



## TAKE A LEAP INTO THE

# Unknown

For a first time canyoner, jumping off rocks can be a daunting prospect, but as Laura Holt discovers, a great instructor and a bit of beginner's pluck are all you need

**R**attling through the Garfagnana valley, Simone Cecchi is telling me about the time he tackled his first canyon; the formidable, and now famous, Orrido di Botri back in the winter of 1985. Driving to what will soon be my first canyon, his tale doesn't exactly put me at ease.

"I went there alone on my motorbike," Simone says, shaking his head with a wry smile. "I was young, and it was the biggest canyon in Tuscany. This was back at a time when no one else was canyoning, so I didn't have a wetsuit or any special equipment, just a boogie board to keep me out of the water as much as possible because it was so cold."

He survived the experience — clearly — traversing the three-mile gorge in eight hours. But somewhat ominously describes it as being "narrow, deep, dangerous — the type of place where animals fall down and die."

I gulp. Nervous head nods follow. But, by the time I've begun to think seriously about opening the minibus door and running in the opposite direction, we've arrived.

Luckily Simone has decided not to take me down memory lane — literally, anyway — and I open the door at Rio Selvano, a challenging yet entry-level canyon of limestone rocks and steep gorges, surrounded by Tuscan forest.

It's the ideal spot for beginners to test out this adrenalin-inducing sport, safe in the knowledge that there's always another way down.

While there are waterfalls and rapids aplenty here, there are also around-the-rock alternatives for anyone who balks at the normal path of jumping, sliding and abseiling their way down.

I begin to relax a little. There's no doubt I'm in very good hands today. Having been a pioneer of canyoning, Simone is now president of the Italian Association of Canyoning Guides. His warm, nothing-is-impossible attitude is testament to 18 years of putting apprehensions at ease.





Rattling across a scenic stone bridge over the Rio Selvano, we arrive at Simone's 'office': an old *metato* (chestnut mill) where native nuts from the Garfagnana were once dried and made into flour for a variety of delicious breads, pasta and polenta.

It's time to get kitted out, so we heave ourselves into skin-tight wetsuits, harnesses, helmets and specialist rubber shoes, before waddling back into the van to reach the starting point of the canyon.

And then, we're off: slipping and sliding our way through the gorge. We tackle seven abseils in total, the highest of which is a little over 40ft, using ropes to feed ourselves down flume-like rock tunnels, or dive bomb into what I'm assured are very deep pools. All the

time Simone is right there, joking with me, spurring me on.

A seasoned canyoner from Rome joins us. "Is this your first time?" she asks, as we wade through the water between obstacles. "Very brave," she says, smiling, as I nod in reply.

The journey takes around three hours, during which time we descend almost 2,300ft. Even I'm a little bit impressed with myself, having had a fear of falling for most of my life. A natural instinct, some might say, but it feels exhilarating not to have flaked out of any hurdles or taken the back route around the rocks.

More impressive still is the scenery in this cleft of the Garfagnana valley, where the Apuan and Apennine mountains meet. With its trickling water, limpid pools and tangled banks, the canyon has an exotic wildness I've witnessed in the jungles of Southeast Asia, but never expected to see here in Tuscany.

"In the Garfagnana, tourism is for Italian people who want to eat well for not a lot of money, but also appreciate nature," says Simone, as we dry ourselves off back at his office and refuel with red wine and crisps.

Indeed, after a successful canyoning experience, it seems only right to do as the Italians do, so we head off to the Molino di Fabbriche, an 18th-century chestnut mill that's still in operation today, and also serves up a sideline in delicious food. The carpaccio di cinghiale (thinly sliced wild boar) is as restorative as the gentle trickle of the Turrice Cava stream outside.

You're never far from good food in Tuscany — and never far from adventure, either. □

Toscana Adventure Team offers canyoning on the Rio Selvano from €60 (£55) per person. [tateam.it](http://tateam.it)



Q&A

*Simone Cecchi*

**PRESIDENT OF THE ITALIAN ASSOCIATION OF CANYONING GUIDES, AND VOLUNTEER FOR THE TUSCANY MOUNTAIN RESCUE SERVICE SINCE 1992**

**FAVOURITE CANYON IN TUSCANY?**

The Rio Selvano because it's fun and not very difficult. It's perfect for both beginners and the more experienced, as it has jumps, slides and abseils running along the three-hour canyon.

