marlia. The 16-hectare garden combines features from several periods. It was initially designed as a Baroque Garden with the oldest Green Theatre of Italy (once hosting performances by Paganini), a Lemon Garden embellished with statues, and a splendid Water Theatre. The garden was enlarged by Elisa Bonaparte, Napoleon's sister with the addition of a romantic English Landscape Park. In 1924 the garden gained an interesting Art Déco garden by Jacques Greber after the estate was bought by the Countess Anna Laetitia Pecci-Blunt who owned the villa until 1971.

Afterwards, we will move to Lucca for lunch. In Lucca we will admire the **Baroque garden of Palazzo Pfanner***, the city walls and the Amphitheatre's square.

We will conclude the day at **Villa Torrigiani** where the present layout dates from the Baroque period and possibly laid out by the French landscape architect André Le Nôtre. The villa is now owned by Princess Vittoria Colonna di Stigliano and is splendidly decorated with 17th century frescoes. The gardens are superbly maintained and amongst the many features on offer are the Garden of Flora, the Grotto of the winds and the Mermaid fishpond.

*Palazzo Pfanner's garden is currently closed for restoration works. It is due to re-open to the public in 2025.



Day 3 – Thursday 19 June

Villa Medici in Fiesole and Villa Gamberaia in Settignano

Villa Medici in Fiesole was the first rural retreat the Medici family commissioned in 1452. Perched on a hill, the Villa dominates the landscape, a spot chosen for its stunning views over the city of Florence. Designed by Michelozzo or Leon Battista Alberti the Villa embodies the humanist ideals revived in this period. It was the setting for dramatic historical episodes in the life of the Medicean dynasty. Much of the garden's layout dates to the changes made from the 18th to the 20th centuries. The lower and western gardens were designed by Cecil Pinsent in the early 20th century.

Villa Gamberaia is one of the most cherished gardens of Italy. Located in the picturesque Settignano town, the original 15th century villa and gardens were enlarged by the Capponi family from 1718. The Romanian princess Catherine Jeanne Ghyka, née Keşko, reimagined the gardens when she laid out the unique water parterre in the late 19th century. The garden is intimate and of a relatable scale and preserves its original limonaia and striking emerald bowling green—once described as a 'great boat sailing through space'. The rustic nymphaeum and the Cabinet de Rocaille, along with sweeping views toward the Chianti hills, all add to its pastoral charms.



Tour Guides

Johanna Lausen-Higgins

Botanics lecturer, Diploma in Garden History

Johanna Lausen-Higgins is a horticulturist and garden historian with a passion for Renaissance gardens and historical fruit cultivation. She is a lecturer at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and directs its Diploma in Garden History. Her research focuses on horticultural history, and Renaissance garden design. She won the Mavis Batey essay prize with 'All the Gold a Miser Desires': A New Reading for the Iconography of the Grotto of the Animals at Villa Castello' which offered a fresh interpretation for the symbolism and was published in 2012.

Eleonora Tonon

Botanics Alumni and Florence Professional Licenced Tour Guide

Eleonora Tonon is a freelancer tour guide, tour leader, and travel designer in Florence with a passion for garden history. She graduated from the University of Padua in Planning and Management of Cultural Tourism in 2010. She studied English, French, German, Spanish, Russian, Japanese, and Portuguese. She attended the online course 'English Landscape Gardens from 1650 to present day' at Oxford University in 2020, and the Diploma in Garden History at Botanics in 2021-2023. She regularly designs and leads garden tours in Tuscany, Lazio, and Veneto regions for French garden clubs such as 'Union des Parcs et Jardins de Normandie' and 'Association des Parcs et Jardins de Paris et Ouest Parisien'.

