



nileGUIDE

ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



Chi King

Best Things to do in Florence

Florence, 4 Days

Table of contents:

- Guide Description 2
- Itinerary Overview 3
- Daily Itineraries 5
- My List 24
- Florence Snapshot 26

Guide Description



AUTHOR NOTE: First time in Florence, here are the essential places to see and enjoy. Your first visit should include the big landmarks like the Duomo, Ponte Vecchio and museums like the Uffizi and the Accademia.

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1 - Florence

DAY NOTE: The first visit to Florence should be a relaxing and special one. On your first day, enjoy the enchantment of Santa Croce church. Then if the weather is gorgeous, take a stroll (I mean very slow) to Piazzale Michelangelo and enjoy the Tuscan countryside by taking some pictures or eating a gelato from the nearby vendors. If you still have the energy to climb more flights of stairs, conquer San Miniato just down the road from the Piazzale. The vista from the top is break-taking.



Santa Croce
Franciscan Basilica



Piazzale Michelangelo
Fantastic view over the city and the hills of Tuscany.



I Fratellini
Sips and snacks



San Miniato al Monte
Romanesque Church on the Florentine Hills



Osteria Antica Mescita San Niccolò
Unusual Local Dishes Inside a Crypt

Day 2 - Florence

DAY NOTE: As you wake up, know that you will be seeing one of the most gorgeous art museums today in Florence. Galleria degli Uffizi holds pieces by Da Vinci, Filippo Lippi, and Caravaggio. Making a reservation in advance will make your trip to the Uffizi and the Accademia much more calm. The Accademia shows off the work of Michelangelo from his later years, some pieces are still unfinished. Lorenzaccio is a delicious and friendly pizzeria where you can enjoy people-watching from your table.



Galleria dell'Accademia (Academy Gallery)
Paintings, Sculptures and Michelangelo's David



Orsanmichele
Medieval Grain Market



Lorenzaccio (II)
Dine in the Piazza della Signoria



Gallerie degli Uffizi (Uffizi Galleries)
World-Renowned Art Collection



Volpe e l'Uva (Le)
Wine Lover's Delight

Day 3 - Florence

DAY NOTE: I bet you are wondering why I didn't put the Duomo as the first to see. It is a glorious site but since it is in the center, you can visit the inside and climb the dome whenever it feels right. The Museo dell'Opera del Duomo is located right behind the church so it is a great second stop on the cobblestones of Florence. Much of the original statues and artwork from the Duomo are stored there. For a nice mid-morning snack or lunch, enjoy Enoteca Coquinarius. It is small, cozy and full of delicious wine.



Duomo (Cathedral of Santa Maria dei Fiori)
The Dome of Brunelleschi



Museo dell'Opera del Duomo (Duomo Works Museum)
An Interesting Museum



Bar-Enoteca Coquinarius
Wine Bar with a warm atmosphere



Mercato Centrale
Fresh fruits, veggies, cheeses, fish and meat.



Trattoria Marione
Old style trattoria

Day 4 - Florence

DAY NOTE: Grom is by far the best gelato you can taste in Florence. Take it with you on your walk towards San Lorenzo. While outside there is a bustling market, inside the church you will find many tombs of the famous Medici family. Also attached to the church is the Cappella dei Medici. The tombs were sculpted by Michelangelo and a grand sight to see. Ponte Vecchio being the oldest bridge in Florence, welcomes it's visitors to window shop and step in to the ancient gold and silver shops. For lunch, stop at Yellow Bar. It is a great afternoon sit for a pizza or a deliciously filling calzone. For an evening activity, take a walk before 7pm to the Loggia del Mercato Nuovo. This is a smaller more secluded

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

market that is located close to Piazza della Signoria. Pass over the Ponte Vecchio to the Oltrarno, and head towards Santo Spirito. There is where one of the best pizzeria's are located. Borgo Antico is always crowded and the atmosphere is quite calm and serene in Piazza Santo Spirito.



San Lorenzo

Church of the Medici



Grom

A mix of a modern ambiance with classical gelato selections.



Ponte Vecchio

The Ponte Vecchio (Old Bridge) has history and many jewelry shops.



Yellow Bar

Friendly, Young Clientèle



Loggia del Mercato Nuovo

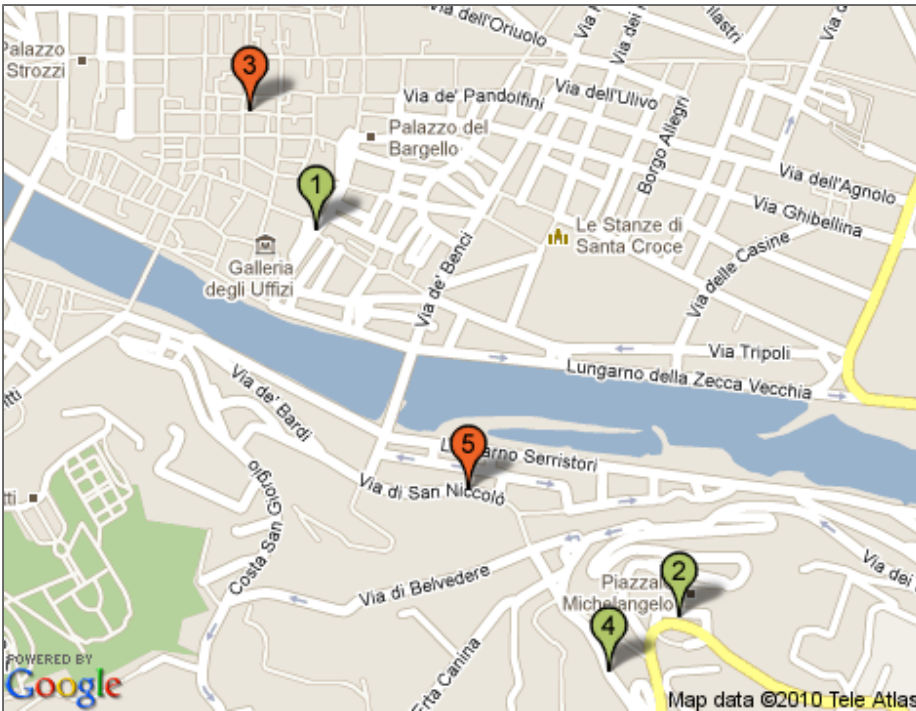
Fontana del Porcellino will bring you fortune.



Borgo Antico

Pizza that will make your belly full

Day 1 - Florence



QUICK NOTE

DAY NOTE: The first visit to Florence should be a relaxing and special one. On your first day, enjoy the enchantment of Santa Croce church. Then if the weather is gorgeous, take a stroll (I mean very slow) to Piazzale Michelangelo and enjoy the Tuscan countryside by taking some pictures or eating a gelato from the nearby vendors. If you still have the energy to climb more flights of stairs, conquer San Miniato just down the road from the Piazzale. The vista from the top is break-taking.

contact:

tel: 055-244-619

fax: +39 055 246 6105

<http://www.santacroce.firenze.it/>

location:

piazza Santa Croce 16
Florence 50122

hours:

Mon-Sat 9:30am-5:30pm; Sun
1-5:30pm

1 Santa Croce

DESCRIPTION: The center of the Florentine Franciscan universe was begun in 1294 by Gothic master Arnolfo di Cambio in order to rival the huge church of Santa Maria Novella being raised by the Dominicans across the city. The church wasn't completed and consecrated until 1442, and even then it remained faceless until the neo-Gothic **facade** was added in 1857 (and cleaned in 1998-99). The cloisters are home to Brunelleschi's Cappella de' Pazzi, the convent partially given over to a famous leather school, and the church itself a shrine of 14th-century frescoes and a monument to notable Florentines, whose tombs and memorials litter the place like an Italian Westminster. The best artworks, such as the Giotto frescoes, are guarded by euro-gobbling lightboxes; bring plenty of change. The Gothic **interior** -- for which they now charge a premium admission (it was free until recently) -- is wide and gaping, with huge pointed stone arches creating the aisles and an echoing nave trussed with wood beams, in all feeling vaguely barnlike (an analogy the occasional fluttering pigeon only reinforces). The floor is paved with worn tombstones -- because being buried in this hallowed sanctuary got you one step closer to Heaven, the richest families of the day paid



Katie Greenaway

big bucks to stake out small rectangles of the floor. On the right aisle is the first tomb of note, a mad Vasari contraption containing the bones of the most venerated of Renaissance masters, **Michelangelo Buonarroti**, who died of a fever in Rome in 1564 at the ripe age of 89. The pope wanted him buried in the Eternal City, but Florentines managed to sneak his body back to Florence. Past Michelangelo is a pompous 19th-century cenotaph to Florentine **Dante Alighieri**, one of history's greatest poets, whose Divine Comedy codified the Italian language. He died in 1321 in Ravenna after a long and bitter life in exile from his hometown (on trumped-up embezzlement charges), and that Adriatic city has never seen fit to return the bones to Florence, the city that would never readmit the poet when he was alive. Against a nave pillar farther up is an elaborate **pulpit** (1472-76) carved by Benedetto di Maiano with scenes from the life of St. Francis. Next comes a wall monument to **Niccolò Machiavelli**, the 16th-century Florentine statesman and author whose famous book *The Prince* was the perfect practical manual for a powerful Renaissance ruler. Past the next altar is an Annunciation (1433) carved in low relief of pietra serena and gilded by Donatello. Nearby is Antonio Rossellino's 1446 tomb of the great humanist scholar and city chancellor **Leonardo Bruni** (d. 1444). Beyond this architectural masterpiece of a tomb is a 19th-century knockoff honoring the remains of **Gioacchino Rossini** (1792-1868), composer of the *Barber of Seville* and the *William Tell Overture*. Around in the right transept is the **Cappella Castellani** frescoed by Agnolo Gaddi and assistants, with a tabernacle by Mino da Fiesole and a Crucifix by Niccolò Gerini. Agnolo's father, Taddeo Gaddi, was one of Giotto's closest followers, and the senior Gaddi is the one who undertook painting the **Cappella Baroncelli** (1332-38) at the transept's end. The frescoes depict scenes from the Life of the Virgin, and to the left of the window is an Angel Appearing to the Shepherds that constitutes the first night scene in Italian fresco. The altarpiece *Coronation of the Virgin* is by Giotto. To the left of this chapel is a doorway, designed by Michelozzo, leading to the sagrestia (sacristy) past a huge *Deposition* (1560) by Alessandro Allori that had to be restored after it incurred massive water damage when the church was inundated during the 1966 flood. Past the gift shop is a leather school and store. In the right transept, Giotto frescoed the two chapels to the right of the high altar. The frescoes were whitewashed over during the 17th century but uncovered from 1841 to 1852 and inexpertly restored. The **Cappella Peruzzi**, on the right, is a late work and not in the best shape. The many references to antiquity in the styling and architecture of the frescoes reflect Giotto's trip to Rome and its ruins. His assistant Taddeo Gaddi did the altarpiece. Even more famous, if only as the setting for a scene in the film *A Room with a View*, is the **Cappella Bardi** immediately to the right of the high altar. The key panels here include the *Trial by Fire Before the Sultan of Egypt* on the right wall, full of telling subtlety in the expressions and poses of the figures. One of Giotto's most well-known works is the lower panel on the left wall, the *Death of St. Francis*, where the monks weep and wail with convincing pathos. Alas, big chunks of the scene are missing from when a tomb was stuck on top of it in the 18th century. Most people miss seeing *Francis Receiving the Stigmata*, which Giotto frescoed above the outside of

Piazzale Michelangelo. Tourists, tourist groups and tour buses all congregate at this panoramic view. Vendors set up early in the morning with cool beverages for the parched tourists and souvenirs for the eager shoppers. A sunset visit is for the romantics, bringing a wine bottle and gazing at the florentine sky as it ends another day. There is no bad time to visit Piazzale Michelangelo, there is always something to see. © NileGuide

contact:
tel: 055-239-6096

location:
Via dei Cimatori 38r
Florence Florence 50122

hours:
Daily 8am-8:30pm

3 I Fratellini

DESCRIPTION: Just off the busiest tourist thoroughfare lies one of the last of a dying breed: a fiaschetteria (derived from the word for a flask of wine). It's the proverbial hole in the wall, a doorway about 1.5m (5 ft.) deep with rows of wine bottles against the back wall and Armando and Michele Perrino busy behind the counter, fixing sandwiches and pouring glasses of vino. You stand, munching and sipping, on the cobblestones of the narrow street surrounded by Florentines on their lunch break and a few bemused tourists. The cinghiale piccante con caprino (spicy raw wild boar sausage with creamy goat cheese) is excellent. Otherwise, choose your poison from among 30 stuffing combinations -- the menu posted on the doorjamb has English translations -- and accompany it with either a basic rosso (red) wine or point to any bottle to try un bicchiere (a glass). © Frommer's



