

GOOD TO KNOW

START/FINISH

Lucca to Rome

SEASON

Spring and fall offer the best chance of mild and clear conditions. Summers can be uncomfortably hot, with temperatures regularly north of 30°C (86°F). A winter pilgrimage is possible, though daylight hours are shorter, and rain is more frequent.

ACCOMMODATIONS

There are various indoor options, including hostels, hotels, B&Bs, churches, and monasteries, many of which are discounted to hikers with pilgrim's passports (see Main Text). Camping on the Via Francigena is only permitted in designated campgrounds or with permission from private landowners.

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Taking a deep (and very satisfying) dive into Tuscan cuisine
2. The timeless cities of Lucca and Siena
3. The tower houses of San Gimignano
4. Walking among the Tuscan countryside's vineyards, olive groves, and cypress-lined byways
5. Lake Bolsena, Europe's largest volcanic lake

HELPFUL HINTS

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The closest international airports to the starting point at Lucca are in Pisa and Florence. For those flying into Rome, it's 5.5 hours by train, with just one transfer.

FOOD

Going hungry on the Via Francigena would be practically impossible. Cafés, restaurants, and markets abound throughout the journey. Unless you choose otherwise, you should never have to carry more than a handful of snacks in your pack.

WHAT TO BRING

Recommended items include a 40L backpack, sleeping bag liner, sleeping bag rated to 0°C (32°F) (if hiking in late fall to early spring), trail running shoes or lightweight synthetic hiking boots, water bottles, first aid kit, sun protection (hat, glasses, sunscreen), GPS app on your smartphone, toiletries, power bank for charging electronics, and pilgrim's passport (see Main Text).

Recommended clothing includes a fleece, rain jacket, rain pants, beanie or buff, two or three pairs of socks (one kept clean for sleeping), hiking pants or shorts, long-sleeved hiking shirt, lightweight travel towel, and swimsuit.

TAKE A LOAD OFF

For folks who'd prefer not to carry all their gear on the Via Francigena, a popular option is to use a luggage transfer service. These companies will pick up your bag at your accommodations and then drop it off at your next port of call. At the time of writing, two such options are SloWays (sloways.eu) and BagsFree (bags-free.com).

BONUS TRACK

SAN GIMIGNANO LOOP

The hilltop town of San Gimignano is famous for its 14 soaring towers. These "medieval skyscrapers" can be spotted from far in the distance, regardless of the direction from which you approach. The San Gimignano Loop allows hikers to soak in these architectural wonders from outside the town walls while meandering through the rolling Tuscan countryside. The hike measures 9 km (5.6 mi) and takes an average of three hours to complete. Routed mostly along infrequently trafficked country lanes, during its course, it winds its way past vineyards, olive groves, and cypress-lined fields and byways.

BACKGROUND

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF SIGERIC "THE SERIOUS"

Though its origins date back to the 7th century, the first detailed completion of the Via Francigena was by Sigeric "The Serious," Archbishop of Canterbury between 990 and 994. Upon ascending to his position, Sigeric traveled to Rome to receive his *pallium*, a liturgical vestment conferring authority from the Pope. During the return trip, he kept a journal of his route, which consisted of 80 daily stages and entailed a total of around 1,700 km (1,056 mi) of walking. Sigeric's itinerary from Rome back to Canterbury (via Switzerland and France) serves as the blueprint for the modern Via Francigena.



FLORA & FAUNA

THE CYPRESSES OF TUSCANY

A symbol of the region and a much-beloved part of the Tuscan countryside, the Mediterranean cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*) originated from the Eastern Mediterranean and was likely brought to Italy by the Phoenicians and Etruscans. Over the centuries, the evergreen conifer has become synonymous with Tuscany, where it has long served both aesthetic and practical purposes. Regarding the former, the cypress's tall, columnar profile and rich green foliage lend a timeless elegance to the landscape. As for the latter quality, cypresses act as windbreaks along roadsides and around buildings and cemeteries, where it's believed that their pleasantly scented wood has a calming effect and can help ward off evil spirits.