**MOST CHALLENGING CANYON?**

The Rio Prunaccio in Careggine. You won't find this on Google yet, because it's the last unexplored canyon in Tuscany. My colleague Andrea and I discovered it last January — nobody else had passed through it before us. It takes four hours to complete and has 11 vertical obstacles, some very complex if the water is high. The highest abseil is 115ft and the last three are particularly amazing.

**ADVICE FOR FIRST-TIME CANYONERS?**

Get ready to see, smell and touch nature. The only requirements are a reasonable level of fitness and the ability to swim. Since canyons are a natural, ever-changing environment, find an experienced guide. They need specific training, skills and enthusiasm to bring the canyon to life.

**WHAT HAS CANYONING TAUGHT YOU?**

I've been doing this for a long time and over the years I've taken people from all walks of life and of all ages canyoning. While canyoning isn't for everyone, it's for more people than you might think.

IMAGE: 4CORNERS

# More ON THE WATER

## Rafting

Tuscany's tangled waterways make it a dream for rafting. Test the rapids on the Selvano, the Serchio or Lima rivers. Or, better still, give the gallery-goers of the Uffizi something to talk about by doing it in the heart of Florence on the Arno. T-Rafting has a 1.5-mile trail — the best times to make a splash are during spring sunsets, summer nights and the fireworks of the feast day of San Giovanni Battista (24 June each year). [t-rafting.com](http://t-rafting.com)



## Caving

One of Europe's most important caves can be found in northern Tuscany's Apuan Alps. The cathedral-like Grotta del Vento ('Wind Cave' — a nod to the gusts that surge through its chambers) is accessed via the small town of Galliciano. There are three different routes to navigate, of varying length and difficulty, with stairs, handrails and walkways to guide you. Descend 250ft, cross an underground stream or simply stare at impressive stalagmites and stalactites along this scenic subterranean assault course. Tours run all year. [grottadelvento.com](http://grottadelvento.com)





# INTO THE Big blue

Whether you don a wetsuit and tank, perch at the bow of a sailing boat or float along on a paddleboard; Tuscany's Tyrrhenian Sea is ripe for exploration. Words: Laura Holt



If you've heard of the Tuscan archipelago, it'll be down to Napoléon. The diminutive emperor was exiled here in 1814 and stayed on the main island of Elba for 300 days before escaping into the Ligurian Sea.

Not a bad place to be exiled, I decide, as I putter across to the seven-strong island chain scattered between the Tuscan coast and the French island of Corsica, where monsieur Bonaparte was born. I'm not here to dissect the finer details of Napoléonic history, however, but to experience another thing these islands are known for: watersports.

I'm staying in Portoferraio, a hook-shaped harbour town and the largest 'city' on Elba, where almost everyone stays when they visit the Tuscan archipelago. Fuss-free seafood restaurants line up along the waterfront, superyachts dot the shore and pastel-painted houses rise to a hilltop villa, where Napoléon resided during his stay.

While Elba is the main hub, I also visit Capraia, a volcanic island, whose craggy, beach-free coast has saved it from large-scale human development. The blood-red rocks of Punta della Zenobito are the result of successive eruptions, and still draw boats to admire their elemental beauty today. With a population of just 300, Capraia is an island preserved in aspic, where ancient mule tracks lined with oleander and holm oaks now double as hiking trails, and the ocean crashes against the rocks below.

In the island's tiny (read: only) town of Porto di Capraia, I visit Il Carabottino, home of cook Siria and her fisherman husband Antonio, whose brown skin bears the signs of a life at sea. He spends his days fishing, and she cooks up the catch in her simple kitchen. It's homespun hospitality at its best.

But you have to work to earn these rewards in the Tuscan archipelago. This fiercely protected marine park has carved out a name for itself as an adventure destination, with miles of crystalline coastline, quiet coves and hidden beaches, and where you can kayak, standup paddleboard, sail and scuba dive. I head out into the big blue to give them a go.