Photo courtesy of I Fratellini

contact:
tel: 055-234-2731
fax: +39 055 234 5354
<http://www.san-miniato-al-monte.com/>

location:
via del Monte alle Croci 34
Florence Tuscany 50125

hours:
Easter to early Oct daily
8am-7:30pm; winter Mon-Sat
8am-1pm and 2:30-6pm, Sun
8am-6pm

4 San Miniato al Monte

DESCRIPTION: High atop a hill, its gleaming white-and-green facade visible from the valley below, San Miniato is one of the few ancient churches of Florence to survive the centuries virtually intact. San Miniato was an eastern Christian who settled in Florence and was martyred during Emperor Decius's persecutions in A.D. 250. The legend goes that the decapitated saint picked up his head, walked across the river, climbed up the hillside, and didn't lie down to die until he reached this spot. He and other Christians were buried here, and a shrine was raised on the site as early as the 4th century. The current building began to take shape in 1013, under the auspices of the powerful Arte di Calimala guild, whose symbol, a bronze eagle clutching a bale of wool, perches atop the **facade**. The Romanesque facade is a particularly gorgeous bit of white Carrara and green Prato marble inlay. Above the central window is a 13th-century mosaic of Christ Between the Madonna and St. Miniato (a theme repeated in a slightly later mosaic filling the apse inside). The **interior** has a few Renaissance additions, but they blend in well with the overall medieval aspect -- an airy, stony space with a raised choir at one end, painted wooden trusses on the ceiling, and tombs interspersed with inlaid marble symbols of the zodiac paving the floor. Below the choir is an 11th-century **crypt** with small frescoes by Taddeo Gaddi. Off to the right of the raised choir is the **sacristy**, which Spinello Aretino covered in 1387 with cartoonish yet elegant frescoes depicting the **Life of St. Benedict**. Off the left aisle of the nave is 15th-century **Cappella del Cardinale del Portogallo**, a brilliant collaborative effort by Renaissance artists built to honor young Portuguese humanist Cardinal Jacopo di Lusitania, who



Katie Greenaway

was sent to study in Perugia but died an untimely death at 25 in Florence. Brunelleschi's student Antonio Manetti started the chapel in 1460 but soon died, and Antonio Rossellino finished the architecture and carving by 1466. Luca della Robbia provided the glazed terra-cotta dome, a cubic landscape set with tondi of the four Virtues surrounding the Holy Spirit to symbolize the young scholar's devotion to the church and to humanist philosophy. It stands as one of della Robbia's masterpieces of color and classical ideals. The unfinished **bell tower** seen from the outside was designed by Baccio d'Agnolo. In 1530 the combined troops of Charles V and Medici Pope Clement VII, who had recently reconciled with each other, lay siege to the newly declared Republic of Florence in an attempt to reinstate the Medici dukes. San Miniato al Monte was one of the prime fortifications, and an artilleryman named Lapo was stationed up in the tower with two small cannons -- he was basically bait, stuck there to draw the fire of the enemy where it would do little harm. The man in charge of the defenses was Michelangelo, who, the authorities figured, was so good at everything else, why not military fortifications? After throwing up dirt ramparts and cobbling together defensible walls out of oak timbers, Michelangelo helped poor Lapo out by devising an ingenious way to protect the tower: He hung mattresses down the sides to absorb the shock of the cannonballs fired at it and left the tower (and, more important, Lapo) still standing. The siege was eventually successful, however, and the Florentine Republic fell, but while it lasted, Michelangelo spent his day up here and referred to the church of **San Salvatore al Monte** just below as "my pretty country maid." It's a simple 1400 church built by Cronaca, with a Giovanni della Robbia Deposition and a Neri di Bicci Pietà inside. © Frommer's

contact:

tel: +39 055 234 2836

location:

via di San Niccolò 60r
Florence 50125

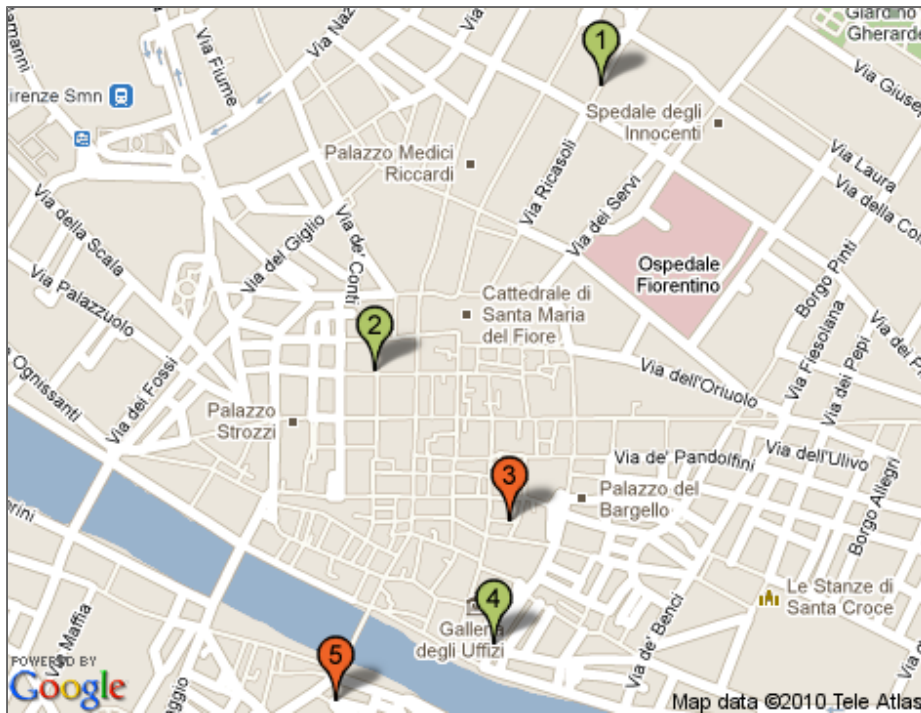
hours:

M-Sa 12:30p-3p & 8p-11p

5 Osteria Antica Mescita San Niccolò

DESCRIPTION: This is a wonderful way of discovering the traditional district of San Niccolò. The restaurant serves classic local dishes and flavours. You should try unusual dishes such as budelline in umido intestines), tongue, cimalino in salsa verde or cavolo verzo rifatto (savoy cabbage). Dishes such as pappa al pomodoro (bread soup with tomato) or spezzatino ai porcini (mushroom stew) are also excellent. Good Tuscan wine is available. This fascinating ancient osteria is located in a crypt which dates back to the 11th century, and is at the back of the Chiesa di San Niccolò. You only have to go up the stairs on the inside of the establishment to visit the church. © wcities.com

Day 2 - Florence



QUICK NOTE

DAY NOTE: As you wake up, know that you will be seeing one of the most gorgeous art museums today in Florence. Galleria degli Uffizi holds pieces by Da Vinci, Filippo Lippi, and Caravaggio. Making a reservation in advance will make your trip to the Uffizi and the Accademia much more calm. The Accademia shows off the work of Michelangelo from his later years, some pieces are still unfinished. Lorenzaccio is a delicious and friendly pizzeria where you can enjoy people-watching from your table.

contact:

tel: 055-238-8609

fax: 055 238 8764

<http://www.firenzemusei.it/accademia/home.html>

location:

Via Ricasoli 60

Florence FI 50122

hours:

Tues-Sun 8:15am-6:50pm;

last admission 30 min. before close

1 Galleria dell'Accademia (Academy Gallery)

DESCRIPTION: Though tour-bus crowds flock here just for Michelangelo's David, anyone with more than a day in Florence can take the time to peruse some of the Accademia's paintings as well. The first long hall is devoted to Michelangelo and, though you pass his Slaves and the entrance to the painting gallery, most visitors are immediately drawn down to the far end, a tribune dominated by the most famous sculpture in the world: **Michelangelo's David**. A hot young sculptor fresh from his success with the Pietà in Rome, Michelangelo offered in 1501 to take on a slab of marble that had already been worked on by another sculptor (who had taken a chunk out of one side before declaring it too strangely shaped to use). The huge slab had been lying around the Duomo's work yards so long it earned a nickname, Il Gigante (The Giant), so it was with a twist of humor that Michelangelo, only 29 years old, finished in 1504 a Goliath-size David for the city. There was originally a vague idea that the statue would become part of the Duomo, but Florence's republican government soon wheeled it down to stand on Piazza della Signoria in front of the Palazzo Vecchio to symbolize the defeated tyranny of the Medici, who had been



ousted a decade before (but would return with a vengeance). During a 1527 anti-Medicean siege on the palazzo, a bench thrown at the attackers from one of the windows hit David's left arm, which reportedly came crashing down on a farmer's toe. (A young Giorgio Vasari came scurrying out to gather all the pieces for safekeeping, despite the riot going on around him, and the arm was later reconstituted.) Even the sculpture's 1873 removal to the Accademia to save it from the elements (a copy stands in its place) hasn't kept it entirely safe -- in 1991, a man threw himself on the statue and began hammering at the right foot, dislodging several toes. The foot was repaired, and David's Plexiglas shield went up. The hall leading up to David is lined with perhaps Michelangelo's most fascinating works, the four famous nonfiniti ("unfinished") **Slaves**, or **Prisoners**. Like no others, these statues symbolize Michelangelo's theory that sculpture is an "art that takes away superfluous material." The great master saw a true sculpture as something that was already inherent in the stone, and all it needed was a skilled chisel to free it from the extraneous rock. That certainly seems to be the case here, as we get a private glimpse into Michelangelo's working technique: how he began by carving the abdomen and torso, going for the gut of the sculpture and bringing that to life first so it could tell him how the rest should start to take form. Whether he intended the statues to look the way they do now or in fact left them only half done has been debated by art historians to exhaustion. The result, no matter what the sculptor's intentions, is remarkable, a symbol of the master's great art and personal views on craft as his Slaves struggle to break free of their chipped stone prisons. Nearby, in a similar mode, is a statue of **St. Matthew** (1504-08), which Michelangelo began carving as part of a series of Apostles he was at one point going to complete for the Duomo. (The Pietà at the end of the corridor on the right is by one of Michelangelo's students, not by the master as was once thought.) Off this hall of Slaves is the first wing of the painting gallery, which includes a panel, possibly from a wedding chest, known as the **Cassone Adimari**, painted by Lo Scheggia in the 1440s. It shows the happy couple's promenade to the Duomo, with the green-and-white marbles of the baptistery prominent in the background. In the wings off David's tribune are large paintings by Michelangelo's contemporaries, Mannerists over whom he had a very strong influence -- they even say Michelangelo provided the original drawing from which Pontorno painted his amorous Venus and Cupid. Off the end of the left wing is a long 19th-century hall crowded wall-to-wall and stacked floor-to-ceiling with **plaster casts** of hundreds of sculptures and busts -- the Accademia, after all, is what it sounds like: an academy for budding young artists, founded in 1784 as an offshoot of the Academy of Art Design that dates from Michelangelo's time (1565). **Seeing David** -- The wait to get in to see David can be up to an hour if you didn't reserve ahead. Try getting there before the museum opens in the morning or an hour or two before closing time. © Frommer's

contact:

tel: 055-284-944

fax: +39 055 234 6286

<http://www.discovertuscany.com/florence/churches/orsanmichele.html>

location:

Via Arte della Lana 1
Florence 50122

hours:

Church open erratic hours (though never open during riposo). Museum daily 9-9:45am, 10-10:45am, and 11-11:45am (plus Sat-Sun 1-1:45pm)

