

First Impressions of Lucca

Thirteen hours were all that was needed. Thirteen hours to travel from my hometown, in Greece, to the most wonderful place I have ever been, Lucca. Despite the exhaustion and sleepiness that followed after my trip, I could not but want to explore the city. As soon as I entered Lucca's walls, it seemed to me as if I were transferred to a whole new world, an earthly paradise, I dare say.

The most noticeable thing about Lucca is undoubtedly its Renaissance-era walls that surround the old town, Centro Storico. What caught my attention was the wonderful green space on top of the walls, where people were walking, running, or just sitting on the benches and admiring the breathtaking panoramic view. And the truth is, I could already imagine myself riding a bike along this path.

As I was walking around the city, I was captivated by the imposing architecture of the buildings. Every hundred meters I would come across a church or a cathedral, a charming piazza, a villa, a historic building, or even a tower. What intrigued me most was the oval piazza dell'Anfiteatro, one of the most romantic and charming spots of the city. And, of course, I will never forget the first time I saw Torre Guinigi, when I was strolling through the narrow streets and it suddenly appeared – almost – out of nowhere. I was aware that Lucca has been proposed to be added in the UNESCO World Heritage List and I could now clearly see why.

Soon enough I realized that Lucca is a city rich in culture, arts, and an impressive musical heritage. As the birthplace of Giacomo Puccini and several other musicians and composers, Lucca has a great tradition in music, which became evident to me by the many music events that were organized around the city. Either in churches or piazzas, every summer night in Lucca is an artistic one; from theatrical plays to jazz concerts, there's always something happening around the city. Especially in July, when the Lucca Summer Festival is taking place, I expect to see the city crowded and full of events. Not to mention the fact that I already booked my ticket for one of the concerts that take place during the festival, before even booking my air tickets to come here!

Besides all this, Lucca is not just about the buildings and the events. For me, Lucca is about getting lost in the narrow cobblestone streets and, without using any aid, trying to find my way to ... somewhere. Because in Lucca, you can never know where the street will lead you: maybe to a piazza, a tower, or even the walls! Cars are limited in the Centro Storico, making Lucca a pedestrian-friendly and walkable city, also because the distances are not long (a little over 4 km in circumference) and everything can be reached within a few minutes. My favorite walk around the city center includes discovering and window-gazing at beautiful



little antique shops amongst the picturesque Italian houses. It is really incredible how much beauty one can find in such a small city.

Lucca is also about the people. Here you can find people from all over the world: Australia, Brazil, Canada, US, South Africa, and beyond. Contrary to what I expected, I was surprised to find out how many people choose to leave their jobs, homes, or families and move to this precise tiny little place in the world. I have had conversations with many of these people, and every time I end up asking the same question: Why Lucca? I always get a different answer and I cannot think of a greater pleasure than listening to the life stories of people who in the past were living miles and miles away from

me. And yet, here we are together, sharing our stories while drinking a glass of wine inside the walls of this magical city.

Most importantly, for me Lucca is about the vibes that it makes me feel. The city emits a romantic and elegant atmosphere, yet at the same time it is friendly, vibrant, and full of joyfulness, with an atmosphere that calms and, most importantly, cures. It may seem an exaggeration, but Lucca has actually changed me. It daily motivates me to be more and more active and to try to enjoy each moment to the fullest; because moments in Lucca are precious and one realizes this as soon as one passes through the walls.

To be honest, Lucca happened to me by chance. I didn't even know that this place existed, until a friend of mine suggested it as a place to do my internship. And the truth is I don't know the words to thank her enough.

– by Eleni Gkovedarou

Eleni is spending the summer months at the Grapevine office thanks to the Erasmus+ programme.

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