## Cruise control

Marina extends a hand and welcomes me aboard. A good name for someone who works at sea, but it's no coincidence. Her father, Stefano Chiappi, owns the sailing company Aviosail and is the captain of this ship. You can hire it crewed for activities like sunset cruises and whale-watching tours, where dolphins and sperm whales leap from the murky depths. Today, I'm aboard a 49ft sailing boat. Meals are strictly of the fresh-fish variety, so Marina serves up a lunch of seafood spaghetti as we spend the day inching around Elba's north coast. [aviosail.eu](http://aviosail.eu)

## Blue planet

Next, it's time to take the plunge and explore the archipelago's sub-aquatic hinterland. After yanking on the equipment: wetsuit, flippers, mask, tank, and weights, I plop into the boat and head over to Lo Scoglietto. But it's the underwater fauna we're here to see, and everything from bottlenose dolphins, razorfish and fan mussels frequent this area. We roll over the side and into the depths, drifting to 12 metres, where I spot giant grouper, barramundi and snapper. Back on board I think again of Napoleon — who'd want to escape these islands, I don't know. [divinginlba.com](http://divinginlba.com)

## Coastal vote

A zodiac zips over to collect me and transport me to Enfola, a craggy, windswept peninsula and the starting point for my next excursion: kayaking.

I'm greeted by Silvia Bracci and Patricio Luca, two guides and real-life partners, who work for tour company Il Viottolo. We hop in our kayaks and push off from the shore, stopping at La Grotta dello Spruzzo (the Spray Cave), where winter storms cause water to spout out of a hole in the top of the rock. I get stuck in the cave, but it's no bad thing: the cerulean waters here are worth pausing for. Once I've managed to unwedge myself, we pass the tiny sea-scattered rock of Le Nave (the Ship), before paddling on to Sansone, the most famous beach on the north coast.

It turns out we're not the only people on the water today, over to my right I see a pair of standup paddleboarders. They make a notoriously difficult sport look like a walk in the park — there's not a wobble in sight. I make a mental note to test it out for myself and return to my oars.

It's a blazing hot day and the company is cheering, with Silvia and Patricio urging us on to the next scenic stop, with calls of "andiamo, andiamo!" [ilviottolo.com](http://ilviottolo.com)



## Paragliding

### HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHAT IT'S LIKE TO FLY?

The rolling hills and sweeping views in Val D'Orcia make it the ideal place to try tandem paragliding. Here, between April and October, the sky is often swarming with colourful canopies. First-timers will discover paragliding doesn't actually involve jumping off a mountain, but running down a slope at the top of a hill to help the wind raise the canopy into the air. Pilots catch thermal updrafts and manipulate the wing to circle, spiral and swoop like a bird and, as paragliders don't have engines, there's nothing but the sound of the wind in your ears.

### THREE MORE TO TRY

#### 1 SKYDIVING, LUCCA

Adrenalin junkies eager to jump out of a plane at 14,000ft should try it over beautiful Lucca at the foot of the Apuan Alps. [paracadutismolucca.it](http://paracadutismolucca.it)

#### 2 SCENIC HELICOPTER RIDE, CHIANTI

Swoop over the vineyards and bucolic countryside of Chianti with the chance to get a bird's-eye view of Albola and Meleto Castle. [helichianti.com](http://helichianti.com)

#### 3 HANG GLIDING, ELBA

With its 91 miles of coast, Elba is the ideal place to enjoy an exhilarating hang gliding flight — it's faster than paragliding and offers a great way to marvel at the scenery below since you're lying face down. [elbapromotion.it](http://elbapromotion.it)



# THE TWO-WHEELED Takeover

Biking has never been more popular, and whether you're a fitness fanatic or are just starting out, there's a trail for you to blaze in Tuscany. Words: Donald Strachan



## Abetone

**WHERE:** Abetone loop via Monte Maiori  
**HOW FAR:** Seven miles (easy to medium)  
**LANDMARKS:** At 4,600ft up in the Apennine Mountains, expect challenging terrain. But there are easier routes, too. A circuit east of Abetone follows roads, woodland trails and mule tracks around Monte Maiori, and climbs to 4,880ft for views from the Verginina di Serrabassa. [abetonetrailpark.com](http://abetonetrailpark.com)