2 Orsanmichele

DESCRIPTION: This tall structure halfway down Via dei Calzaiuoli looks more like a Gothic warehouse than a church -- which is exactly what it was, built as a granary/grain market in 1337. After a miraculous image of the Madonna appeared on a column inside, however, the lower level was turned into a chapel. The city's merchant guilds each undertook the task of decorating one of the outside nichelike Gothic tabernacles around the lower level with a statue of their guild's patron saint. Masters such as Ghiberti, Donatello, Verrocchio, and Giambologna all cast or carved masterpieces to set here. Since 1984, these have been removed and are being replaced by casts as the originals are slowly cleaned and exhibited up on the second story. Unfortunately, the church now keeps erratic hours due to a lack of personnel, so there are no set opening hours; however, you may get lucky and find the doors thrown open when you pass by (or, though this may take even more luck, someone might actually answer the phone number below and give you details on when it will next open). Since it's pretty nifty, and there's a chance you'll be able to pop in, I'll go ahead and describe it all. In the chapel's dark interior (emerged in 1999 from a long restoration and entered around the "back" side on Via dell'Arte della Lana) are recently restored 14th- to 16th-century paintings by the likes of Lorenzo di Credi and Il Poppi. The elaborate Gothic **Tabernacle** (1349-59) by Andrea Orcagna looks something like a miniature church, covered with statuettes, enamels, inset colored marbles and glass, and reliefs. It protects a luminous 1348 Madonna and Child painted by Giotto's student Bernardo Daddi. The prominent statue of the Madonna, Child, and St. Anne to its left is by Francesco da Sangallo (1522). Across Via dell'Arte della Lana from the Orsanmichele's main entrance is the 1308 Palazzo dell'Arte della Lana. This Gothic palace was home to medieval Florence's most powerful body, the guild of wool merchants, which employed about one-third of Florence in the 13th and 14th centuries. Up the stairs inside you can cross over the hanging walkway to the first floor (American second floor) of Orsanmichele. These are the old granary rooms, now housing a **museum of the statues** that once surrounded the exterior. A few are still undergoing restoration, but eight of the original sculptures are here, well labeled, including Donatello's marble St. Mark (1411-13); Ghiberti's bronze St. John the Baptist (1413-16), the first life-size bronze of the Renaissance; and Verrocchio's Incredulity of St. Thomas (1473-83). This museum, too, does not always adhere to its posted hours, as those are dependent on someone being around to honor them. Still, it's at least worth a try. © Frommer's



contact:

tel: +39 055 29 4553
fax: +39 055 26 4353
<http://www.ristorantelorenzaccio.com>

location:

piazza della Signoria 32
Florence 50122

3 Lorenzaccio (II)

DESCRIPTION: The specialties consist of the wood-burning oven pizza presented to you hot right out of the brick oven. Another favorite is the Calzone which is as large as your head, literally. It is an enticing adventure in your mouth with so much mozzarella and ricotta. The Pizza Lorenzaccio created by my friend, Michelangelo, topped with the famous prosciutto crudo, sun-dried tomatoes, arugula, black olives, mozzarella. By the same name but an insalata(salad), Insalata Lorenzaccio is another favorite, consisting of prosciutto of parma, fresh tomatoes, mouth-watering mozzarella, black olives and lettuce of course. It really is refreshing and full of flavor. Perfect for a hot summer day. Topping it with fresh olive oil and red wine vinegar, I wouldn't have it any other way. © NileGuide



Katie Greenaway

contact:

tel: 055-238-8651
fax: +39 055 238 8694
<http://www.uffizi.firenze.it>

location:

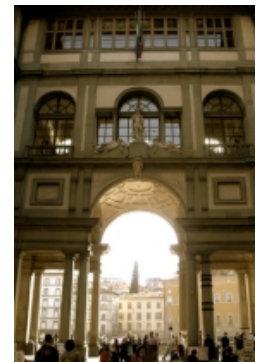
Piazzale degli Uffizi 6
Florence 50122

hours:

Tues-Sun 8:15am-7pm. Ticket window closes 45 min. before museum

4 Gallerie degli Uffizi (Uffizi Galleries)

DESCRIPTION: The Uffizi is one of the world's great museums, and the single best introduction to Renaissance painting, with works by Giotto, Masaccio, Paolo Uccello, Sandro Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Perugino, Michelangelo, Raphael Sanzio, Titian, Caravaggio, and the list goes on. The museum is deceptively small. What looks like a small stretch of gallery space can easily gobble up half a day -- many rooms suffer the fate of containing nothing but masterpieces. Know before you go that the Uffizi regularly shuts down rooms for crowd-control reasons -- especially in summer, when the bulk of the annual 1.5 million visitors stampedes the place. Of the more than 3,100 artworks in the museum's archives, only about 1,700 are on exhibit. The painting gallery is housed in the structure built to serve as the offices (uffizi is Florentine dialect for uffici, or "offices") of the Medici, commissioned by Cosimo I from Giorgio Vasari in 1560 -- perhaps his greatest architectural work. The painting gallery was started by Cosimo I as well and is now housed in the second-floor rooms that open off a long hall lined with ancient statues and frescoed with grotesques. **Tips for Seeing the Uffizi** -- If you have the time, make two trips to the museum. On your first, concentrate on the first dozen or so rooms and pop by the Greatest Hits of the 16th Century, with works by Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Raphael, and Titian. Return later for a brief recap and continue with the rest of the gallery. Be aware that the **gift shop** at the end of the galleries closes 20 minutes before the museum. You can visit it without reentering the museum at any time; if you plan to stay in the collections until closing, go down to the shop earlier during your visit and get the guards' attention before you pass through the exit turnstile, so they'll know you're just popping out to buy a few postcards and will recognize you when you ask to be let back in. © Frommer's



Katie Greenaway

contact:

tel: 39 55 239 8132
fax: +39 055 239 8132
<http://www.levolpieluva.com/>

location:

Piazza de Rossi, 1r
Florence 50123

hours:

Monday to Saturday from
11:00 AM to 09:00 PM

5 Volpe e l'Uva (Le)

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

"I suggest taking advantage of this opportunity to browse the wide range of delectable collection of wines such as a classic Chiant, a stunning Brunello, Prosecco and the famous Vin Santo."

DESCRIPTION: This little enoteca off the beaten path is just the place for people looking to get away from those crowded Piazze (squares). It is located in a tiny piazza called Piazza dei Rossi. It has a homey feeling and welcoming atmosphere. The staff is very helpful and kind. If you don't know what you type of wine to try, they will suggest something perfect for you. And to munch on from a long morning of walking, there is an array of cheese plates, salumi, and caprese. In addition, there are typical panini and schiachiatte made with fresh ingredients with superb flavor to add to the experience. They provide a hearty list of wines from small producers throughout Italy. You will find wines in this shop that you won't find anywhere else in Florence.

© NileGuide

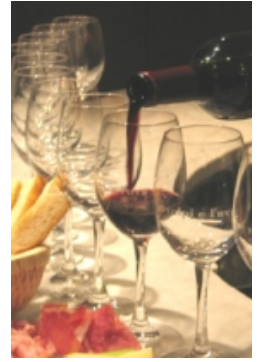
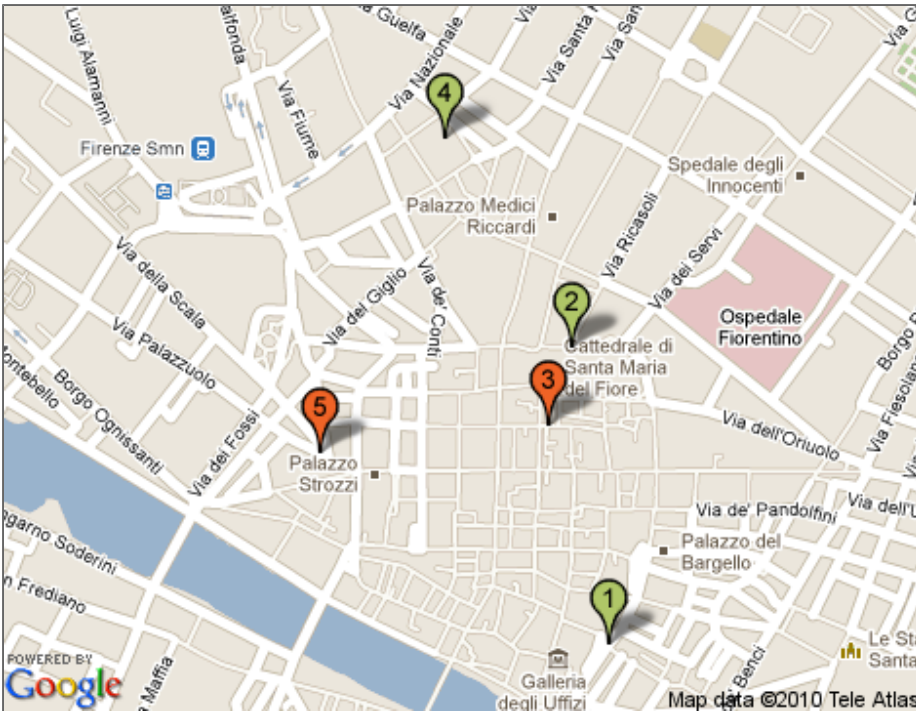


Photo courtesy of Volpe e l'Uva (Le)

Day 3 - Florence



QUICK NOTE

DAY NOTE: I bet you are wondering why I didn't put the Duomo as the first to see. It is a glorious site but since it is in the center, you can visit the inside and climb the dome whenever it feels right. The Museo dell'Opera del Duomo is located right behind the church so it is a great second stop on the cobblestones of Florence. Much of the original statues and artwork from the Duomo are stored there. For a nice mid-morning snack or lunch, enjoy Enoteca Coquinarius. It is small, cozy and full of delicious wine.

contact:
tel: 055-230-2885
<http://www.duomofirenze.it/index-eng.htm>

location:
Piazza del Duomo
Florence 53100

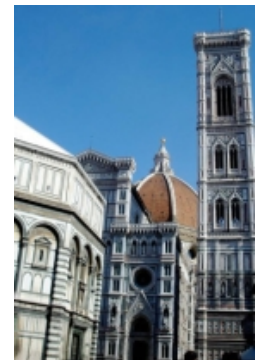
hours:
Church Mon-Wed and Fri 10am-5pm; Thurs 10am-3:30pm; 1st Sat of month 10am-3:30pm, other Sat 10am-4:45pm; Sun 1:30-4:30pm. Free tours every 40 min. daily, 10:30am-noon and 3-4:20pm. Cupola Mon-Fri 8:30am-6:20pm; Sat 8:30am-5pm (1st Sat of month to 3:20pm)

1 Duomo (Cathedral of Santa Maria dei Fiori)

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Head to the top of the Dome for some fantastic views of Florence.

DESCRIPTION: For centuries, people have commented that Florence's cathedral is turned inside out, its exterior boasting Brunelleschi's famous dome, Giotto's bell tower, and a festive cladding of white, green, and pink marble, but its interior left spare, almost barren. By the late 13th century, Florence was feeling peevish: Its archrivals Siena and Pisa sported huge new Duomos filled with art while it was saddled with the tiny 5th- or 6th-century Santa Reparata as a cathedral. So, in 1296, the city hired Arnolfo di Cambio to design a new Duomo, and he began raising the facade and the first few bays before his death in 1302. Work continued under the auspices of the Wool Guild and architects Giotto di Bondone (who concentrated on the bell tower) and Francesco Talenti (who finished up to the drum of the dome and in the process greatly enlarged Arnolfo's original plan). The facade we see today is a neo-Gothic composite designed by Emilio de Fabris and built from 1871 to 1887 (for its story, see the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo). The Duomo's most distinctive feature is its enormous **dome** [STSTST], which dominates the skyline



