

Lucca, Italy: the lands of Giacomo Puccini

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13 photos

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Italy's prodigal son Giacomo Puccini lived from 1858-1924 and was the composer of such operas as *La Boheme* (on which the musical *Rent* is based) and *Madame Butterfly*.

Recently, I had the honor of being invited by the Tuscan city of Lucca to learn more about him and the land from which he was inspired.

When taking in Puccini's music and surroundings, it's clear why he was a legend in his own time. He was not only gifted, but also

handsome and quite the ladies' man. His lush music and debonair demeanor must have reminded audiences of a world that was quickly disappearing. He allowed them to forget for the few hours that an opera lasts, the intruding cacophony and chaos that was the early 20th century. As Thomas Edison wrote him in a letter, "Men die and governments change, but the songs in 'La Boheme' will live forever."

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Lucca as a city dates from Etruscan times, before the Romans came and built an amphitheater and other buildings. Later, the Lombards and others re-purposed many of building materials and architectural details for churches, shops, towers and other structures.



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Lucca, Italy: the lands of Giacomo Puccini

Photo credit: Tamar Alexia Fleishman, Esq.

What to do: Puccini's [birth house and museum \(http://goitaly.about.com/od/lucca/qt/puccini-house-museum-lucca.htm\)](http://goitaly.about.com/od/lucca/qt/puccini-house-museum-lucca.htm) will provide great insight into what made him tick.

The [Puccini Museum in Celle \(http://www.luccaterre.it/scheda.php?id=2876&lang=en\)](http://www.luccaterre.it/scheda.php?id=2876&lang=en) (Pescaglia) is also a must-see to dig deeper into Puccini's mindset. It's the home of his 16th c. ancestors. This museum has many items donated by Puccini's kin and has the only known Edison recording of his voice.

[Torre del Lago Puccini](http://goitaly.about.com/od/tuscany/a/torre-del-lago-puccini.htm)

<http://goitaly.about.com/od/tuscany/a/torre-del-lago-puccini.htm> is the site of Puccini's last home on the beach. The home/museum/mausoleum for the composer is open most mornings. It's in this home that Puccini's personality really shines through, with the accolade letters and gifts, shotguns, piano and other tokens of a life well-lived.

See a Puccini opera! Avoid the parking situation: take a relaxing boat ride to the theater with the [Escursioni Nella Palude \(http://www.laversilia.it/eco-idea\)](http://www.laversilia.it/eco-idea) across Lake Massaciuccoli. [The Grand Theatre Giacomo Puccini \(http://www.puccinifestival.it\)](http://www.puccinifestival.it) - Torre del Lago Puccini near Lucca, where the Puccini Festival is held in the summer, is a breathtaking outdoor venue.

In the city of Lucca, [there are performances held every single day \(http://www.puccinielasualucca.com/EN/events.asp?MYDATE=1\)](http://www.puccinielasualucca.com/EN/events.asp?MYDATE=1), even on Christmas. Concerts are generally at the Church of San Giovanni starting at 7 pm, but for holidays that can vary. Payment is required in Euros, cash only.

Guinness Book of Records lists the Vetriano Theater as the smallest in the world, with only 99 seats. Located in a former barn, it's a gem of a venue, performing operas in conjunction with La Scala.

Something that's in Lucca but not Puccini oriented, is the [Museum of Torture \(http://www.museodellatortura.it\)](http://www.museodellatortura.it). It's both fascinating and sad to learn about what happened to various political dissidents, religious heretics and outspoken women during the Middle Ages.

Enjoy a day of luxe activities: Forte dei Marmi has many of the world's top designer brands all within walking distance of each other, including Gucci, Valentino and Armani, along with perfumeries and jewelry stores. Nearby Pietrasanta is filled with public art, art galleries, museums and restaurants.

Glamorous types from around the world are dressed to impress while window shopping. The beaches at Marina di Pietrasanta are also a chic place to spend time.

If you like the idea of someone else navigating the streets, insider secret places reservations, contact Maria at "Let's Taste Lucca" tours, calling 349 133 2450. Her command of English, knowledge of art, history and culture as a tour guide is unmatched.

Where to eat: Puccini liked fine dining; follow in his footsteps. His publisher wrote to him to put down the red wine and get to work. Lucca is in the Tuscany region, with luscious olive oils, wines, honeys and meats to tempt you.

Right next door to the ancestral Puccini home is the [Puccini Restaurant](#) (<http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://www.puccinibb.it/&prev=/search%3Fq%3DRistorante%2BPuccini%253F%253F,%2BPescaglia%26num%3D100%26hl%3Den%26newwindow%3D1%26safe%3Doff%26client%3Dfirefox-a%26hs%3DVH%26rls%3Dorg.mozilla:en-US:official>), serving delightful country fare in an ancient abode. Homemade soups and pastas are made with the freshest ingredients, enjoyable with a local wine.

[Tenuta San Pietro](#) (<http://www.tenuta-san-pietro.com/restaurant-in-lucca>) offers a stunning, bird's eye view of Lucca from the hills, while serving the most delicate seafood, their own olive oils and proper pasta.

Lucca's [Di Simo Caffè](#) (http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://www.italiadiscovery.it/dove_mangiare/toscana/lucca/lucca/antico_caffe_di_simo/ristorante_brunch_e_lunch_bar_e_caffe_wine_bar_aperitivi_after_dinner_pasticceria_snack_bar_caffe_libreria/index.php&p) looks like a vintage ice cream store, but offers great coffee and cocktails. Puccini apparently thought so too and was a frequent customer.

Another [Puccini Restaurant](#) (http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://www.italiadiscovery.it/dove_mangiare/toscana/lucca/lucca/antico_caffe_di_simo/ristorante_brunch_e_lunch_bar_e_caffe_wine_bar_aperitivi_after_dinner_pasticceria_snack_bar_caffe_libreria/index.php&p), this one in Lucca, offers a relaxed dinner theater. They perform Puccini shows (and other events, like Paganini), with outdoor seating, serving classic salads, pastas and entrées.

Experience a cavern wine tasting of estate grown and bottled wines at [Fattoria Maionchi](#) (<http://www.fattoriamaionchi.it/tuscan-holiday-farm.html>). Go ahead, succumb to its deliciousness. You can take a couple of bottles home duty-free.

Where to stay: The city of Lucca itself is celebrating this year its 500th year of the intact city walls. To this day, very few cars are authorized to enter its city gates. Not just any taxi can take you to your hotel; you must make prior arrangements. The [Hotel La Luna](#) (<http://www.hotellaluna.com/>) is the perfect location. It's simple and cozy-sized, but the staff is pretty fluent in English, there are cafés and lots of shops right outside its door. They have gourmet cold cuts and their own honey for breakfast in the morning.

[Residence Prunali](#) (<http://www.residenceprunali.it/>) in Massarosa offers very comfortable luxury, with terracotta floors, wood beams, pool, sauna and WiFi. The accommodations are excellent for long

term stays: the gated facilities lend themselves to people within socializing and becoming a community at the pool.



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Tamar has done the full range of travel, from camping to 5-star luxury resorts. With a foodie background and past career in the music biz, she provides insights into the fun things people want to do, eat and see. Tamar is also passionate about the history of the people in any given destination,...