



ITALIANISSIMO

TUSCANY / FLORENCE

# Off Beat and On Foot, Rudston Steward of Maremma Safari Club

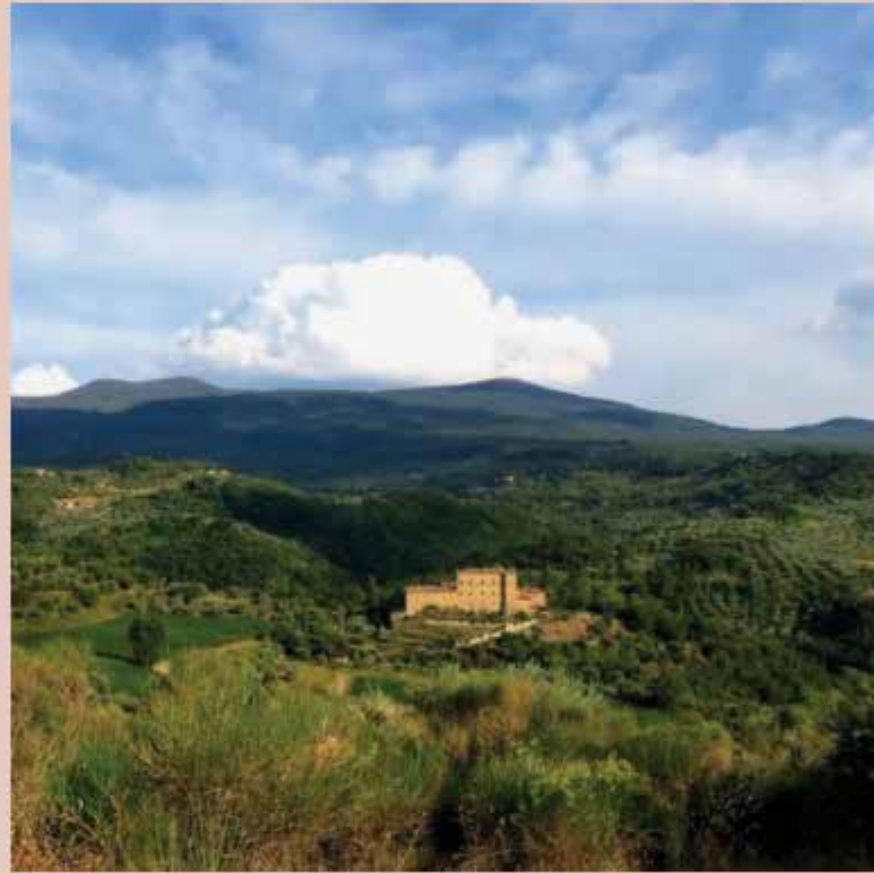
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**2612.2 km walked,**  
**139 mountains climbed,**  
**127 beaches and 651 bowls of pasta**  
**eaten.**

And this is just since 2016, when Rudston Steward launched **Maremma Safari Club**, his off beat, on foot full immersion walking tours in Italy and around the world. And the count keeps going.

Born in New York, raised in South African, the peripatetic Steward spent the golden years of childhood in Rome, a decade back in New York with a year in Argentina and another Costa Rica, Steward returned to Italy in the early 2000s.



*“I was clearly destined to be involved in the travel industry,”*

he says laughingly. And more importantly, destined to be walking as his South Africa background had him camping, trekking and walking in safari and in the wild. Steward packed his bags again and returned to Tuscany to launch a career as a freelance guide, travelling throughout Italy as well as India, Jordan, Bhutan, Spain, South Africa and more. His in-depth experience brought him to the side lines for a years as a travel specialist, receiving such accolades Condè Nast Traveller’s Top Travel Specialist.

But Steward was itching for more. “In 2015, I wanted to get back out in the field,” Steward explains, “and there was environmental aspect, I didn’t want to fly around the globe so much.” So Steward spent an entire year exploring nine regions of Italy – Sicily, Calabria, Basilicata, Puglia, Toscana, Sardegna, Abruzzo, Trentino Alto Adige, Campania. “My goals was to get an in-depth overview of each region to create multi-day walks.”