Katie Greenaway

and is a symbol of Florence itself. The raising of this dome, the largest in the world in its time, was no mean architectural feat, tackled admirably by Filippo Brunelleschi between 1420 and 1436. You can climb up between the two shells of the cupola for one of the classic panoramas across the city. At the base of the dome, just above the drum, Baccio d'Agnolo began adding a balcony in 1507. One of the eight sides was finished by 1515, when someone asked Michelangelo -- whose artistic opinion was by this time taken as cardinal law -- what he thought of it. The master reportedly scoffed, "It looks like a cricket cage." Work was immediately halted, and to this day the other seven sides remain rough brick. The Duomo was actually built around **Santa Reparata** so it could remain in business during construction. For more than 70 years, Florentines entered their old church through the free-standing facade of the new one, but in 1370 the original was torn down when the bulk of the Duomo -- except the dome -- was finished. Ever the fiscal conservatives, Florentines started clamoring to see some art as soon as the new facade's front door was completed in the early 1300s -- to be sure their investment would be more beautiful than rival cathedrals. Gaddo Gaddi was commissioned to mosaic an Enthronement of Mary in the lunette above the inside of the main door, and the people were satisfied. The stained-glass windows set in the facade were designed by Lorenzo Ghiberti, and Paolo Uccello, a painter obsessed by the newly developed perspective, frescoed the huge *hora italica* clock with its four heads of Prophets in 1443. At a right-aisle pier are steps leading down to the excavations of the old Santa Reparata. In 1972, a tomb slab inscribed with the name Filippo Brunelleschi was discovered there (visible through a gate). Unless you're interested in the remains of some ancient Roman houses and parts of the paleo-Christian mosaics from Santa Reparata's floor, the 3€ (\$3.90) admission isn't worth it. Against the left-aisle wall are the only frescoes besides the dome in the Duomo. The earlier one to the right is the greenish **Memorial to Sir John Hawkwood** (1436), an English condottiere (mercenary commander) whose name the Florentines mangled to Giovanni Acuto when they hired him to rough up their enemies. Before he died, or so the story goes, the mercenary asked to have a bronze statue of himself riding his charger to be raised in his honor. Florence solemnly promised to do so, but, in typical tightwad style, after Hawkwood's death the city hired the master of perspective and illusion, Paolo Uccello, to paint an equestrian monument instead -- much cheaper than casting a statue in bronze. Andrea del Castagno copied this painting-as-equestrian-statue idea 20 years later when he frescoed a Memorial to Niccolò da Tolentino next to Uccello's work. Near the end of the left aisle is Domenico di Michelino's Dante Explaining the Divine Comedy (1465). In the back left corner of the sanctuary is the **New Sacristy**. Lorenzo de' Medici was attending Mass in the Duomo one April day in 1478 with his brother Giuliano when they were attacked in the infamous Pazzi Conspiracy. The conspirators, egged on by the pope and led by a member of the Pazzi family, old rivals of the Medici, fell on the brothers at the ringing of the sanctuary bell. Giuliano was murdered on the spot -- his body rent with 19 wounds -- but Lorenzo vaulted over the altar rail and sprinted for safety into the New Sacristy, slamming the bronze doors behind him. Those doors were cast from 1446 to 1467 by Luca della Robbia, his only significant work in the medium. Earlier, Luca had provided a lunette of the Resurrection (1442) in glazed terra cotta over the door, as well as the lunette Ascension over the south sacristy door. The interior of the New Sacristy is filled with beautifully inlaid wood cabinet doors. The frescoes on the **interior of the dome** were designed by Giorgio Vasari but painted mostly by his less-talented student Federico Zuccari by 1579. The frescoes were subjected to a thorough cleaning completed in 1996, which many people saw as a waste of restoration lire when so many more important works throughout the

city were waiting to be salvaged. The scrubbing did, however, bring out Zuccari's only saving point -- his innovative color palette. © Frommer's

contact:

tel: 055-230-2885
fax: +39 055 230 2898
www.operaduomo.firenze.it

location:

Piazza del Duomo 9
Florence 50122

hours:

Mon-Sat 9am-7:30pm; Sun
9am-2pm; last admission 30
min. before close

2 Museo dell'Opera del Duomo (Duomo Works Museum)

DESCRIPTION: This museum exists mainly to house the sculptures removed from the niches and doors of the Duomo group for restoration and preservation from the elements. The dusty old museum was completely rearranged from 1998 to 2000. The courtyard has now been enclosed to show off -- under natural daylight, as they should be seen -- Lorenzo Ghiberti's original gilded bronze panels from the Baptistery's **Gates of Paradise**, which are being displayed as they're slowly restored. Ghiberti devoted 27 years to this project (1425-52), and you can now admire up close his masterpiece of schiacciato (squished) relief -- using the Donatello technique of almost sketching in perspective to create the illusion of depth in low relief. On the way up the stairs, you pass **Michelangelo's Pietà** (1548-55), his second and penultimate take on the subject, which the sculptor probably had in mind for his own tomb. The face of Nicodemus is a self-portrait, and Michelangelo most likely intended to leave much of the statue group only roughly carved, just as we see it. Art historians inform us that the polished figure of Mary Magdalene on the left was finished by one of Michelangelo's students, while storytellers relate that part of the considerable damage to the group was inflicted by the master himself when, in a moment of rage and frustration, he took a hammer to it. The top floor of the museum houses the **Prophets** carved for the bell tower, the most noted of which are the remarkably expressive figures carved by Donatello: the drooping aged face of the Beardless Prophet; the sad fixed gaze of Jeremiah; and the misshapen ferocity of the bald **Habakkuk** (known to Florentines as Lo Zuccone -- pumpkin head). Mounted on the walls above are two putty-encrusted marble **cantorie (choir lofts)**. The slightly earlier one (1431) on the entrance wall is by Luca della Robbia. His panels (the originals now displayed at eye level, with plaster casts set in the actual frame above) are in perfect early Renaissance harmony, both within themselves and with each other, and they show della Robbia's mastery of creating great depth within a shallow piece of stone. Across the room, Donatello's **cantoria** (1433-38) takes off in a new artistic direction as his singing cherubs literally break through the boundaries of the "panels" to leap and race around the entire cantoria behind the mosaicked columns. The room off the right stars one of Donatello's more morbidly fascinating sculptures, a late work in polychrome wood of **The Magdalene** (1453-55), emaciated and veritably dripping with penitence. The new exit corridor leading off from the Prophets room houses some of the **machines** used to build the cathedral dome, **Brunelleschi's death mask** as a grisly reminder of its architect, and the **wooden model proposals** for the cupola's drum and for the facade. The original Gothic facade was destroyed in 1587 to make room for one done in High Renaissance style, but the patron behind the work -- Grand Duke Francesco de' Medici -- died before he could choose from among the submissions



wcities

by the likes of Giambologna and Bernardo Buontalenti. The Duomo remained faceless until purses of the 18th century, heavy with money and relentless bad taste, gave it the neo-Gothic facade we see today. © Frommer's

contact:
tel: 39 55 230 2153

location:
Via delle Oche, 15r
Florence 50123

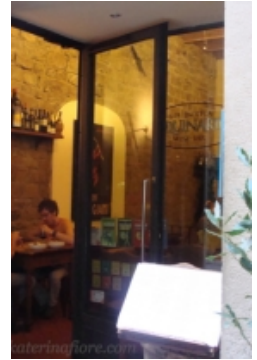
hours:
M-Sa 10a-11p

3 Bar-Enoteca Coquinarius

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

"I suggest stopping in for a nice early morning snack at around 11:30 or waiting until the lunch crowd has left and arrive around 3:00 and enjoy the solitude with your cheeses and crostini."

DESCRIPTION: It is a room full of warmth and the scents of a seasonal menu. Coquinarius has a small menu of different types of bruschette for antipasti, tasty meats and fish. Salads are a forte here; creative choices include toppings such as sun-dried tomatoes, eggplant, sunflower seeds, zucchini flowers or pear. This elegant and striking enoteca has a wide range of wines from Italy, California, Argentina, Austria and Chile. The camerieri(waitstaff) are very kind and full of life. It is a great place to sit for the afternoon, bring a book, enjoy the chiacchiere(chatter) of the other patrons, or get lost in the glass of wine. Wines are served by the glass or bottle in this relaxed, inexpensive experience of true Italian style.
© NileGuide



Katie Greenaway

location:
Piazza Del Mercato Centrale
Florence Tuscany 50123

4 Mercato Centrale

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

"Eat at the small restaurants inside, you won't be disappointed."

DESCRIPTION: Mercato Centrale built in 1874 and is one of the largest indoor markets in Italy. Located in the zone of San Lorenzo, tourist center of Florence, people seem to just pass through the San Lorenzo market instead of stepping inside the Mercato Centrale. With 2 floors of fresh meat, cheese and restaurants of the delicious kind, you must stop by and see what catches your eye. Mercato Centrale is open from 7am-2pm everyday except Sunday. A busy market inside in the morning after 2pm the San Lorenzo market outside takes over and is thriving with tourists and local vendors.

contact:
tel: 39 55 214756

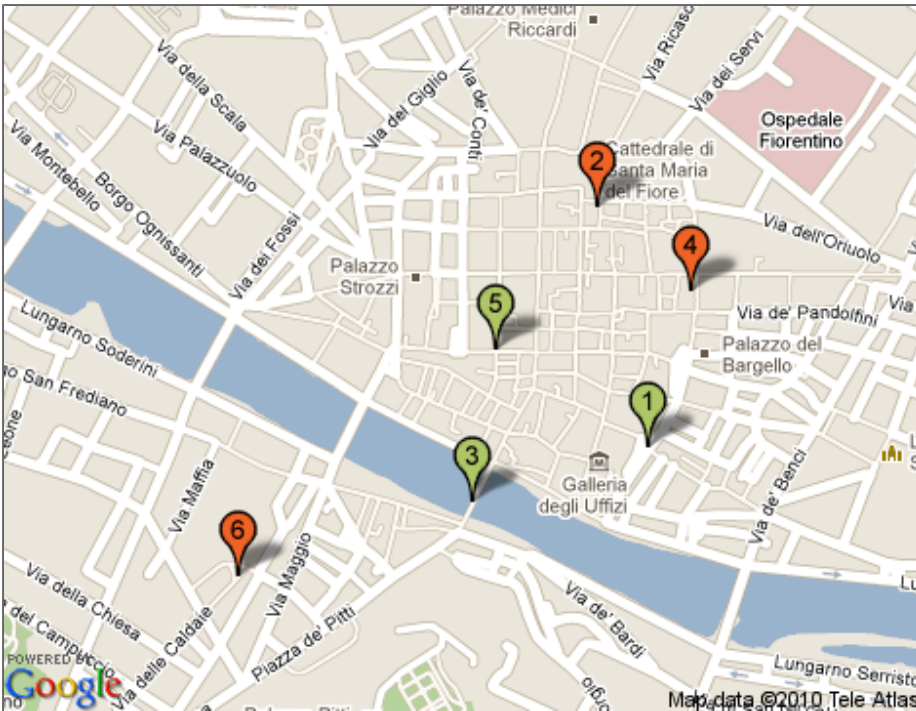
location:
via della Spada 27
Florence 50123

hours:
Mo to Su from 12:30 PM
to 02:30 PM, Mo to Su from
07:30 PM to 10:30 PM

5 Trattoria Marione

DESCRIPTION: Trattoria Marione is an authentic old style trattoria in the heart of Florence, just off the elegant via Tornabuoni. It is always crowded and quite often there is a line out the door. Local home style cooking is the trademark of the place, with typical dishes such as Crostini Toscani. They specialize in traditional bread soups like Ribollita and Pappa al Pomodoro, but the Farro soup (an antique grain popular in the Tuscan countryside) and classic mixed boiled and roasted meats are also particularly tasty. Friendly service and great food at reasonable prices! © wcities.com

Day 4 - Florence



QUICK NOTE

DAY NOTE: Grom is by far the best gelato you can taste in Florence. Take it with you on your walk towards San Lorenzo. While outside there is a bustling market, inside the church you will find many tombs of the famous Medici family. Also attached to the church is the Cappella dei Medici. The tombs were sculpted by Michelangelo and a grand sight to see. Ponte Vecchio being the oldest bridge in Florence, welcomes it's visitors to window shop and step in to the ancient gold and silver shops. For lunch, stop at Yellow Bar. It is a great afternoon sit for a pizza or a deliciously filling calzone. For an evening activity, take a walk before 7pm to the Loggia del Mercato Nuovo. This is a smaller more secluded market that is located close to Piazza della Signoria. Pass over the Ponte Vecchio to the Oltrarno, and head towards Santo Spirito. There is where one of the best pizzeria's are located. Borgo Antico is always crowded and the atmosphere is quite calm and serene in Piazza Santo Spirito.

contact:

tel: 055-216-634

<http://www.sanlorenzo.firenze.it/>

location:

piazza di San Lorenzo
Florence 50123

hours:

Church Mon-Sat 10am-5pm.
Old Sacristy (usually) Sept-
July Mon, Wed, Fri, and Sat
10-11:45am; Tues and Thurs
4-5:45pm. Laurentian Library
Mon-Sat 9am-1pm

