

THE EXCURSION

By Yvonne Gordon

Pack It In

The Alaskan adventure sport of packrafting makes a splash in Tuscany

It's a peaceful day at Tuscany's Lake Bilancino, and on a small, stony beach, a group of hikers is inflating rafts—with nary an air pump to spoil the quiet. Instead, these outdoors enthusiasts are catching air in what look like kitchen-size garbage bags and then squeezing the air into yellow dinghies that they've unrolled from waterproof backpacks. Packrafts, as these boats are known, were popularized in Alaska but have recently landed on Italian shores, thanks to the Fiesole-based water sports outfitter T-rafting.

While many travelers see Tuscany by bicycle, T-rafting owners Sebastian Schweizer and Enrico Pini Prato—both of whom have PhDs in freshwater ecology—are taking to the region's many waterways. In addition to activities such as whitewater rafting and floating under the Ponte Vecchio, last season the company debuted this packrafting excursion, which begins about 20 miles from Florence. After a gentle hike through rolling countryside and forest from the Bosco ai Frati convent to the lake, participants unzip their backpacks to reveal a foldable paddle and a one-person raft that weighs between 3.5 and 8 pounds. Once inflated, the rafts carry the paddlers to a picnic on the other shore. It takes just a few minutes to deflate and pack them up, at which point the group continues on, hiking past the 12th-century Castello

del Trebbio and stopping for a wine tasting at a local farm.

"This is the cool thing about packrafting: A body of water doesn't stop your hike or biking trip," Schweizer says. "This equipment gives you incredible freedom, making water and land your gaming ground and opening your horizons."

With its 250 miles of coastline, seven main islands, and dozens of lakes and rivers, Tuscany is particularly ripe for this sport. "We have beautiful rivers such as the Ombrone in Maremma—a wild area of Tuscany—or the nature reserves of the Upper Arno," says Schweizer, who also loves packrafting around the region's islands. "Walking in Mediterranean bush and paddling into the crystal-clear water during the same excursion is an unforgettable experience." *1.5-hour trips from \$40; 3-hour trips from \$62, t-rafting.com*



THE GADGET

GoPro HERO7 Black

It wouldn't be an overstatement to call 2019 a make-or-break year for GoPro. After a string of ill-fated product launches, last fall the company debuted its

HERO7 series, signaling a readiness to pair its rugged tech with the needs of the social media age. The HERO7 Black model features HyperSmooth image stabilization, live-streaming capabilities, time-lapse video, eight-times slow motion, and a QuikStories



feature that automatically transfers Instagram Stories-size clips to your smartphone. And if you want to take it, say, rafting in Tuscany, the camera is waterproof down to 33 feet. Tech critics have greeted the new GoPro with a hero's welcome: It won a CES

2019 Innovation Award and accolades from *PCMag* and *Popular Science*. "The world loves to tear you down when you're on top," GoPro founder and CEO Nicholas Woodman said in the wake of the positive reviews, "but, fortunately, the world also loves a comeback story." \$399, gopro.com —Ayo Osobamiro

Courtesy of T-rafting (rafting)