## The Garfagnana

**WHERE:** Castelnuovo Garfagnana loop  
**HOW FAR:** 13 miles (easy)  
**LANDMARKS:** Where the River Serchio cuts its careful path between the Apennine Mountains and Apuan Alps lies the lush Garfagnana Valley. From outside Castelnuovo's 16th-century castle, a gentle circuit heads out along the shore of little Lake Pontecosi (picnic by a lakeside church), then carry on to the medieval walled village of Castiglione. [bikesharing.garfagnana.eu](http://bikesharing.garfagnana.eu)



## Elba

**WHERE:** Capoliveri peninsula  
**HOW FAR:** 15 miles (easy)  
**LANDMARKS:** An hour by ferry from Piombino, Elba is best known for its beaches. In the far south east, beyond Capoliveri, are 60 miles of marked bike trails. One loop starts beside the rental shop in Piazza del Cavatore and skirts Monte Calamita. Several short diversions lead to wild beaches unreachable by car. [capoliveribikepark.it](http://capoliveribikepark.it)

## Montecatini

**WHERE:** Montecatini Terme to Vinci and back  
**HOW FAR:** 30–35 miles (medium difficulty)  
**LANDMARKS:** The town of art nouveau spas and liver-soothing waters is at the northern end of one of Tuscany's prettiest roads. The main destination is Vinci, home town of Leonardo and site of the Museo Leonardiano. It's a short detour to Anchiano, for Leonardo's birthplace. On the return, tend weary muscles in Grotta Giusti's natural thermal cave, outside Monsummano Terme. [toscananelcuore.it/vinci](http://toscananelcuore.it/vinci)



## The Casentino

**WHERE:** Fiumicello circuit via Monte Ritoio  
**HOW FAR:** 13 miles (medium difficulty)  
**LANDMARKS:** The forest uplands on the border with Emilia-Romagna are rich in spiritual landmarks. In 1224, St Francis reputedly received his stigmata in the Casentino. One scenic route starts and ends at Fiumicello, ascending to the 3,914ft peak of Monte Ritoio. En route, pass Mulino Mengozzi, a working stone watermill. The last two miles is downhill all the way. On summer mornings, an ethereal mist hangs over the beech trees. Autumn is red, yellow and ochre. [parcoforestecasentinesi.it](http://parcoforestecasentinesi.it)

## Sit back, relax

### E-biking: Chianti

Bruno Baldini is an e-bike guide working in the Chianti: "The starting spot is Greve, in the heart of Chianti Classico. After two miles of flat road, climb towards a ridge, past vineyards and olive groves, before entering a wood on a dirt road. A downhill gravel road runs to medieval Panzano, a good spot to grab a gelato. A hilly section leads to a fortified abbey, Badia a Passignano. From there, another white road climbs back to the ridge and the hamlet of Montefioralle, before a final steep downhill to Greve." [taols.it](http://taols.it)

### Vespa: Val d'Orcia

Dario Rossi leads Vespa tours around central Tuscany: "A tour of the Val d'Orcia uncovers the Tuscany you see in postcards. The road from Montepulciano to Pienza, and then on to San Quirico, is one of the most beautiful in Italy. The Val d'Orcia, north and east of Mount Amiata and crossed by the River Orcia, is characterised by fantastic views and medieval villages: Pienza and Montalcino, Montepulciano, and not forgetting Monticchiello and Bagno Vignoni." [taols.it](http://taols.it)



# JUST DON'T CALL THEM *Cowboys*



**T**hink of Tuscany, and horsemen with brimmed hats corralling Longhorn cattle probably don't spring to mind. But down among the squat *macchia* vegetation and saltmarshes of the Maremma, they were once a common sight.

Known as *butteri*, these mounted livestock herders tended Maremmana cattle.

Today, the Maremma Regional Park is the last *butteri* heartland. It's a world apart from the landscape of rolling, vineyard-covered hills commonly associated with the region; narrow trails weave through ilex

and parasol pine trees and past abandoned watchtowers.