1 San Lorenzo

DESCRIPTION: A rough brick anti-facade and the undistinguished stony bulk of a building surrounded by the stalls of the leather market hide what is most likely the oldest church in Florence, founded in A.D. 393. San Lorenzo was the city's cathedral until the bishop's seat moved to Santa Reparata (later to become the Duomo) in the 7th century. More important, it was the Medici family's parish church, and as those famous bankers began to accumulate their vast fortune, they started a tradition of lavishing it on this church that lasted until the clan died out in the 18th century. Visiting the entire church complex at once is tricky: Though interconnected, the church proper, the Old Sacristy, and the Laurentian Library have different open hours. The Medici tombs, listed separately below, have a separate entrance around the back of the church and have still different hours. The first thing Giovanni di Bicci de'



Medici, founder of the family fortune, did for the church was hire Brunelleschi to tune up the **interior**, rebuilding according to the architect's plans in 1426. At the end of the aisle is a Desiderio da Settignano marble tabernacle that's a mastery of schiacciato relief and carefully incised perspective. Across the aisle is one of the two bronze 1460 **pulpits** -- the other is across the nave -- that were Donatello's last works. His patron and the first great consolidator of Medici power, which at this early stage still showed great concern for protecting the interests of the people, was Cosimo il Vecchio, Lorenzo the Magnificent's grandfather. Cosimo, whose wise behind-the-scenes rule made him popular with the Florentines, died in 1464 and is buried in front of the high altar. The plaque marking the spot is simply inscribed PATER PATRIE -- father of his homeland. Off the left transept is the **Sagrestia Vecchia (Old Sacristy)**, one of Brunelleschi's purest pieces of early Renaissance architecture. In the center of the chapel Cosimo il Vecchio's parents, Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici and his wife, Piccarda Bueri, rest in peace. On the wall of the left aisle is Bronzino's huge fresco of the **Martyrdom of San Lorenzo**. The 3rd-century namesake saint of this church, San Lorenzo was a flinty early Christian and the treasurer of the Roman church. When commanded by the Romans to hand over the church's wealth, Lorenzo appeared before Emperor Valerian's prefect with "thousands" of sick, poor, and crippled people saying "Here is all the church's treasure." The Romans weren't amused and decided to martyr him on a gridiron over hot coals. Feisty to the last, at one point while Lorenzo lay there roasting he called out to his tormentors through gritted teeth, "Turn me over, I'm done on this side." Near this fresco is an entrance to the cloister and just inside it a stairwell to the right leading up to the **Biblioteca Laurenziana (Laurentian Library)**, which can also be entered admission free without going through -- and paying for -- the church (the separate entrance is just to the left of the church's main doors). Michelangelo designed this library in 1524 to house the Medici's manuscript collection, and it stands as one of the most brilliant works of Mannerist architecture. The vestibule is a whacked-out riff on the Renaissance, all pietra serena and white plaster walls like a good Brunelleschi piece, but turned inside out. There are phony piers running into each other in the corners, pilaster strips that support nothing, and brackets that exist for no reason. On the whole, however, it manages to remain remarkably coherent. Its star feature is a pietra serena flight of curving stairs flowing out from the entrance to the reading room. This actual library part, however -- filled with intricately carved wood and handsomely illuminated manuscripts -- was closed indefinitely in 1999 until "urgent maintenance" is completed. © Frommer's

contact:

http://www.grom.it/pages/dove_firenze.htm

location:

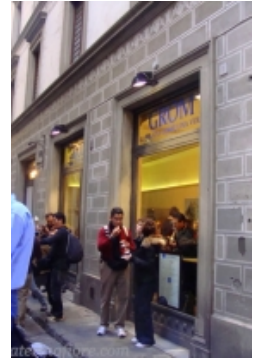
Via del Campanile angolo via delle Oche
Florence

2 Grom

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Wait in the line, it is worth the wait!

DESCRIPTION: Grom is a gelateria that is frequented by not only tourists but Florentines as well. It has their own specific gusti (flavors) that really entice the new traveler. Founded in 2003 in Torino, it grew very successful and famous among the Italians. In fact, in 2007 Grom opened in New York it being the first city abroad to take on this delicious gelato. In Florence, there is constantly a line running along side the tiny shop near the Duomo.
© NileGuide



Katie Greenaway

location:

Ponte Vecchio
Florence 50125

3 Ponte Vecchio

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

"The jewelry is superb and really expensive on the Ponte Vecchio. Grab your camera and catch the Tuscan Hills alive and rolling beyond the city center."

DESCRIPTION: You can't miss the most recognizable landmark of Florence, the Ponte Vecchio. Constructed in 1345, the Ponte Vecchio is the oldest bridge still standing in Florence, hence the name. The multicolored structure bridge was first home to butcher shops. As the noble bankers would cross the Arno river to their offices, there was a rancid smell of pigs blood and rotted meat which extremely offended them. In an effort to improve the area, the Medici stepped in and ordered the lower class shopkeepers out and moved goldsmiths and diamond-cutters in. Ponte Vecchio is the only bridge that escaped the bombing by the Germans in WWII. Today, now a pedestrian bridge, the shops shimmer and shine with necklaces, rings and charms of the most expensive kind. Tourists can enjoy an early morning walk over the bridge before the shops open or at sunset where lovers stare at the horizon as musicians sing and be merry.
© NileGuide



contact:

tel: 39 55 21 1766

location:

Via del Proconsolo, 39r
Florence 50122

hours:

W-Su 12p-1a

4 Yellow Bar

DESCRIPTION: Since the early 1970s, this bar has kept one unchanging feature: the nearly exclusively young customers who go there. It is the perfect place for any time of day and it caters for all tastes and all budgets. You can spend an evening with your friends here in a chaotic but friendly atmosphere. The place's informality is accentuated by its modern look, long opening hours and flexible menu. They serve homemade tagliolini or spaghetti with prawns, Gorgonzola or asparagus.



wcities

There are also the classic hamburgers, salads and tasty pizzas. Wide choice of international beers and drinks. © wcities.com

location:
via Porta Rossa
Florence 50122

5 Loggia del Mercato Nuovo

DESCRIPTION: Loggia del Mercato Nuovo or Loggia del Porcellino, was built in the middle of the 16th century. Walk a few steps towards the Duomo, you will find Piazza della Repubblica and following the crowds towards the Arno river, the Ponte Vecchio. The stalls used to sell more of silk and luxury goods, but today all you will find is leather bags, coats and tourist souvenirs. The main focus is the Fontana del Porcellino, which was by Pietro Tacca in the 16th century, the original wild boar sits in the Palazzo Pitti. If you rub the nose of the boar it is said you will receive good fortune, after of course leaving a coin in the mouth of the boar as well. Superstion implies that the wish will be granted if the offering tumbles through the grate whence the water flows. Check out the Loggia at night as well. Without the stalls, it is somewhat peaceful.

© NileGuide



contact:
tel: +39 055 21 0437
<http://www.borgoanticofirenze.com/>

location:
Piazza Santo Spirito 6r
Florence FI 50125

6 Borgo Antico

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Order the pizza with zucchini, YUM!

DESCRIPTION: Borgo Antico is constantly packed with a relatively young crowd. Its location, opposite Santo Spirito church, makes it particularly enchanting. In summer, customers can eat in the outdoor cafe. The gigantic dishes that are offered include vegetable and fish starters and excellent meats with salad and tomatoes. It also offers good pizza and great homemade desserts. You can also get the pizzas to go. Just say "porta via" and you are set to go.

© NileGuide



Photo courtesy of
Ristorante Borgo Antico

contact:

tel: 055-215-918

<http://giubileo.comune.fi.it/mu-sei/smnovella/welcome.html>

location:

piazza Santa Maria Novella
Florence 50123

hours:

Mon-Thurs and Sat 9am-5pm;
Fri and Sun 1-5pm

1 Santa Maria Novella

DESCRIPTION: Of all Florence's major churches, the home of the Dominicans is the only one with an original **facade** that matches its era of greatest importance. The lower Romanesque half was started in the 14th century by architect Fra' Jacopo Talenti, who had just finished building the church itself (started in 1246). Leon Battista Alberti finished the facade, adding a classically inspired Renaissance top that not only went seamlessly with the lower half but also created a Cartesian plane of perfect geometry. The church's interior underwent a massive restoration in the late 1990s, returning Giotto's restored Crucifix to pride of place, hanging in the nave's center -- and becoming the first church in Florence to charge admission. Against the second pillar on the left of the nave is the pulpit from which Galileo was denounced for his heretical theory that Earth revolved around the sun. Just past the pulpit, on the left wall, is **Masaccio's Trinità** (ca. 1428), the first painting ever to use perfect linear mathematical perspective. Florentine citizens and artists flooded in to see the fresco when it was unveiled, many remarking in awe that the coffered ceiling seemed to punch a hole back into space, creating a chapel out of a flat wall. The **transept** is filled with spectacularly frescoed chapels. The **sanctuary** behind the main altar was frescoed after 1485 by Domenico Ghirlandaio with the help of his assistants and apprentices, probably including a very young Michelangelo. The left wall is covered with a cycle on The Life of the Virgin and the right wall with the Life of St. John the Baptist. The works have a highly polished decorative quality and are less biblical stories than snapshots of the era's fashions and personages, full of portraits of the Tornabuoni family who commissioned them. Restoration workers in 2005 found a fresco hidden behind one of the lesser-known works here -- by 16th-century Veronese painter Jacopo Ligozzi -- and the mystery of who created it is the talk of local art circles. As of the printing of this edition, it remains unknown. The **Cappella Gondi** to the left of the high altar contains the Crucifix carved by Brunelleschi to show his buddy Donatello how it should be done. At the end of the left transept is a different **Cappella Strozzi**, covered with restored **frescoes** (1357) by Nardo di Cione, early medieval casts of thousands where the saved mill about Paradise on the left and the damned stew in a Dantean inferno on the right. © Frommer's



contact:

tel: 055-238-8608

location:

Piazza San Marco 3
Florence Florence 50121

hours:

Mon-Fri 8:30am-1:50pm; Sat-
Sun 8:15am-7pm

2 San Marco Church

DESCRIPTION: In 1437, Cosimo de' Medici il Vecchio, grandfather of Lorenzo the Magnificent, had Michelozzo convert a medieval monastery here into a new home for the Dominicans, in which Cosimo also founded Europe's first public library. From 1491 until he was burned at the stake on Piazza della Signoria in 1498, this was the home base of puritanical preacher Girolamo Savonarola. The monastery's most famous friar, though, was early Renaissance painter Fra' Angelico, and he left many of his finest works, devotional images painted with the technical skill and minute detail of a miniaturist or an illuminator but on altarpiece scale. While his works tended to be transcendently spiritual, Angelico was also prone to filling them with earthly details with which any peasant or stonemason could identify. The museum rooms are entered off a pretty



Katie Greenaway

cloister. The old Pilgrim's Hospice has been converted into a **Fra' (Beato) Angelico Gallery**, full of altarpieces and painted panels. Also off the cloister is the **Reffetorio Grande (Great Refectory)**, with 16th- and 17th-century paintings, and the **Sala del Capitolo (Chapter House)**, frescoed from 1441 to 1442 with a huge Crucifixion by Fra' Angelico and his assistants. The door next to this leads past the staircase up to the Dormitory to the **Sala del Cenacolo (Small Refectory)**, with a long fresco of the **Last Supper** by Domenico Ghirlandaio. The **Dormitorio (Dormitory)** of cells where the monks lived is one of Fra' Angelico's masterpieces and perhaps his most famous cycle of frescoes. In addition to the renowned **Annunciation** at the top of the stairs to the monks' rooms, Angelico painted the cells themselves with simple works to aid his fellow friars in their meditations. One of these almost anticipates surrealism -- a flagellation where disembodied hands strike at Christ's face and a rod descends on him from the blue-green background. Angelico's assistants carried out the repetitious Crucifixion scenes in many of the cells. At the end of one of the corridors is the suite of cells occupied by Savonarola when he was here prior. In the first are two famous portraits of him by his devout follower and talented painter Fra' Bartolomeo, along with an anonymous 16th-century painting of Savonarola Burned at the Stake on Piazza della Signoria. The **Biblioteca (Library)** off the corridor to the right of the stairs was designed by Michelozzo in 1441 and contains beautifully illuminated choir books. © Frommer's

Florence Snapshot

Local Info

Florence is full of culture to offer the new traveler. The art and architecture is what sets Florence apart from the other cities in Italy. From the Duomo to the Ponte Vecchio to San Miniato, there is so much to see and explore. The wonderment of Florence flows over its visitors bringing smiles to their faces. Each neighborhood has something to show off as well. Santa Croce holds the leather shops as it's trademark. San Frediano has the artisan shops that have been operating for centuries. Campo di Marte expresses anything and everything about Viola, the color of the Fiorentina football (soccer) team. The markets are a token viewpoint of how the locals live.

