

Le Marche, Italy & Corsica

This trip to the Le Marche region of Italy and northern and western Corsica make for a great weeklong trip. I combined it with a hiking trip in Corsica, along the GR20. You could also break it into two long weekend trips or add more time in Florence and Tuscany to the Italy part for a longer trip.

Date	To	Hotel	Cost	Comments
Sat, Aug 15	<p>Drive Pisa to Florence to San Marino to Le Marche</p> <p>I met a friend in Florence and due to time constraints I just drove through to pick her up, but you could leave a few days earlier to spend time in Florence. If you do, you <i>must</i> eat at my favorite restaurant, Il Latini (via dei Palchetti 6/r (Palazzo Rucellai) - 50123 - Firenze - tel. (+39) 055 210916 - info@illatini.com, http://www.illatini.com) and be sure to order an assortment of appetizers (<i>primi piatti</i>). I would have stayed in Florence just for that restaurant, but it's closed for the August 15th holiday.</p> <p>On the way to San Marino, we stopped off at the picturesque town of Premilcuore, a nice place to have lunch.</p> <p>I admit that I partly wanted to visit San Marino to tick off another country on my list. I wouldn't make a special trip to the region just to see San Marino. It is very over-touristed and commercial. But the city is in a beautiful setting high above the plain below, so I would say it is worth a visit if you are already in the area.</p>	<p>La Tavola Marche Google Earth/GPS Coordinates: N 43 36'21.59 E 12 24'47.78 Agriturismo Ca'Camone Via Candigliano 61046 Piobbico (PU) tel. +39 331.525.2753</p> <p>La Tavola Marche (www.latavolamarche.com) is a wonderful "agriturismo" guesthouse and cooking school in Le Marche, a less touristy region of Italy than neighboring Tuscany, for example. Hosts Ashley and Jason made us feel more than welcome and taught us a great deal about the region. Jason is a professional chef who teaches cooking classes: you may choose from suggested themes or pick your own subject for a class. You certainly aren't required to take a class if you stay with them, but it would be a shame not to. I'd love to go back in the spring or fall for one of their truffle weekends. It's a wonderful place to relax, in a very quiet corner of the Italian countryside on beautiful grounds with a swimming pool. Apartments have kitchenettes so if you don't want to go into town, you can heat up the leftovers from your cooking class and stay in. Ashley and Jason will also go out of their way to help you plan your time in the area. And their website and blog are amazing resources. La Tavola Marche would make a wonderful weekend trip in itself.</p>	<p>Hotel €95/night</p> <p>Abby paid €100 deposit</p> <p>Car: €192 (paid by Abby but can be cancelled anytime)</p>	<p>Saturday 15 August Check in opens Sat 15 Aug 05:00 Closes Sat 15 Aug 06:20</p> <p>Paris Orly (Terminal Sud) To Pisa (Tuscany) flight 4209; dep. Sat 15 Aug 07:00 arr. Sat 15 Aug 08:35</p> <p>Car Pick-Up Details: Pisa, Italy 15 Aug 2009 @ 09:00 Pisa Airport (Galileo Galelei)</p> <p>Dinner at La Tavola 8pm</p> <p>We definitely underestimated how much time it would take to drive to San Marino and then Piobbico. Roads are quite narrow and windy and not for the faint-hearted. But thankfully we made it to our guesthouse in time for the 4-course dinner. It would also be a shame not to sign up for one of Jason's home-cooked meals during your stay. Absolutely delicious.</p>
Sun, Aug 16	Le Marche	La Tavola Marche	€95/night	<p>Visit Urbino</p> <p>On Sunday we visited Urbino, a wonderful medieval hilltop city not far from Piobbico. We then drove around the Le Marche countryside, stopped in Urbania, and back to Piobbico for dinner.</p>

Mon, Aug 17	Le Marche	La Tavola Marche	€95/night	<p>AM: cooking class</p> <p>PM: Road trip through southern Le Marche</p> <p>We had our cooking class in the morning and learned to make incredibly tasty pasta with organic ingredients we picked from the garden that morning. In the afternoon, we visited the nearby towns of Cagli and Sansepolcro. For dinner we were back at the guesthouse to finish off the rewards of our cooking class.</p>
Tues, Aug 18	Livorno	<p>HOTEL ARISTON LIVORNO Piazza Della Repubblica,11 57100 LIVORNO LI Italy Tel: +39 0 586 880149 Fax +39 0 586 889192 http://www.hotelaristonlivorno.com info@hotelaristonlivorno.com</p> <p>This hotel was nothing special but perfectly adequate and central.</p>	€85	<p>3h38 drive Piocobbo to Livorno</p> <p>Tuesday we left early and drove to Cortona, Tuscany, for lunch (made famous as the town from <i>Under the Tuscan Sun</i>). Cortona is a bit touristy now, but still has a lot of charm and certainly worth a visit. We ate at Café del Teatro, which I would highly recommend for the décor and the food.</p> <p>After Cortona, we drove to Montepulciano. I always knew Montepulciano had good wine, but I didn't realize it was also such a picturesque town. We spent the night in Livorno, which does not have much to offer tourists but you don't have much choice when you have an 8am ferry the next day.</p>

