



Tellaro

## Tourist Route

### **Top view of the village**

Seen from above, from the courtyard of the modern Church of Stella Maris, the village of Tellaro appears as a single, compact, impenetrable body. That is how it was in the past: a maze of narrow streets lined by tall, typically Ligurian houses and protected by defensive towers. Mario Soldati, who lived in Tellaro and loved it dearly, said: "Once upon a time, and still it is today, the village of Tellaro. It is all built on the rocks of a promontory that juts out into the sea, at the foot of a large hill covered with olive groves".

### **Entrance to the village**

The round tower that guards one of the entrances to the fortified village is still clearly visible. You can choose to go pass its outward appearance and immediately enter into the heart of the village or go down to the right to reach the Marina. A wide external descent skirts Tellaro's tower houses: a wall of buildings accompanies it on the left. There are no openings of alleyways until you reach the Church of San Giorgio, where another gate opened onto the village.

### **The Marina**

"The promontory also serves as a shelter from the winds of the nearby inlet. At the end of this inlet, there is a small harbour full of boats". Mario Soldati's words accompany us to the Marina of Tellaro. Boats aground, houses overlooking the sea and the old communal washhouses. Fed by the nearby canal, by the spring water of "capoàigua" (the beginning of the spring), over the centuries these washhouses have always played an important role in the social life of the community: women of all ages and social backgrounds, until the middle of the twentieth century, met here every day to wash their clothes and then hang them out to dry on the rocks.

### **The Promenade beyond the Marina**

Leaving the Marina behind us, continuing on the right, a walkway on the cliff gives one of the most famous views of the village, lying on the sea, like a ship that seems to be sailing out to sea. In front of us the islands of the Gulf of Poets, further on the jagged coastline of Fiascherino.

### **The Sottoria Gallery**

To the left of the Marina, a series of open windows in the stone walls characterises the so-called "Sottoria" or "sotto-ripa". About 70 metres long and 2.20 metres wide, it is all that remains of the covered curtain built by the inhabitants constructed in the Middle Ages and on which the houses above it, the buildings facing the sea, rest. Built to defend the village against the constant incursions of pirates, it connected a squared tower (demolished after the Second World War) with the round fortified tower which has now become the bell tower of the Church of San Giorgio. Its entrance is marked by an eighteenth-century wrought-iron gate.

### **St George's Church**

The church of San Giorgio, lapped by the sea, was built in its essential parts between 1564 and 1584, using the foundations and remains of an older building that had military functions. One of the gates giving access to the fortified village opened near the church, while one of the towers was adapted as a bell tower. Linked to this church is the famous legend of the octopus that allegedly saved the population from a night-time pirate attack by violently ringing the bell.

We recount it with the simple and admired words used by D.H. Lawrence (Letter to W. E. Hopkin, from Fiascherino 1913): "Our village is Tellaro. It grows sheer out of the rocks of the sea, a sea-robber's nest of 200 souls. The church is over the water. There is a tale that once in the night the church bell rang – and rang again. The people gout up in terror – the bell rang mysteriously. Then it was found that the bell rope had fallen over the edge of the cliff among the rocks, and an octopus had got hold of the end, and was drawing it. It is quite possible. The men go fishing for the octopus with a white bait and a long spear. They get quite bit ones, six or seven pounds in weight sometimes – and you never saw anything fiendishly ugly. But they are good to eat".

### **Beyond the Church**

Before entering the village, passing in front of the entrance to the church, we take a small detour: leaving the church to the left, we descend the few steps that flank the building to reach the suggestive path that climbs up the cliff. Here, we pass "under" Tellaro and arrive in a timeless place: in front of us only there is only a blue expanse and a splendid coastline overlooking the sea. Beyond the end of Liguria and the beginning of Tuscany. There is no better place to recall the verses of Dante who, when comparing the steep walls of Purgatory with the Ligurian coast, mentions precisely the Lerici coast: "'Twix Lerici and Turbia, the most desert, the most secluded pathway is a stair easy and open, if compared to that".

### **Oratory S. Maria 'n Selàa**

One of the oldest places of worship in Tellaro, it too probably originally had military functions. It then became the Oratory of the "Battuti di Santa Maria". It was donated to the Confraternity in 1630, and on the façade, there is still a bas-relief depicting hooded figures.

Today, the deconsecrated building is owned by the Municipality of Lerici, and it is used as a town hall for the celebration of civil weddings and as a venue to host exhibitions and events, among which the summer literary review with the dialect name "Libi'n Selàa" stands out.

### **Tellaro's alleys**

The discovery of Tellaro does not end here: in Liguria, it is nice to get lost in the alleys...well aware that in the "carruggi" one never gets really lost. From the small square of the Oratory, we are not afraid to venture further into the most hidden meanders of the village, in search of ancient traces of popular devotion and tradition, imagining the terrible end we would have met if, as enemies, we had found ourselves trapped in these narrow alleys.

Boiling olive oil would probably have fallen from the windows, if it were true that the inhabitants, on the striking hills surrounding Tellaro, produced so much of it that they could use it as a defensive weapon. An ancient proverb from Porto Venere reads: "Tellaro non voglio, perchè brucian con l'olio" (Tellaro I don't want, because they burn with oil).

### **Surroundings**

Surrounded by centuries-old olive trees, dry stone walls and Mediterranean scrub, Tellaro is connected to Lerici, La Serra and Montemarcello by several scenic paths, within the Montemarcello-Magra-Vara Regional Natural Park. Not far from the village, are the ruins of Portesone and Barbazzano: from this abandoned settlement, where the remains of the ancient Church of San Giorgio can still be seen, the founders of Tellaro made their way down along the mule tracks that still connect the sea to the hills. (See "Itineraries – Trails).

From the road to Lerici, instead, comfortable stairs lead down to the cliffs and, further on, the beautiful coves of Fiascherino, where D.H. Lawrence stayed. In his letters, he wrote: "It is very lovely here. I seat on the rocks against the sea all day and write. I tell you, it is a dream".