There are markets all over the city in every neighborhood. Each having their own personality and locals that have been coming for many years. The one thing that is great about Florence is that you can easily get lost and end up finding a treasure. There are always little streets that nobody ever sees and shops that are kept a secret. Explore the city because there is so much more to see than the Ponte Vecchio.

Enjoy the traditions of the Fiorentini, such as having a caffè at the bar around 11am when Piazza Repubblica is bustling. On Sundays, take a stroll through the center and window shop. On Saturday, shop at the local markets and enjoy chatter of Italian in your ear. Florence's main attractions consists of the Duomo, Ponte Vecchio and the Uffizi Gallery. During the high season these places are filled with visitors and sometimes it takes a while to see. Plan ahead and enjoy these attractions in a calm and timely matter so not to rush your visit.

Florence is known for its secrets and little treasures that are found throughout the city. For example, have you ever noticed the tiny wine doors in the walls of the Palazzo's? These wine doors were made for the rich to sell their wine to the peasants on the streets of Florence. When the local wealthy families had excess wine from the harvest they would sell it out of these windows. What you would do is knock on the door and slide the money in as they opened it. Then the person behind the door will then fill a glass of wine to go. Some of the windows around the center still are in its authentic wooden structure others

have been boarded up. Another fact about Florence, if you look around in the center of Florence, at all the big Palazzo's and smaller buildings as well. You will notice some of the windows that are missing. The whole frame of the window is there but the window is missing. Italians were taxed higher when they had so many windows.

So they filled in each window that they didn't want to pay an extra tax on.

The most famous landmarks in Florence are the Ponte Vecchio (Old Bridge), Il Duomo and The Uffizi Gallery. The Ponte Vecchio is the oldest bridge in Florence, that currently has gold and silver shop aligning the bridge. Previously housing butchers, the Ponte Vecchio holds onto the tradition of gold and silver shops making it a very posh street to purchase your goods on. Il Duomo (Santa Maria del Fiore) is what brings flocks of people to Florence every year. The gothic style church was begun in 1296 with the design from Arnolfo di Cambio and the dome was completed in 1436 by Filippo Brunelleschi. The church has one of Giorgio Vasari's famous fresco which covers the inside of the dome. The Uffizi Gallery is yet another attraction most visitors look to visit when arriving in Florence. From Da Vinci to Caravaggio, you have a pick of the great works of the Renaissance period.

San Giovanni (Duomo)

San Giovanni takes its name from San Giovanni Battista (St John the Baptist), patron saint of Florence, in whose honor the Baptistery was built. The historic city center (centro storico) is most representative of Florence. The layout of the district follows a road system created by the Romans (known as the cardus and decumanus system). In the centro storico, you will see the enormous, imposing structure of the cathedral Santa Maria del Fiore, referred to mostly commonly as the Duomo (from the Latin domus, meaning house of God), with its cupola designed by Filippo Brunelleschi, a beautiful dome that adds splendor to the city skyline. The city has also preserved its medieval network of streets, lined with regular, geometric Renaissance palaces such as the Palazzo Strozzi and Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, which once belonged to Florence's powerful, oligarchic families. Florence is divided into five districts and

the center is divided into four sections (San Giovanni, Santa Croce, Santa Maria Novella and Santo Spirito). The university and the Tribunale di Firenze (which is housed in the Complesso di San Filippo Neri) are also in this district.

Santa Maria Novella

Named after the Santa Maria Novella Basilica - a Dominican basilica and important cultural center during the Middle Ages, the district of Santa Maria Novella covers the area west of the train station where a majority of affordable hotels and the city's largest park is located. The train station of the same name (designed in 1932 by the young architect Giovanni Michelucci) is also situated nearby. Not far from the station is the Fortezza da Basso, a former stronghold of the city which is now used as an important center for conferences, conventions and exhibitions. The zone is also home to the Parco delle Cascine, one of the city's green oases. In this district also lies exclusive boutiques that are concentrated in a few of the most well-known streets, such as via de' Tornabuoni and via della Vigna Nuova. Via de' Tornabuoni is famous for being home to some of Italy's most prestigious designer boutiques e.g. Versace and the Florentine Salvatore Ferragamo.

Santa Croce

Santa Croce is named after Santa Croce church, a medieval Franciscan basilica. The National Central Library (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze) is also located here.

Santo Spirito (Oltrarno)

The entire stretch of the side of the river opposite the majority of the city's tourist attractions, the Oltrarno is home to many locals, small eateries and amazing tourist sights such as San Frediano to San Niccolò. At its heart is probably one of the most incredible Renaissance churches and piazzas: the Piazza Santo Spirito, which has retained much of its historic charm and is filled with workshops of the city's traditional artisans. This piazza is the place for parties on summer evenings, bringing together young Florentines and foreigners, many of whom live in this area. The Palazzo Pitti with its old Medicean garden and the Boboli Garden, are both in Oltrarno. The famous Piazzale Michelangelo (with

Florence Snapshot continued

its panoramic view) is also in this district. From here, it is possible to see one of the few remaining stretches of medieval wall around the Belvedere that was spared from demolition in the 19th Century. Included in this is the lovely medieval gate of the Porta Romana.

Campo di Marte & Fiesole

The Campo di Marte is located outside of what used to be the medieval city wall and is home to many historical buildings dating back to the early 20th Century, as well as to many modern stone and cement apartment blocks which were built after World War Two. There are also numerous sports venues, athletic facilities and the Stadio Artemio Franchi, Fiesole, and the Bellariva zone are close by; these are swathes of Piagentina countryside that always induced feelings of nostalgia in Tuscan painters.

Gavinana & Galluzzo

Gavinana and Galluzzo are south of the Arno and lead to the well-known Chianti wine region. On the southwestern side lies Galluzzo, famous for its Carthusian monastery.

Isolotto & Legnaia

Combining areas of the city that were developed during the 1960s and 1970s (and are still expanding!), Isolotto and Legnaia are home to commuters and enormous American hotel chains. The Isolotto district was once the scene of various clashes and social unrest during the 1960s.

Rifredi

Rifredi in the northwestern part of the city where, by the 15th Century, the Medici had already constructed some of their many country villas, among which Villa di Careggi, the villas of Castello and La Petraia in the Castello. In this district there are also several industrialized, residential zones, such as Novoli, Firenze Nova, Brozzi, Le Piagge and l'Olmaticello. Brozzi, the zone is host to many Chinese and African immigrants. The influx of immigrants means that even a city like Florence cannot live forever in the past but must create a new multi-ethnic history.

© NileGuide

History

The history of Florence stretches back as far as the 8th Century BCE when a primitive settlement lived in the valley, close to the Arno. "Florentia" is recorded as an official Roman colony in 59 BCE and was designed according to the typical Roman road system, which can be seen in many Italian cities today. There are two principal roads: the cardus descends from the Baptistery to Via Roma and continues on to Via Calimala, while the decumanus stretches from via del Corso to via degli Speziali until it reaches via degli Strozzi. The Forum (public meeting place and market) was built at the point where the roads meet, on what is now the Piazza della Repubblica. During Roman rule, Florence was the most important city in Roman Tuscany.

Florentia was invaded by numerous tribes in the following centuries: Goths, "Silicone", Ostrogoths and Longobards. Many inhabitants adopted Christianity at the time of the Silicone, and the first churches appeared outside the Roman walls of Florentia: San Lorenzo and Santa Felicità were built during the 4th Century CE and can be visited today.

Charlemagne's arrival put an end to the colony's expansion. Buildings were still constructed however, and the Baptistery dates back to this time. The city flourished in the 9th and 10th Centuries, a great deal of money was spent on the construction of many religious buildings, e.g. the Badia Fiorentina. Many public works were undertaken, including the building of the city walls in 1078. Florentia was a cultural and economic success!

Florence's wealth and power grew at an enormous pace; a second set of city walls had to be built; the district of Oltrarno became part of the city and Romanesque-style architecture ruled (e.g. San Miniato and Santi Apostoli churches). Florentine craftsmen became involved in textiles (beginning with the trading of wool and silk), which led to gradual urbanization. Political tension began to rear its ugly head in the 13th Century as two political factions (the Guelphs and the Ghibellines) fought for power. At the end of the 13th Century, there was something of a cultural revolution. A major player in this revolution was the architect Arnolfo di Cambio who designed the Palazzo dei

Priori (which became the Palazzo della Signoria a century later and then the Palazzo Vecchio) and also started work on the reconstruction of Santa Maria del Fiore, which was completed in successive centuries. Arnolfo also continued with the construction of the third and final set of city walls.

The city was devastated by plague in 1348, and political conflicts were still rife. The Ciompi Revolt of 1378 occurred as a result of the people's frustration—the poor reacted against their unjust governor. Meanwhile, Florentine merchants and bankers were already working hard to increase their wealth in order to attain power over the nobility.

Lorenzo de' Medici played an important role in Florence's history; he strengthened the political interests of the nobility, while dedicating himself to his love of the Arts and philosophy. The city underwent a cultural rebirth. After Lorenzo's death in 1492, the city came under the harsh, puritanical rule of the fanatical Dominican friar, Girolamo Savonarola, who was elected to the leadership of the Republic. He was so unpopular for his preachings that he was burned at the stake six years later by angry citizens. The leadership of the city was unstable for several years after that with the arrival of French troops under King Charles VIII, but the de' Medici clan regained power and Florence had her first Duke in 1530, and then Grand Duke in 1569. The succession of the Grand Dukes of the Medici family continued until the end of the 18th century, but Florence gradually lost the central role it had occupied in preceding centuries. The last heir of the Medici's handed over power and all the family's riches to the House of Lorena, whose rule continued until 1859, when Florence was united with the rest of Italy (which later became the Kingdom of Italy). Florence was only the capital of this kingdom for a few years (1865-1871) and the court transferred its official residence to the Palazzo Pitti. A lot of urban design and restructure took place during the 19th century, including the construction of embankments along the Arno and piazzas in the centre of the new districts of Barbano and Mattonaia (which are now Piazza dell'Indipendenza and Piazza D'Azeglio). The "arnolfiane" wall and the Jewish Ghetto (which was situated in the current location of the Piazza della

Florence Snapshot continued

Repubblica) demolished to make way for a series of ring roads which were to lead to the Piazzale Michelangelo and the Piazza della Repubblica.

World War Two had a devastating effect on Florence. The city sustained many damages, especially to its bridges and the area inside the Ponte Vecchio. The flood of 1966 further hindered the preservation of valuable Florentine treasures, resulting in a restoration process that will be on-going well into the 21st and 22nd Centuries.

© NileGuide

Hotel Insights

Italians say that it will certainly take you more than a day to drink in the beauty of Florence, you will need to stay for at least a long or extended weekend. It is also true to say that it can be a problem to find a room in Florence, especially if you decide to visit on the spur of the moment. To save yourself unwanted trauma, it is always best to book in advance. Florence is always popular with tourists and often the more cost-effective hotels are full in November. You will also find that hotel prices are high even during low season.

If you decide to drive to Florence, take note that the municipal police will not allow you to enter the city unless you have a hotel booking or unless you need to unload your luggage. If you must use a car, it is important to stay at a hotel that has parking.

Santa Maria Novella

Many of the city's hotels are located in this centrally-located district; close to the train station and all the tourist attractions. If you want to stay near the splendor of the Santa Maria Novella, then try Hotel Aprile. Five star hotels are sprinkled throughout the city and some of the best of these hotels include: the Grand Hotel and the Westin Excelsior, (both are in piazza d'Ognissanti) these are the places where the VIPs and politicians stay when they come to visit the city. The Villa Medici has an enticing swimming pool, and is close to the Piazza della Repubblica, as is the Helvetia & Bristol. The Croce di Malta faces the Piazza Santa Maria Novella. The Astoria Palazzo Gaddi is inside a beautiful palazzo which has glorious ceilings decorated with frescoes. If you arrive in Florence by train, you will find many hotels around the Stazione Santa Maria Novella that are

either two or three star. Via Panzani (leading to Piazza del Duomo) and Via Nazionale, have a wide choice of reasonably priced hotels, many of these are family run establishments, housed in historic palazzi. The Annabella and the Nizza are only a few of the long list of hotels that will welcome you and treat you well, as you enjoy your trip to this beautiful city.