Rudston Steward during one of his walking tours



*Why do you call your walking tours safari?*

The word *safari* comes from Swahili and Arabic, and it simply means to travel. My love of walking as a form of travel and exploration originated in South Africa, where I partly grew up; I'd spend days on end in the bush on foot. I wanted to transplant the African dimension of my past into my Italian journeys: that thrill of mounting an expedition—of going on safari. To me safari is a magical word, charged with the wildness and wonder that are important elements of all my walking trips. And these days I live in the Maremma region of Tuscany, hence the name Maremma Safari Club.

*What is your favourite safari tour?*

That would be like choosing one favourite amongst your many children...they are all extraordinary in different ways. When you walk in Sicily, Calabria, Sardinia, Tuscany, and Alto Adige you discover that these regions are in fact more like separate mini-countries, somehow all still co-existing under one Italian flag. But I do have a soft spot for the Monte Amiata Safari in Tuscany, where we spend five days strolling around my home turf, on back-routes I researched myself that no-one else knows or uses. We never see other hikers along the way, for the entire five day trip, which makes for a very special experience. And we visit lots of friends along the way, drink their amazing wines—the last two nights we are hosted by the Sesti family at their Castello di Argiano wine estate, in my opinion one of the most exquisite places on earth. The Monte Amiata Safari also works really well for those who want to extend their stay in Tuscany beyond the walking trip—I usually suggest continuing on to Hotel Il Pellicano, conveniently located on the coast just down the road from where we end the walk. It makes for a killer combination: five days blazing an extraordinary trail through the Tuscan hills on foot, followed by a dose of glorious dolce far niente unwinding down by the sea.

*What if I've never been on a walking tour? What do I need to know?*

Everything you need to know, all the granular detail, is addressed in our initial one-on-one conversations. I invest a lot of time in making sure the right travellers end up on the right trips—that their ability and preferences are matched to the best destination. This involves plenty of back-and-forth in the planning stage, and it's a fun process of getting to know each other and figuring out which walking safari—if any—is a good fit for a potential traveller.

### *What do I need to bring?*

The Italian regions we walk in are all completely distinct, so the terrain and gear varies from place to place and is different for each trip. In the Aeolian Islands you need a snorkel (because every walk ends with a post-volcanic dive in the sea); in the Dolomites you need more warm layers than you think, and firm footing (particularly if you opt to do the Via Ferrata to the summit of Monte Paterno); in Tuscany you need walking sticks, flip flops (we ford the Orcia River twice) and a healthy appetite for Brunello di Montalcino. The basic equipment essentials for all trips are: proper walking shoes, a small daypack, sun protection, a sense of adventure, loads of curiosity (hip flask optional—I always bring mine).

The trips have varying levels of difficulty. You must like walking (after all, these are walking trips) and be relatively fit and active to participate in any of them, but you don't need to be a marathon runner or have lots of walking experience (these are definitely not “fitness challenges” designed to test your physical condition). Maremma Safari Club trips are slow-travelling journeys on foot: strolling, eating and drinking our way through stunning landscapes in some truly off-the-beaten-track corners of Italy. The goal is to have a unique, memorable and potentially transformative travel experience; to immerse yourself fully in a landscape and region—while enjoying a stimulating, relaxing, active, fascinating and utterly delicious few days in the process.

*You go everywhere. Tell us a little about your walking tour in Tuscany's **Monte Amiata**.*

The last day's walk on our [Monte Amiata](#) safari is a gorgeous full-day hike from the hamlet of Castiglioncello Bandini, where we overnight at a friend's villa. We start out with very wide views across the Maremma hills down to the Grosseto coast and a glimpse of the Tyrrhenian Sea (plus, if lucky, the silhouette of Montecristo Island out in the bay), before following a ridge gently down through oak forests, wheat fields and olive groves, heading north towards Montalcino. We stop for a picnic at the bottom (usually in the company of a big flock of European Bee-Eaters) before crossing the Orcia River.

Anyone who prefers to skip the afternoon walk after the picnic can hop in the van and head straight to Argiano—to siesta, jump in the pool or get a head-start on the wine-tasting (on all the walks, wherever possible, there's the option to walk a half-day only and then hop in the van). The last section of the trail is up through Brunello vineyards aiming for Castello di Argiano's medieval tower, with epic views back towards the Monte Amiata—the holy mountain of the Etruscans. You can trace the entire five-day trajectory from the endpoint of the walk, sitting back on Argiano's terrace with a well-deserved glass of Sangiovese in hand. And then it's time for the final gala dinner, a Tuscan feast served in the candle-lit chapel.