<p>Wed, Aug 19</p>	<p>Corsica—Cap Corse, Bastia (night in Bastia)</p>	<p>Hotel Central confirmed 3, rue Miot 20200 BASTIA Site web : www.centralhotel.fr E-mail : infos@centralhotel.fr 00 33 (0) 4 95 31 71 12</p> <p>Before checking in to the hotel, we spent a couple of hours driving around Cap Corse, the peninsula that reaches north of Bastia. We visited the scenic fishing villages of Erbalunga and Centuri and cut through the center of the peninsula on the way back to Bastia. Once again, driving in Corsica is not for the timid. Two-way streets are narrower than most one-way streets in the rest of France but that doesn't stop RVs and herds of goats from trying to monopolize the lanes. Not to mention the probability that there's a 1,000+ foot drop off to one side of the road and a rock face on the other side.</p> <p>This hotel is in a good location, about half-way between the ferry port and the Old Port. The rooms are nicely-decorated and have character, though no air conditioning meant they were a bit hot in August.</p> <p>Bastia is a great city in which to spend a day exploring back roads and parks. I'd consider going back to Bastia or Calvi just as a quick weekend getaway from Paris.</p>	<p>€30 deposit paid by Abby. Total price: €97</p> <p>Ferry: €24.70</p> <p>Car: US\$184 (paid by Abby but can be cancelled anytime)</p>	<p>Car Drop-Off Details: Livorno, Italy 19 Aug 2009 @ 08:00 Livorno Downtown Office Stazione Marittima Porto</p> <p>Ferry Livorno to Bastia: 8:15am-12:15am</p> <p>Car: voucher number is 3049039 Pick-Up Details: Bastia, France 19 Aug 2009 @ 13:00 Bastia Downtown Office 3 Rue Chanoine Leschi</p> <p>We had a bit of trouble finding the rental car drop-off in Livorno (be sure to leave extra time for finding the right pier and finding the rental car drop off). We had no trouble with the rental car pick-up in Bastia though, close to the ferry port. We could have brought the same car on the ferry (for extra money and hassle) but we were not returning to Italy and it's incredibly expensive to pick up in one country and drop off in another (around a €500 supplement).</p> <p>Corsica has amazing food and in particular, seafood. We had an incredible dinner in Bastia's Old Port at Le Lavezzi (8, rue Saint Jean, 04 95 31 05 73), which I would highly recommend!</p>
<p>Thurs, Aug 20</p>	<p>Corsica—Desert des Agriates, Balagne Craft Trail, Sant' Antonino, Calvi (night in Calvi)</p>	<p>Hotel Magnolia Rue Alsace Lorraine CALVI 20220 +33 (0) 4 95 65 19 16 info@hotel-le-magnolia.com</p> <p>We explored Bastia a bit more in the morning, then made the beautiful drive over to Calvi, making a detour up the mountain to Sant' Antonino, one of the most beautiful villages in France (Les Plus Beaux Villages de France).</p> <p>Hotel Magnolia is in a perfect location right in the center, but it's quiet and has a nice terrace in front. I was a bit disappointed by Calvi's beach, but I adored the town itself (the waterside cafes and promenade as well as the old town perched above).</p>	<p>50% deposit paid by Abby. Total price: €130</p>	<p>About 10km or so before arriving in Calvi, we stopped for a seafood lunch at a wonderful beachside restaurant, Le Pain de Sucre (www.le-pain-de-sucre.com, 04 95 60 79 45).</p> <p>Parking de la citadelle (at the end of boulevard Wilson)</p> <p>Check-in 15h</p>

<p>Fri, Aug 21</p>	<p>Corsica—Scandola Reserve, Piana region (night in Porto)</p>	<p>Hôtel Bella Vista route de Calvi 20150 PORTO - Corse - France Coordonnées GPS: N 42° 15mn 59s E 8° 42mn 16s Tel 04 95 26 11 08 info@hotel-bellavista.net</p> <p>The Bella Vista was a bit pricier than some of our other hotels, but the price included breakfast and dinner, so in the end it was a good value. We had a nice room with a balcony and the dinner was exceptional.</p>	<p>1/3 deposit paid by Abby. Total price: €178, includes dinner</p>	<p>Friday morning, we made our way to Porto, in time to take a full afternoon boat trip from Porto to see the Scandola Reserve, the small village of Girolata and the cliffs of Piana, and to go for a nice swim in the ocean.</p>
<p>Sat, Aug 22</p>	<p>Vizzavona</p>	<p>Hotel Monte d'Oro (tel. 0495472106, 0495472344) in the village of Foce</p> <p>We drove to Ajaccio early to drop off the rental car. My Italy & Corsica travel buddy flew from Ajaccio back to Paris that afternoon. I met another friend and we explored Ajaccio for a few hours (i.e. ate pasta and gelato and saw Napoleon's birthplace), then prepared to embark the following day on our 9-day hike of the northern section of the GR20.</p>	<p>No deposit, total price €98</p>	<p>Drop-Off Details: Ajaccio, France 22 Aug 2009 @ 13:00 Ajaccio Airport</p> <p>Train to Vizzavona 16h55-18:08</p> <p>You'd miss a fair bit of Corsica without a car, but if you don't drive or you just need transportation to or from a long-distance hike, with a bit of patience you can rely on public transport. This site gives details on bus and train schedules (note that most routes have different winter and summer schedules): http://www.corsicabus.org.</p>