

# Garden tours of Italy



From the Romans to the Renaissance, Italy has been a playground for the rich and famous – and a treasure trove for their art. Sculptures and mosaics, Botticellis and Donatellos: from hilltop churches to city cathedrals, Italy is a living, breathing museum of masterpieces that has drawn poets and writers, artists and musicians, and the curious rich from all over the world.

Little wonder their legacy remains, not just in museums and galleries, but also in extraordinary gardens, with almost every palazzo and villa hiding its own exquisite gem. Perfectly complementing the more traditional delights of the Italian Lakes and Tuscany, our Garden Tours of Italy programme gives access to some of the finest gardens in Europe, many of them normally off-limits to public.



*We have based these tours in the very finest hotels the regions have to offer, handpicked for their elegance, their gardens or their proximity to others.*

**S**cattered with hilltop villages and cypress-studded horizons, medieval towns, and humble trattoria serving rustic feasts in cobbled courtyards often overlooking the plains, Tuscany has called to sun-starved north Europeans – and Brits in particular – like nowhere else in Italy. Not for nothing Shelley described it as a ‘paradise of exiles’. Bookended by the Alpi Apuane mountains to the north (whose quarries supplied the marble for Michaelangelo’s David) and the sun-baked clay hills of the crete to the south, Tuscany packs an astonishing variety of landscapes into a relatively tiny area, making it possible to gorge on duomos and campaniles by morning, gardens by afternoon, with simple, sumptuous, sunkissed lunches in between.

OUR GARDEN TOUR OF TUSCANY starts at the Hotel Villa le Barone in the heart of Chianti, a fantastic base for visits to San Gimignano and Florence, Montepulciano and Montalcino, but also for a string of exquisite gardens, including those at Villa Poggio Torselli, Giardino di Vignamaggio and Villa Geggiano. Beautiful houses in their own right, the villa gardens here blend the classical and the romantic, the rustic and the renaissance, with avenues of cypresses leading to immaculate lemon groves hiding statues and fountains. After Chianti, the tour decamps to Bagni di Pisa, a charming spa hotel midway between Pisa and Lucca, a perfect jewel of a terracotta-roofed Tuscan town still protected by 16th century walls. The gardens visited here will include the beautiful 22-acre cypress-studded park at Villa Grabau; Villa Oliva, where a long avenue of cypresses leads from the 15th century mansion to terraced garden sprinkled with fountains and pergolas overlooking the Luccan plains; and the Parco della Villa Reale id Marlia, a vast, a baroque marvel with its own open-air theatre, in the grounds of an equally magnificent palazzo.

TO THE NORTH, OUR GARDEN TOUR OF THE ITALIAN LAKES has a more alpine accent, split between the lush, mountainous splendours of Lake Como and Lake Maggiore. Based at the Grand Hotel Villa Serbelloni at Bellagio, a decadent, neo-classic palazzo perched on a promontory all but in Lake Como itself, fair littered with Persian carpets and Murano chandeliers, Art Deco treasures and Imperial chaise-longues, our tour visits two stunning gardens, Villa Melzi d’Eril and Villa Balbianello, both right on the shores of Lake Como itself. While here, it is also possible to take a boat trip across the lake to Villa Carlotta, built for a Milanese marquis in the 17th century, with a fabulous terraced garden tumbling down to the shore; similarly, the gardens of Villa Monastero, Villa Cipressi and Villa Varenna can all be reached from Bellagio by boat. The second leg of the tour stays on Lake Maggiore at Villa Aminta, another stunning hotel and spa dipping its toes in the lake itself. A hotel you would gladly never leave, it is nevertheless a superb base for the nearby splendours of Isola Bella, a tiny island marooned on the lake, where a craggy fishing village was transformed into a palazzo and magnificent gardens by aristocrats in the 17th century. Almost indecently blessed with terraced gardens sloping peacefully down to the water’s edge, Lake Maggiore has several other villas we will visit, including Villa Taranto and Villa San Remigio.



Palazzo Pfanner, Tuscany

## EXPRESSIONS GARDEN TOURS FOR SMALL GROUPS

Expressions Italy has been organising tailor-made holidays for individuals and small groups for over 20 years. With our team of Italian-speaking consultants and our in-depth knowledge of the country, we can offer you an unrivalled service for all aspects of your holiday. Our handcrafted garden tours of Italy offer the chance to visit and get to know some of the most exquisite gardens in some of the most beautiful parts of Italy, with quite a wide range of natural vegetation, from the alpine Lakes to the classical landscape of Tuscany in the heart of the country.