San Giovanni(Duomo)& San Marco

For comfort and elegance near San Marco, try the Hotel Regency in Piazza Massimo D'Azeglio, a pleasant, peaceful piazza. Many fantastic four star hotels are also scattered throughout the district, the pick of the bunch are: the Grand Hotel Baglioni, which is conveniently located between the Piazza della Stazione and the Duomo, this hotel has a stupendous terrace view. Il Brunelleschi, housed in the splendid, Byzantine Pagliazza tower, was a female prison during the Middle Ages. Il Calzaiuoli is also situated in a prime spot, between Piazza del Duomo and Piazza della Signoria. The Hotel Loggiato dei Serviti and Le Due Fontane are to be found in the setting of the Piazza Santissima Annunziata.

Santo Spirito(Oltrarno)

Perhaps you would like a view of the Arno? Lungarno has been recently renovated and faces the river.

Campo di Marte& Fiesole

You can also find a wide choice of three-star establishments along the banks of the Lungarni in this district, these are a little further out of town, but you can easily reach the center on foot within a matter of minutes: such as the Hotel Columbus.

Novoli

If you are coming to Florence for business rather than pleasure, you may find it easier to stay near to the airport or the main motorways. In the north of the city, you'll find the Hotel Alexander and the Hotel Fleming.

Gavinana& Galluzzo

If you want to lose yourself in the midst of the city and be immersed in the green of Viale dei Colli, then the Grand Hotel Villa Cora is ideal, you can take a dip in the pleasant pool, or you can try the four star hotel, Relais Certosa in Certosa del Galluzzo, with its own splendid tennis

courts (should you fancy a little exercise). On the outskirts of the south the Holiday Inn Garden Court and the Sheraton beckon. If looking for a view of the Arno, then the Park Palace is for you.

© NileGuide

Restaurants Insights

Tuscan cuisine, and Florentine food in particular is essentially based on simple, natural ingredients. It hails from the traditions of peasant food and is wholesome and tasty.

Extra-virgin olive oil is held in pride of place in Florence, and it is never missing from the Florentine table. Olive oil from Tuscany is cold-pressed, green and pungent or pizzichino (sometimes with a slightly bitter after-taste) and is eaten within a year and a half of harvesting the olives. Olive oil is used as a dip for foods such as celery, artichokes and pinzimonio (a selection of fresh vegetables). It is also used in cooking, and as a condiment for salads and delicious bruschette. Amongst the bruschette there is one that is king, and must be tasted to be believed! It is made with red cabbage and beans and then seasoned with ground pepper and Frantoio oil.

If you want to indulge in Florentine bread you should remember that in general, bread in Tuscany does not use salt. Tryschiacciata if you want a more flavorful bread—this is a crusty focaccia salted and drizzled with olive oil. A typical Florentine antipasto dish is a recipe called crostini di fegato, pieces of Florentine bread which have been baked and dunked in soup, and then garnished with chicken liver pâté, capers and anchovies.

Another traditional Florentine specialty is the famous bistecca alla fiorentina. The steak comes from Chianina, a region near Tuscany which produces the Chianina breed, regarded as possibly the oldest breed of cattle in the world. It is thick cut, weighs not less than 800g, cooked on the grill, served rare and, on occasion, with a wedge of lemon on the side. A Florentina can satisfy two people, but there are those brave enough who will attempt to eat one all by themselves!

The soups and minestre are well worth trying and they are derived from peasant traditions. The most delicious, famous

Florence Snapshot continued

Florentine soup *isribollita*, made with a mixture of stale bread, beans, *cavolo nero* (a black cabbage grown in Tuscany, similar to kale or Swiss Chard) and other typical Tuscan vegetables. *Ribollita* derives its curious name from the fact that the peasant women would usually cook the soup in large quantities that would be boiled repeatedly (*ribollita*), and then eaten for several days. As with many leftovers, *ribollita* always tastes better the day after! Other delicious soups are *pappa con il pomodoro* (a tomato-based soup that's thickened with bread) and *minestra di farro* (spelt or barley soup with beans, tomatoes, celery and carrot). While some of these soups might not sound terribly appealing to your palate, they are absolutely delicious, simple and hearty.

Do you have a sweet tooth? *Schiacciata alla Fiorentina* is a special Florentine treat: an orange-flavored sponge cake, covered with confectioner's sugar (often with a *cocoagiglio*, or lily - the symbol of Florence —sprinkled onto the center) and filled with pastry or whipped cream. Although typically served around *Carnevale*, it can be found at Florence's pastry shops year round. *Cantuccini di Prato* are dry almond biscuits that are dipped in *Vin Santo*, a sweet, aromatic dessert wine.

Tuscan Specialties These specialties can be found in the majority of Florence's restaurants. Some of the more famous, traditional restaurants include: *Il Latini*, *Trattoria Mario*, *Coco Lezzone* and *La Casalinga*, there are also many others, so don't feel dismayed if you don't get into the places above.

Haute Cuisine If you fancy something more "refined", or if you want to celebrate a really special occasion, then it is worth spending that little bit extra and going to *Enoteca Pinchiorri*, or *Il Cibreo*, you could also try *Cammillo*, although you will definitely need to book in advance.

Wine Bars There are also many *enoteche* or wine bars in Florence: here you can drop in, relax and have a glass or two of good *Chianti* with a sandwich. In the most elegant places e.g. *Enoteca de' Giraldi* and *Enoteca "La Sosta del Rossellino"*, you can try delicious wines accompanied by tasty *bruschette* and delicate appetizers. *La Barrique* wine bar is also very popular and has an extensive wine list.

Pizza Italy is famous for its pizza and pizzerias can be found in almost every nook and cranny of Florence, although getting a typical Neapolitan-style pizza might be a bit of a challenge: Florentine crusts tend to be thin and crispy, cooked in a wood-fueled oven. If you prefer the "traditional" Neapolitan pizza, it is almost always possible to ask for a pizza *withdoppia pasta* (double crust), which means you'll get a softer, thicker crust. Try *Ciro & Sons* for a slice of Naples in Florence.

International Cuisine Recent years have seen a big growth in the amount of ethnic restaurants, ranging from the Chinese restaurants to Mexican (*Cafè Caracol*), from Indian (*Ashoka* or *Ristorante India*), to Japanese (*Momoyama*) and there are also many other restaurants in various areas of the city.

Vegetarian Vegetarian cuisine has also made an impression on Florence! *Ruth's* is next to the Synagogue and sells Kosher, vegetarian fare. *Il Vegetariano* serves wonderful meat-free and organic dishes and is a huge success in the city.

© NileGuide

Nightlife Insights

Although Florence is quite a small city, it is inundated with visitors, ex-pats and students; this is great news if you want to have an evening of raucous fun, or if you prefer to follow more cultural pursuits. Visitors and Florentines alike are impressed by the wealth of entertainment that they find on offer here.

Cinema

Going to the cinema has become an increasingly popular pastime since the mid-1990s, and the number of cinemas has increased to meet the needs of the people in Florence; many of the city's multiplexes have been renovated and reopened. This change in the amount of cinemas that exist has created a climate of "non-stop cinematography" and fewer cinemas close down during the summer months. Florentine cinemas are very varied; there are modern one-screen halls, massive multiplexes and small independent cinemas. The *Cecchi Gori Group* owns the most cinemas in the city and the majority show general releases and (dubbed) American blockbusters,

although the *Atelier* group makes sure that Art house theatre is kept alive. *Atelier* have six cinemas that show good quality independent films and directors and actors will often attend previews and answer audience questions. On Wednesdays, prices are reduced and many Florentines go to the movies. However, one of the best times to go to the cinema is during the summer; between the months of June and September: you can watch a new release or one of the previous winter's "smashes" in the open air, as you sit beneath the stars. Some of the "normal" cinemas will remain open; many of these have air-conditioning, which is a great way to avoid the humidity of a Florentine summer, not to mention all the mosquitoes! One cinema in the historic center, the *Odeon*, caters to the international community showing films primarily in English, and sometimes the occasional French or Spanish-language cinematic phenomenon on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Theatre

Although there are many more cinemas, compared with the amount of theatres, it is unfair to say that Florence favors the "Big Screen" to the stage. The Florentine theatrical tradition has always been noteworthy, for example, the famous *Maggio Musicale Fiorentino* attracts many well-known people. The range of productions is very varied too, there are upbeat comedies by Neil Simon at *Teatro della Pergola*, or more provocative, thought provoking dramas such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* at the *Teatro Manzoni*. If Shakespeare is more your thing, then the *Metastasio Theatre* will meet your highbrow needs!

Cafés, Bars & Pubs

In Florence (and everywhere else) most people want to go out and stay out until late at the weekend; this city has a large number of bars and discos, which people can enjoy any day of the week. For a quiet evening, drinking and chatting late into the night, why not try *Caffè Pitti* in *Piazza Pitti*, or *Hemingway* close to *Santa Maria del Carmine*. At *il Genius* you can relax with friends and play board/card games. *Zoe*, *Dolce Vita* and *Porfirio Rubirosa* are a little more crowded and lively, while *Cafè Caracol* has a *Latina* vibe. If you are more of a wine lover, then try *Pitti Gola* or *Cantina*. Maybe you fancy a pint? Both

Florence Snapshot continued

The William and Chequers are British in style, (perhaps to meet the needs of the many ex-pats who make their home here!) They sell an infinite number of beers, and snacks accompanied by good music and are populated by Florentine beer lovers and foreigners alike. **Clubs**

Lots of tourists like to check out the clubs and discos when they are on holiday. Florence offers a great variety of nightspots, it is possible to choose from mainstream discos such as Meccanò, where you might meet a VIP or two), and the fabulously cheesy Andromeda, or more specialist rock bars such as Tenax (popular with many young Italians) and the Auditorium Flog. There are many nightclubs (especially during the summer) with theme nights, where people can dance, listen to music and chat. These include Pongo, which is close to Teatro Verdi and il Lidò on the banks of the Arno, which attracts at least half of the city.

As you can see, Florence has much to attract the cultivated wine drinker, the cinephile or the perpetual party boy/girl. Divertitevi!
© NileGuide

Things to Do Insights

Piazza del Duomo is a great place to start a tour that will uncover some of Florence's historical beauty. Not only is the piazza rich in history, but it's an architectural delight too. One of the first sights you will see is the Battistero di San Giovanni, dedicated to St John the Baptist and one of the oldest buildings in the city. It was constructed in its current form in the 11th Century. Besides the beautiful interior which is richly decorated with mosaics, there are glorious medieval and Renaissance bronze doors by Andrea Pisano and Lorenzo Ghiberti. The pair of doors designed by Ghiberti that the public sees on the Baptistery are replicas and the originals are located nearby at the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo. The museum is situated on the piazza, behind the apse of the cathedral. Amongst other things, it contains precious sculptures as well as exhibits connected to the buildings that are dotted around the piazza.

In front of the Baptistery is Santa Maria del Fiore, which was built by Arnolfo di Cambio in 1296 to replace the old Santa Reparata cathedral. The archaeological remains of

this cathedral are in the basement of the present church. Di Cambio's building was only completed 150 years later with the addition of the enormous cupola (dome) that sits above the church's transept. Filippo Brunelleschi, a truly gifted Renaissance architect designed the dome. It is possible to reach the top of the cupola (access is on the right hand side of the church), which is 107m from ground level but there is no lift so you will have to climb over 450 steps. It is definitely worth climbing the steps, not just for the beautiful view that awaits you at the top, but also so that you can begin to appreciate the mastery of Brunelleschi, as the cupola is truly an extraordinary feat of architecture.

The interior of the cathedral itself is also well worth visiting, even though at times there can be a queue. Amongst other things, you will be able to see the frescoes beneath the cupola, painted in the second half of the sixteenth century by Vasari and Zucchari. The frescoes cover an area of around 3600m² and represent the Last Judgment. It is also worth taking a look at the Sacristy where Lorenzo de' Medici sought refuge during the Pazzi conspiracy when his brother Giuliano was killed in the cathedral in 1478. Here you will also see the lined marquetry created by a group of artists including Giuliano and Benedetto da Maiano. There are two frescoes on the right of the nave as you turn towards the exit: Giovanni Acuto (Sir John Hawkwood) by Paolo Uccello and Niccolò da Tolentino by Andrea del Castagno.