Boars and martens snuffle around the woods, buzzards and ospreys wheel overhead and the pristine beaches are out of bounds to cars. But make it here and you'll often spot *butteri* riding their horses.

The *buttero's* life was — and is — a hard one. Many today are reliant on income from horsemanship shows and riding excursions. Others eke out a meagre living moving cattle between soggy Mediterranean pastures and cooler uplands. Just like they always have.

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The Tenuta di Alberese ([alberese.com](http://alberese.com)), 100 miles north west of Rome, offers proficient horse-riders a unique opportunity to shadow working *butteri* for half a day as they tend their cattle. The day begins at 7am in Spergolaia. Advance booking is essential (€60/£53 per person). You can also stay on site at the Tenuta in a choice of agriturismo apartments. For more about hiking trails in the Maremma Regional Park, visit [parco-maremma.it](http://parco-maremma.it).



Q&amp;A

*Alessandro  
Zampieri*

**ALESSANDRO ZAMPIERI HAS BEEN A BUTTERO SINCE 1979, AND HEAD OF THE BUTTERI SINCE 1999.**

**DOES IT ANNOY YOU WHEN PEOPLE CALL YOU A 'TUSCAN COWBOY'?**

Absolutely! I'd never call a Texan cowboy an 'American *buttero*'. Everywhere people work with livestock, there's an individual name: in America, cowboys; in Argentina, *gauchos*; in France, *gardians*; in Hungary, *csikós*; and in Italy, *butteri*.

**HOW LONG HAVE THE BUTTERI LIVED AND WORKED IN THE MAREMMA?**

Archaeological evidence from the Etruscan period [eighth–second century BC] tells us Maremmano horses and Maremmana cattle were raised in those times. They were used for work, so large herds were needed, but mechanisation and the reclamation of the Maremma's swamps led to the near-extinction of the breeds — and the livelihood of *butteri*. I can't say how many exactly remain, but, in terms of who still does the everyday labour — it's just us.

**WHAT IS THE ESSENCE OF TRADITIONAL BUTTERO LIFE?**

Our daily work is livestock control and herd management, adapting to the rhythms of our animals. In every season, there's a different type of work to do, which can only be done from horseback. The only thing that's changed over time is how we distribute fodder to the animals, but for the rest of the work, and especially our work on horseback, it's all just as it once was. There's no other way.





## THE WORLD IS YOUR *Armadillo*

It can handle the toughest of terrains, tackling mountains, rivers and everything in between. Laura Holt takes an armadillo for a walk, though not the kind you think

I'm strolling along with an armadillo. Not a real one, of course, but what I'm pulling along behind me is no less surreal than if I were taking the actual animal for a walk in the woods.

Men with well-worn flat caps emerge from the trees. They carry their bounties of foraged porcini in hip-slung wicker baskets, and as I come into view, a look of utter bewilderment crosses their faces.

The Casentinesi forest is the one of the largest woodlands in Europe, encompassing a network of trails covering more than 400 miles either side of the border between Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany. Every twisting

path can be hiked, biked or tackled on horseback; what I'm doing, however, is slightly more unusual.

The adaptable, man-hauled Armadillo cart was designed by my guide Sebastian Schweizer to transport goods across a huge range of challenging terrains. Its applications are endless: it can be carried as a backpack, used in water, towed as a sled, attached to a bike, and even pulled by the waist, as I'm doing today, using a cross-body harness and wheels.

"The only thing the Armadillo can't do is fly," quips Sebastian.

In reality, though, he's no joke: an engineer-turned-explorer, Sebastian

has pulled his cart over land and sea. Two years ago he undertook a six-day aqua trekking adventure along Sardinia's deserted Golfo di Orosei: a wild, windswept stretch of coastline where the Gennargentu Mountains furrow their brows at the sea.

Clad in a wetsuit, flippers, mask and snorkel, he swam five miles along the bay each day, Armadillo in tow. With no hotels or hospitality offering respite, an ex-US navy desalinator and ration packs became his only friends. "At night, I used to lie there and dream of restaurants," Sebastian jokes.