A UNIQUE FEATURE of our tours is that they operate for small numbers only. You do not have a tour leader and you do not have the feeling of being herded around visiting highly visible tourist attractions. Quite the opposite. You travel in a small, luxury coach with just 16 seats. You have a local guide to accompany you to the garden visits but not in between. You stay in Expressions tried and tested hotels that we have used for our individual guests for almost 20 years. You will not be treated as a tour party. The places we have included in the tours are not on the popular tourist track (with a couple of exceptions such as Isola Bella on Lake Maggiore) but the emphasis is on discreet places, gems of garden design and botanical interest.

### Alternative travel arrangements

If you want us to arrange flights on other dates allowing you more time in Italy before and/or after the holiday, if you want to fly into and out of a different airport or fly at different times to the ones suggested, if you want the use of a hire-car for your holiday or if you want to travel out and back by train instead of flying, all this is possible. Just discuss your travel plans with us and we will adjust the details and the price accordingly.

### Important information

This holiday is based on 10 people participating. Flight times are subject to alteration and are confirmed at the time of booking. We reserve the right to consolidate departure dates if there are insufficient numbers for any of the departure dates. Our booking conditions apply to this holiday. We reserve the right to alter the itinerary if we cannot be accommodated in any of the villas and gardens for any reason closer to the date of departure. Holiday insurance is not included but it is absolutely essential that you are fully insured.



Giusti Gardens, Verona

## GARDENS AND VILLAS OF TUSCANY

Combining Chianti and the Lucca region, this 6 night tour reflects the diversity and beauty of Tuscan villas and gardens; Italianate, baroque, parkland, water features and stunning views. The tour operates with a maximum of 10 people.

This tour combines the classical heart of Tuscany with a stay near Greve in Chianti from where you visit three of the most beautiful and historic gardens in the Chianti area; Villa Poggio Torselli at San Casciano Val di Pesa, Giardino di Vignamaggio at Greve and Villa Geggiano near Siena. These villas date from the 15th Century and each of their gardens is famed in its own way for its design and beauty. Villa Poggio Torselli is renowned for its spectacular flowering plants including Indian giant hibiscus and a golden crown of 120 secular lemon trees, whereas Vignamaggio boasts an ornate Italian garden with ornamental trees, roses and cypress and Villa Geggiano, frequently used as a film set, is resplendent with ancient cypress, sculpted boxwood as well as lemon trees. From Chianti you move further west towards the coast and the town of Lucca, which offers the opportunity to visit some of the less well-known gems of this region, including Villa Grabau, Villa Oliva, the Parco della Villa Reale and the Villa Torrighiani. The Villa Grabau is renowned for its English-style parkland which abounds in rare trees, planted initially in the 16th century when the villa was built and added to over the years. Villa Oliva enjoys views over the countryside near Lucca from its position on a hillside. Its gardens descend the hill and there are numerous water falls and fountains. The Parco della Villa Reale is an extensive garden and parkland with numerous linked water features, a Moorish garden, a lemon garden, a green theatre and a camellia walk. Finally the Villa Torrighiani houses a baroque garden with nymphaeum, grottoes, water games and flowers.



Villa Poggio Torselli, Tuscany



Parco della Villa Reale, Tuscany

### DAY BY DAY ITINERARY

#### Day one: Arrive in Tuscany

You either join our flight at 10.55 from Gatwick, arriving in Pisa at 14.00 or you make your own way either to Pisa for this time or directly to the hotel. At Pisa you are met by your Iveco small coach and English speaking driver who takes you the hour and a half approximately to your hotel for the first three nights, the Villa le Barone at Panzano near Greve in Chianti. There is time to unpack and explore the hotel and its grounds as well as the country tracks nearby before dinner.

#### Day two: Full day tour and visit to Villa Poggi Torselli

Your driver is joined by your guide for the whole day today as you enjoy the stunning landscape of Chianti and this part of Tuscany, with its mixture of rolling landscaped vineyards and wooded hills. You visit the Villa Poggi Torselli at San Casciano Val di Pesa, renowned for its spectacular flowering plants. Packed lunch accompanies you. You return to the hotel Villa le Barone for dinner.

#### Day three: Full day tour Greve to Siena

Once again you enjoy the services of a guide for the whole day for your visit to the Giardini Vignamaggio nearby in Greve. Vignamaggio was the home of the Gherardini family and Lisa Gherardini who is said to be the subject of da Vinci's Monna Lisa. Then you head south towards Siena and the second garden of the day at Villa Geggiano, now a national monument, where you have a guided tour. A packed lunch today and then you return back to the Villa le Barone for dinner.

#### Day four: Departure for Lucca

You leave Greve this morning for your second stay of the tour, at the Bagni di Pisa near Lucca, arriving in time to relax and enjoy the hotel's spa treatments or a swim in the hotel's pool. Dinner is taken at the hotel.

#### Day five: Full day tour to Villa Grabau and Villa Oliva

A guide accompanies you again today to visit the Villa Grabau and the gardens of the Villa Oliva. These two villas and their gardens near Lucca give you a flavour of the variety of the gardens in this area with both English-style parkland with rare trees and formal water features. Time in the day to relax with your packed lunch. Dinner is taken back at the hotel Bagni di Pisa.

#### Day six: Full day tour to Parco Villa Reale di Marlia and Villa Torrighiani

Your guide accompanies you to two splendid gardens in the Lucca area again today. The Parco Villa Reale is a very large garden with numerous water features, gardens within gardens and an enormous amount to explore. Villa Torrighiani is very pretty, formal and ornate. A convenient time for your packed lunch will be made and you return to the hotel for dinner and your last night.

#### Day seven: Return to London from Pisa

You have some time this morning to relax before heading back by your small coach to Pisa airport and your flight to Gatwick which leaves at 14.45 arriving at 15.55.

#### Dates and prices

This tour departs on the following dates from London for these prices per person

18 May 2012	£2190
9 June 2012	£2220
16 June 2012	£2140
13 July 2012	£2170
7 September 2012	£2190
21 September 2012	£2190

Prices are based on two people sharing a double or twin room and are based on 10 people taking part. If there are fewer than 10 participating, the price may be increased.

Deposit payment: £250 per person  
Supplements: Superior double or twin room at the Villa le Barone £16 per person per night

#### We include

- Flights with British Airways London Gatwick to Pisa in Euro traveller
- Transportation from Pisa airport and back to Pisa airport in a small Iveco Daily 16 seater coach for maximum 10 people with one piece of luggage per person, English speaking driver
- Entrance tickets to the gardens mentioned
- Services of an English speaking local guide as mentioned
- Three nights' dinner, bed and breakfast at the Villa le Barone in a classic (except on 18 May when superior rooms are included) double or twin rooms, plus two packed lunches
- Three nights' dinner, bed and breakfast at the Hotel Bagni di Pisa in double or twin rooms, plus two packed lunches

#### Villa le Barone Panzano, Greve in Chianti

This is a traditional hotel, once an aristocratic villa and now a 4 star hotel of under 30 rooms, in its own grounds amid a typical Tuscan landscape of rolling fields and vineyards. There is a swimming pool and tennis court.

#### Hotel Bagni di Pisa San Giuliano Terme, near Lucca

This is a 5 star spa hotel of about 60 rooms, situated on the edge of a small spa town. It is renowned for its spa facilities including a thermal pool and cave, yet its location near Lucca and Pisa make it an ideal base. There is an indoor and outdoor pool, spa and fitness centre.

## GARDENS AND VILLAS OF COMO AND MAGGIORE

This 6 night tour combines stays in five star hotels on both Lake Como and Lake Maggiore, both of which have a distinctly alpine feel but are also luxuriant in their vegetation. The tour operates with a maximum of 10 people.

This tour of two very popular and dramatically beautiful Italian lakes features a splendid range of striking villas and their gardens on Como including the splendid Villa Melzi d'Eril at Bellagio with its eclectic collection of sculptures in this essentially English-style park that abounds with excellent tree specimens, the enchanting Villa Balbianello facing Serbelloni, secluded in its setting and full of woods of pine, cypress and oak as well as flowerbeds, Villa Carlotta at Tremezzo, full of imaginative planting, sunny terraces, with climbers, ferns, giant magnolias and cork oaks and to the formal terraces of the gardens of the Villa d'Este. Two more gardens complete the tour at Lake Como; Villa Cipressi which is poised upon a rocky promontory with terraces leading down to the lake, planted with Mediterranean shrubs and vines, laced with magnolia, eucalyptus, pittosporum, lavender and agave and Villa Monastero, renowned for a fine collection of Mediterranean and tropical vegetation, as well as fountains and statues. On Lake Maggiore we had to include Isola Bella, one of the most dramatic 17th Century Baroque gardens in Italy, seemingly floating on the surface of the lake with its ten-terraced garden and marble balustrades. Water theatre, putti and grottoes embellished with tinted stucco, pebble mosaic and shellwork add to the sense of fantasy here. Trees include orange trees, lemons and pomegranates. We also include the Villa Taranto, a botanical feast of eclecticism with wisteria, roses, caesalpina, gardenias and magnolias, the Villa San Remigio with its spectacular views and its early 20th Century interpretation of a Renaissance garden, Villa Rusconi Clerici, the Villa Giulia in Verbania and the Botanical garden in Alpinia.