He carried around 40kg of equipment on this particular trip, but the





Armadillo is capable of taking much more — up to 150kg, in fact — making it ideal for everything from scientific expeditions to charity work, where aid needs to reach remote places.

Back in Tuscany, my walk through this sylvan scene is less life-threatening expedition, more micro-adventure. Rows of silver birch trees stand sentinel on either side of track and shards of golden light strike through the forest canopy.

The only other creatures to call these woods home (apart from the Armadillo, of course) are wolves. They were returned the area recently, as human residents shift to the cities in search of work. Happily, they only prowl at night, so today I've got the forest all to myself.

Sebastian is a big fan of English adventurer, author and motivational speaker Alastair Humphreys, who encourages people to get out and explore their immediate environment on micro-adventures. You don't need to ski to the South Pole or go trekking in Patagonia to find excitement, the theory goes.

So Sebastian has teamed up with local operator Mugello &

Tuscany to offer tailor-made Armadillo trips in atmospheric places such as this: the Casentinesi forest. He also works with Mugello on the Maremma coast, especially during winter, when the dune-backed shorelines are virtually deserted.

Next spring, however, Sebastian's taking his idiosyncratic invention further afield. He's off to one of the world's harshest environments, the Atacama Desert, with a guy who's set on a 300-mile trek across Chile's otherworldly desert hinterland. After that, a trip across the US is in the works. "I also use it when I'm out in Florence, shopping with the kids though," he adds. The looks he must get there. □

A four-day 'Armadillo Experience' tour with Mugello & Tuscany starts from €615 (£544) per person, including hotels, meals, transfers and excursions. The company also runs a four-day 'Tuscany Crossover Experience', combining Armadillo trekking with other activities such as biking and kayaking, from €1,420 (£1,256) per person. [mugello-tuscany.com](http://mugello-tuscany.com)  
For more information on Sebastian's Armadillo project, visit: [armadilling.com](http://armadilling.com)



#### FOUR MUST-VISIT Rest and refuelling stops

##### TORRE DI BARATTI, MAREMMA COAST

After exerting yourself in the Tuscan archipelago, head to this agriturismo overlooking a quiet stretch of the Maremma coast. Everything here's sourced locally — herbs and vegetables come from the hotel's garden, pork from their own pigs, wine from nearby vineyards, fish from the coast and olive oil from the groves that slope down to the sea. [torredibaratti.com](http://torredibaratti.com)

##### AGRITURISMO LA TORRE, BAGNI DI LUCCA

After canyoning or hiking in the Garfagnana valley, check in to this russet-red agriturismo. The restaurant draws in-the-know locals for its high-end take on home cooking, using produce from the 60-acre farm. The porcini-packed ravioli and caramel-infused panna cotta are worth the trip alone. [latorreaagriturismo.com](http://latorreaagriturismo.com)

##### FRASCOLE, CHIANTI RUFINA

Chianti Rufina, north of Florence, is all about quality over quantity. The affable Lippi family are big news in the wine business and treat guests to tastings. The five apartments all have arresting valley views and hearty farmhouse breakfasts offer a tasty slice of Tuscan family life. [frascole.it](http://frascole.it)

##### LOCANDA DI MEZZO, BARGA

Run by a group of aspirational chefs and sommeliers, this restaurant fuses Tuscan produce with contemporary cooking techniques. Get active in the Garfagnana valley, then head here for refined *baccalà* (salt cod) and cooked in smoked butter with buckwheat and bay leaf. [locandadimezzo.it](http://locandadimezzo.it)



## Best foot forward TUSCAN HIKES

### ETRUSCAN CAVE ROAD

Never tried 'archeotrekking'? Now's your chance. The Vie Cave (Cave Road) in the Maremma hills snakes through what was once the epicentre of the Etruscan world, linking caves and burial tombs with hilltop towns such as Sovana, Sorano and dramatic Pitigliano, which rises from a limestone cliff. Explore the cave network and learn how this pre-Roman civilisation flourished between 700BC and the fourth century with Carlo Rosati, an eminent guide and academic who's written books on the subject and brings the story to life. [sovanaguide.it](http://sovanaguide.it)