Isola Bella, Lake Maggiore



Villa Taranto

### DAY BY DAY ITINERARY

#### Day one: Arrive in Milan

You either join our flight at 14.50 from Heathrow, arriving in Milan Malpensa at 17.50 or you make your own way either to Milan Malpensa for this time or directly to the hotel. At Milan you are met by your Iveco Daily small coach which seats a maximum of 16, although we have limited the tour to 10 participants. You arrive at your first hotel, Grand Hotel Tremezzo on Lake Como in time for dinner.

#### Day two: Full day tour of nearby gardens

This is quite a full day with a total of four gardens to be visited on different shores of Lake Como. Today your coach and driver are joined by a local guide to accompany you as you visit the Villa Melzi d'Eril, Villa Balbianello, Villa Carlotta and Villa d'Este. Time to stop for your packed lunch in the course of the day. You return to the hotel for dinner.

#### Day three: Half day visit to Villa Monastero and Villa Cipressi

Today you have the services of the local guide for the morning as you visit the garden, villa and museum of the Villa Monastero and then the garden of the Villa Cipressi. The afternoon is free for you to relax at the hotel, making the most of its lakeside swimming pool or to explore on your own, perhaps by lake steamer. Dinner is included at the hotel.

#### Day four: From Como to Maggiore

Today you leave to drive over to Lake Maggiore heading for Stresa and your guide to accompany you by boat to the magnificent Isola Bella. After the tour you check-in at your hotel, the Grand Hotel Majestic in Pallanza in time for dinner.

#### Day five: Full day tour of Villa Taranto and Villa San Remigio

Today is spent with the local guide and driver who take you to the charming villas and gardens of Villa Taranto and Villa San Remigio. You enjoy a packed lunch along the way, returning to your hotel for dinner.

#### Day six: Full day tour of Villa Rusconi Clerici, Villa Giulia and Stresa

This magnificent feast of luxuriant lakeside gardens is rounded off with three on the last day, with Villa Rusconi Clerici, Villa Giulia and the botanical gardens in Alpinia, reached by cable car. A packed lunch accompanies you today but your final dinner is taken back at the Grand Hotel Majestic.

#### Day seven: Back to Milan and London

You have a large part of the day at leisure on Lake Maggiore today as your flight does not depart until 19.00 from Milan Malpensa. Stroll the lakeside promenades, do some last minute shopping or drink in the beauty of the lake from the hotel gardens.

#### Dates and prices

This tour departs on the following dates from London for these prices per person

15 May 2012	£2940
22 May 2012	£2940
12 June 2012	£2940
19 June 2012	£2970
11 September 2012	£2970
18 September 2012	£2970

Prices are based on two people sharing a double or twin room and are based on 10 people taking part. If there are fewer than 10 participating, the price may be increased.

Deposit payment: £300 per person  
Supplements: Lake view double or twin room at the Grand Hotel Tremezzo £52 per person per night in May, £47 per person per night all other dates.

#### We include

- Flights with British Airways London Heathrow to Milan Malpensa in Euro traveller
- Transportation from Milan airport and back to Milan airport in a small Iveco Daily 16 seater coach for maximum 10 people with one piece of luggage per person, English speaking driver
- Entrance tickets to the gardens mentioned
- Services of an English speaking local guide as mentioned
- Hotel Tremezzo in a double or twin park view rooms, plus one packed lunch
- Three nights' dinner, bed and breakfast at the Grand Hotel Majestic, Pallanza in double or twin rooms with partial lake view, plus two packed lunches

#### Grand Hotel Tremezzo Tremezzo, Lake Como

A 5 star hotel in the grand 'turn of the century-Liberty' style on the shore of Lake Como a short distance from the beautiful Villa Carlotta. There is a swimming pool in the lake, just separated from the hotel building by the lakeside road and verdant gardens that climb the hillside behind. Restaurant with panoramic views and spa. (Jacket required for dinner in the Terrazza restaurant).