### GARFAGNANA

The Garfagnana valley has a scenic stretch of hiking trails linking medieval towns. The scenery is spectacular, with wildflower-cloaked slopes rising to crinkle-cut peaks. Walk the route between Pignone and Monte Rovalto (3,477ft) to get a real sense of this undiscovered pocket of Tuscany. You can also pick up scenic sections of the Via Francigena pilgrim route from here, which links Canterbury with Rome. That's Tuscany offers tours of both with expert local guides. [thatstuscany.com](http://thatstuscany.com)



### ABETONE

Come spring and summer, pro-snowboarders such as Leonardo Pasquesi double-up as hiking guides, leading you through meadows flecked with snowdrops, violets, blueberry and juniper bushes. After traversing the area on foot, visit La Casina, an Alpine-style restaurant, that serves up hearty classics such as *ossobuco* (braised veal shanks) and pays homage to skiing greats, such as Alberto Tomba, who visit Abetone in winter. [abetone.com](http://abetone.com)





## THE MANY WAYS TO TACKLE A

# Tuscan mountain

From tubing to trekking, Sam Lewis finds that southern Tuscany offers winter adventures to rival those of the country's flashy north

### Downhill skiing Abetone

Tuscany's ski resorts may be smaller than those in the glitzy north of Italy, but lift passes are considerably cheaper and most lie within easy access of cities. The main resort of Abetone is less than a 90-minute drive from Florence and, at an altitude of around 4,000ft to 6,400ft, it's surprisingly snow sure. Offering pretty panoramas and tree-lined pistes, with open bowls as well as moguls, the 34 miles of groomed slopes are best suited for beginners and intermediates. On a clear day, certain pistes provide tantalising glimpses of the sea, while others are lit up in the evening, making it a magical place to ski under the stars. [abetoneve.it](http://abetoneve.it)

### Snowboarding Zum Zeri

This attractive little resort in Lunigiana is ideal for beginners, with a ski school and snow park offering plenty of opportunities to brush up your technique. More experienced snowboarders can try the black run Cinghiale ('Wild Boar'). [zumzeri.eu](http://zumzeri.eu)

### Snow shoeing and trekking Garfagnana

The best way to explore this wild alpine valley is on foot. Seasoned hikers can head to Careggine to snow shoe through the Apuan Alps Park and stay in a mountain hut. First-timers can hire a guide in Corfino. [turismo.garfagnana.eu](http://turismo.garfagnana.eu)



### Snow tubing and kiting Dognaccia di Cutigliano

Near Abetone, this medieval town offers nine miles of pristine pistes. It's set to get a lot bigger by 2020, when it completes a link with Corno Alla Scale in Emilia Romagna. Go now while it's still a serene and peaceful resort, best suited for families, with bobsleighbing and a snow tube slope served by a moving treadmill — now lit in the evenings. Older teens, meanwhile, can try snow kiting in Croce Arcana Pass. [dognaccia2000.it](http://dognaccia2000.it)

### Nordic skiing Monte Amiata

Monte Amiata, southern Tuscany's highest peak, is 50 miles from Siena. Its six-mile cross-country trail snakes can also be tackled in snowshoes. Aching muscles can be soothed at one of the area's natural thermal springs, such as Bagni San Filippo. [turismoimaremma.it](http://turismoimaremma.it) [amiataneve.it](http://amiataneve.it)



IMAGE: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX



## ESSENTIALS

### Getting there

Ryanair, EasyJet and British Airways all fly direct London main airports to Pisa, while Vueling and British Airways fly direct to Florence. [ryanair.com](http://ryanair.com) [easyjet.com](http://easyjet.com) [ba.com](http://ba.com) [vueling.com](http://vueling.com)  
Average flight time: 2h15

### Getting around

Buses connect most smaller towns and villages, and trains are efficient and reasonably priced. To book tickets in advance, visit [trenitalia.com](http://trenitalia.com). To head off the beaten track, however, it's best to rent a car. [hertz.com](http://hertz.com) [avis.com](http://avis.com)

### When to go

April to June, and September to late October are the best times to visit. Winters are cold and snowy, while summers are hot, with temperatures reaching 28C.