#### Grand Hotel Majestic Pallanza, Lake Maggiore

Situated on a promontory in Lake Maggiore surrounded by English-style gardens of lawns and trees, the Grand Hotel Majestic dates from the 1870s and is a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World. There are 90 rooms, two restaurants, a spa and an indoor swimming pool.

## GARDENS AND VILLAS OF LAKE MAGGIORE

This 6 night tour is a gentle starter tour for people who want to combine an interest in the gardens and botanical features of stunning Lake Maggiore but who also want some free time to explore independently or just to relax in a glorious lakeside location. The tour operates with a maximum of 10 people.

On Lake Maggiore we had to include Isola Bella, one of the most dramatic 17th Century Baroque gardens in Italy, seemingly floating on the surface of the lake with its ten-terraced garden and marble balustrades. Water theatre, putti and grottoes embellished with tinted stucco, pebble mosaic and shellwork add to the sense of fantasy here. Trees include orange trees, lemons and pomegranates. We also include the Villa Taranto, a botanical feast of eclecticism with wisteria, roses, caesalpina, gardenias and magnolias, the Villa San Remigio with its spectacular views and its early 20th Century interpretation of a Renaissance garden, Villa Rusconi Clerici, the Villa Giulia in Verbania and the Botanical garden in Alpinia.



Villa Taranto in springtime



Gardens of the Villa Taranto, Maggiore

### DAY BY DAY ITINERARY

#### Day one: Arrive in Milan

You either join our flight at 14.50 from Heathrow, arriving in Milan Malpensa at 17.50 or you make your own way either to Milan Malpensa for this time or directly to the hotel. At Milan you are met by your Iveco Daily small coach which seats a maximum of 16, although we have limited the tour to 10 participants. You arrive at your hotel, the Hotel Cannero in Cannero Riviera on Lake Maggiore in time for dinner.

#### Day two: Full day tour to Isola Bella

Your first full day of the day is a spectacular introduction to Lake Maggiore with your guide accompanying you by boat to the magnificent Isola Bella in Lake Maggiore itself. There will be time for you to find a panoramic spot in which to enjoy your packed lunch. You return to Cannero Riviera and your hotel for dinner.

#### Day three: Full day tour of Villa Taranto and Villa San Remigio

Today is spent with the local guide and driver who take you to the charming villas and gardens of Villa Taranto and Villa San Remigio. You enjoy a packed lunch along the way, returning to your hotel for dinner.

#### Day four: Full day tour of Villa Rusconi Clerici, Villa Giulia and Stresa

This magnificent feast of luxuriant lakeside gardens is rounded off with three on the last day, with Villa Rusconi Clerici, Villa Giulia and the botanical gardens in Alpinia, reached by cable car. A packed lunch accompanies you today but your final dinner is taken back at the Hotel Cannero.

#### Days five and six: At leisure in Cannero with dinner included at the hotel.

Time to rest, shop or explore the area independently.

#### Day seven: Back to Milan and London

You have a large part of the day at leisure on Lake Maggiore today as your flight does not depart until 19.00 from Milan Malpensa. Stroll the lakeside promenades, do some last minute shopping or drink in the beauty of the lake from the hotel gardens.

### Dates and prices

This tour departs on the following dates from London for these prices per person

15 May 2012	£1920
22 May 2012	£1920
12 June 2012	£1920
19 June 2012	£1950
11 September 2012	£1920
18 September 2012	£1920

Prices are based on two people sharing a double or twin room and are based on 10 people taking part. If there are fewer than 10 participating, the price may be increased.

Deposit payment: £200 per person

Supplements: Lake view double or twin room with balcony at the Hotel Cannero £22 per person per night

### We include

- Flights with British Airways London Heathrow
- Milan Malpensa in Euro traveller
- Transportation from Milan airport and back to Milan airport in a small Iveco Daily 16 seater coach for maximum 10 people with one piece of luggage per person, English speaking driver
- Entrance tickets to the gardens mentioned
- Services of an English speaking local guide as mentioned
- Three nights' dinner, bed and breakfast at the Hotel Cannero in Cannero Riviera in double or twin rooms, plus three packed lunches

### Hotel Cannero

#### Cannero Riviera, Lake Maggiore

This is a charming, family-run hotel highly praised by our clients every year. It oozes charm and character, is traditionally but smartly furnished, enjoys a fantastic lakeside location and offers tremendous value with its half board. There is a swimming pool and garden at the hotel and a public lakeside beach a short walk away.