As you leave the cathedral, you will see the Campanile di Giotto. Giotto, the renowned Medieval artist himself began work on the tower prior to his death in the 14th Century. In this case too, a climb to the top is recommended—but take care if you suffer from vertigo!

Walk down Via Calzaiuoli—along which you will find hundreds of shops selling all manner of goods—and in a few minutes, you will reach the Piazza della Signoria, the political center of Florence. The focal point of the piazza is the imposing Palazzo Vecchio (also known as the Palazzo della Signoria). This palace once housed the government of the city of Florence and has been enlarged several times over the centuries. Arnolfo di Cambio (the same architect who designed the cathedral), created the palazzo in 1294. The section that is not dedicated to the museum retains

its function as the offices of the Town Council. The second internal courtyard houses the only public baths in the city center.

On the Piazza della Signoria, you'll come across the Loggia dei Lanzi, originally a public meeting place which is now an open-air museum where you can view several sculptures by Giambologna (Rape of the Sabines) and Baccio Bandinelli (Hercules and Cacus). Besides this, there is also the Mannerist Fountain of Neptune by Bartolomeo Ammannati and the equestrian monument to Cosimo I, by Giambologna. There is a 19th-century copy of Michelangelo's magnificent David too, which stands in front of the palace gates.

At this point you have a choice. You can either visit the Galleria degli Uffizi (probably one of the most important art collections in the world), which is only a short walk from the piazza, or, weather permitting, relax at an open-air café, e.g. the Rivoire (a popular choice), which is famous for its hot chocolate with cream—absolute bliss!

Medici Residences You can begin your visit with what was the residence of the Medici family, from Cosimo il Vecchio until the Grand Duke Cosimo I: Palazzo Medici-Riccardi in Via Larga, now known as Via Cavour. The palace was commissioned by Cosimo il Vecchio, designed by famed architect Michelozzo in 1444 and finally enlarged by the Riccardi family when they took over ownership of the palace. Today it is seat of Florence's Prefettura and official offices of the province of Florence. From the interior courtyard, it is possible to visit the Cappella dei Magi (Chapel of the Magi), frescoed by Benozzo Gozzoli and magnificently restored for the 1992 anniversary of the death of Lorenzo de' Medici. Throughout the fresco there are numerous portraits of major Florentine figures of the time as well as members of the Medici family. Some of the famous faces include leaders of the Eastern Orthodox church and John VII Palaiologos, Byzantine Emperor, both figures present in the city during the Council of 1439. In the palace there is also the Biblioteca Riccardiana, with an entrance on via dei Ginori 10, which features one of the greatest library collections in the city with manuscripts purchased from Riccardo Riccardi and it has been open to the public since the early 18th Century. The library

Florence Snapshot continued

is adorned with sculpted interiors of the 1700s.

Around the corner from the Palazzo Medici is the Chiesa di San Lorenzo, one of Florence's ancient churches, rebuilt in the 1500s by Filippo Brunelleschi and his architectural team. One of the true Medici churches, it contains the tombs of many of their famous family members, from Giovanni di Averardo and his wife Piccarda Bueri, in the Sagrestia Vecchia, to Cosimo il Vecchio, whose tomb is found in the crypt, directly beneath the church's high altar. In the Sagrestia Nuova, a work of Michelangelo, we find on one side the tombs of Lorenzo il Magnifico, and his younger brother Giuliano who was murdered in the Pazzi Conspiracy in 1478, and on the other the tombs of Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino and Giuliano, Duke of Nemours. In the adjacent Cappella dei Principi (Chapel of the Princes), an opulent 17th-century design, we find several tombs of Medici Dukes and their wives.

Next to the church are the numerous stands of the San Lorenzo Market where you can buy clothing (new and used), shoes and other trinkets that are great gifts for friends and family. If you're looking for local food products, the nearby Mercato Centrale, Florence's largest market, you can find everything from fruit and vegetables to meat and fish, at affordable prices. While you're there, why not try a lampredotto sandwich, a Florentine specialty that not all foreigners are willing to taste.

Returning to the via Cavour and following it upwards, you arrive at piazza San Marco, where the Church of San Marco is found. The historic monastery previously belonged to the Sylvestrines and in 1418 was handed over to the Dominicans. Thanks to the financing of Cosimo il Vecchio, the church and monastery were able to enlarge.

While at the church, you simply can't miss the Museum of San Marco that includes part of the Dominican monastery where Fra' Giovanni da Fiesole (perhaps better known as Fra' Angelico, Antonino Pierozzi (bishop and Florentine saint), Girolamo Savonarola, and in most recent times Giorgio La Pira, the unforgettable mayor of Florence. A suggested starting point on the tour of the church museum is the Cloister of Sant'Antonino, and then from the Sala Capitolare where Fra' Angelico frescoed one of his masterpieces, the *Cruxifixion*. On

the first floor of the monastery, spread out through three corridors that open onto the monks' cells, all decorated with frescoes with religious scenes entirely done by Fra' Angelo and his workshop. This is, without a doubt, one of the most interesting and emotional parts of the complex.

Not far from the piazza is the Accademia di Belle Arti where the small off-shoot building of the Galleria dell'Accademia, in which, among the many works of art, is the original copy of the *David* by Michelangelo as well as other works by this well-known Florentine artist, such as the *Prisoners*. This museum contains four of the statues that were originally designed for the final resting place of Pope Julius II (a Medici); however, it was never realized.

Given the pretense of several offices of the university, particularly in via degli Alfani, there are many bakeries, small grocery stores and bars where you can get *schicciattine* (a focaccia-like bread with salt, olive oil and sometimes peppers, olives and other savory treats on top, sandwiches, or *coldprimi* at affordable prices. This also means that you can find sit-down places that don't overcharge if you don't take your meal or coffee at the bar. This zone is also characterized by the presence of specialized libraries, copy shops and printing offices.

From the piazza San Marco, you can easily arrive in under a couple minutes to the piazza della Santissima Annunziata, with the Basilica Mariana della Santissima Annunziata, and on the right side, the colonnade designed by Filippo Brunelleschi for the Ospedale degli Innocenti, a true masterpiece of Renaissance architecture. At this point, you ought to be tired, and if you decide to head down the via dei Servi, towards the Duomo whose magnificent cupola is visible from the middle of the piazza, or turn down the via della Colonna and arrive at the Archaeological Museum, to appreciate and superb Etruscan and Egyptian artifacts.

Oltrarno Towards the Ponte Vecchio, characterized by the numerous jewelry shops, which originally butcher and leather makers that lined the river, and in crossing this famous bridge you arrive in an area known as the Oltrarno. The area is more formally known as Santo Spirito and today has unique artistic characteristics that distinct it from other parts of the city. During

the summer, it is not difficult to find locals sitting on chairs in front of their apartment buildings, chatting and discussing the day's events. This has always been an area where many artists have lived and worked, something that is still quite visible today with the numerous restoration and art studios that line the streets.

Shortly after crossing the bridge, on the left there is the Chiesa di Santa Felicità, Florence's oldest church, restored in the 18th Century. Up a bit further is the large piazza on an incline which leads to the entrance of the Palazzo Pitti, originally a residence of the Pitti family who went broke constructing and decorating it to outdo the Medici...who eventually purchased it in 1565 to save Luca Pitti from impending debt. Today the palazzo houses five museums, but if you don't want to stay cooped up indoors and the weather permits it, it is strongly suggested that you visit the Boboli Gardens, which is easily accessible from the palace's courtyard. The extensive gardens go from the hills to the Forte Belvedere, a fortress of the city; however, if you can't make it to the top, a walk amongst the trees and sit on the benches to enjoy the beauty of the gardens.

Following these suggestions, just outside the piazza Pitti is the splendid via Maggio (previously known as the via Maggiore), lined with gorgeous 16th-century palaces that belonged to Florence's most noted families, not to mention all the lovely antique shops that are on both sides of the road. Shopping here is really *élite*, reserved for those who can afford to buy an expensive villa or an expensive Renaissance-era piece of furniture. There are also more affordable shops in the area where you can find items to bring home as souvenirs.

Walking down these narrow streets that characterize this area you will inevitably find yourself in front of the Chiesa di Santo Spirito, Brunelleschi's last architectural triumph. In front of the church, every morning, there are different markets, and once a month there is an antiques market - truly an event to not miss out on. There are plenty of choices for dining in this area: bakeries, grocery shops, but also small, family-run trattorie with homemade meals and outstanding menus at affordable prices.

By this point, if you aren't already exhausted, you can take the main street

Florence Snapshot continued

back towards the Chiesa di Santa Maria del Carmine, even if it's just to see the chapel of Felice Brancacci that he commissioned from Masaccio in the 1420s. The frescoes are truly a masterpiece of Early Renaissance art, works not to miss. The entrance to the chapel. The entrance to the chapel is from the piazza, on the right side of the church.

© NileGuide

Travel Tips

Getting There

By Air

Florence's Amerigo Vespucci Airport(+39 055 373 3498/ <http://www.aeroporto.firenze.it/>) is just six miles northwest of downtown, but handles a limited number of airlines. It has recently been renovated to accommodate more passengers and more airlines. They include:

Air France(+1 800 871 1366/ <http://www.airfrance.com/>) Alitalia(+1 800 223 5730/ <http://www.alitalia.com/>) Austrian Airlines(+1 800 843 0002/ <http://www.aa.com/>) Belle Air(+355 42 40 194/ <http://www.belleair.al/>) Brussels Airlines(+1 516 740 5200/ <http://www.brusselsairlines.com/>) Carpatair(+44 208 602 7077/ <http://www.carpatair.ro/>) Continental(+1 800 231 0856/ <http://www.continental.com/>) Flybaboo(<http://www.flybaboo.com/>) KLM(+1 800 374 7747/ <http://www.klm.nl/>) Lufthansa(+1 800 645 3880/ <http://www.lufthansa.com/>) Meridiana(+39 0789 52682/ <http://www.meridiana.it/>) Sterling Airlines(+44 0870 787 8038/ <http://www.sterling.dk/>) Swiss Airways(+1 877 359 7947/ <http://www.swiss.com/>)

From the Airport

Bus: ATAF(+39 055 56 501/ <http://www.ataf.net/>) provides bus service every 30 minutes between 6a-11:30p. The ride takes about 20 minutes, depositing passengers at the Santa Maria Novella Rail Station. Cost: EUR4.50.

Taxis: Taxis can be found just outside the arrival terminal. Rides to downtown last 15-20 minutes and cost approximately EUR 20-30.

Rental Cars: There are several rental dealers at the airport with offices in the

downtown area near Santa Maria Novella train station.

Avis(+1 800 831 2847/ <http://www.avis.com/>) Hertz(+1 800 654 3131/ <http://www.hertz.com/>) Europcar(+39 041 541 5654/ <http://www.europcar.com/>) National(+1 800 227 7368/ <http://www.nationalcar.com/>)

By Train

Ferrovie Dello Stato, or FS(<http://www.trenitalia.it/>), the Italian state railway, enjoys a sound reputation for efficiency. Since Florence is on the main Rome-Milan Line, riders are offered a variety of daily options, including Intercity trains(IC), known for their express service. Santa Maria Novella, the city's main train station located in the north end of Florence, handles most of the rail traffic. Rifredi, a much smaller station, offers a limited number of rail choices.

By Bus

Lazzi Eurolines(+39 055 363 041) handles international travel connecting Florence with major European cities such as Brussels, Barcelona, Paris and Prague. Its station is located adjacent to the Santa Maria Novella train station. Domestic travel is provided by SITA(+39 055 294 9555/ <http://www.sita-on-line.it/>) to locations such as Lucca, Volterra, Pisa, Siena, Empoli and more.

By Car

Autostrada 1(A1), Italy's major highway, juts into Florence from Bologna from the north, and continues south to Rome. E76 connects Florence with Pisa and the Ligurian Sea to the west.

Getting Around

The Azienda Transporti Area Fiorentina, or ATAF(+39 055 56501/ <http://www.ataf.net/>), manages Florence's bus transportation. It services all the major tourist attractions, operating between 5a-1:30a. Fares: 70-minute ticket EUR 1.20; one-day ticket EUR 5; three-day ticket EUR 12; seven-day ticket EUR 22.

Taxi

Taxis can easily be hailed at stands found at hotels and major squares throughout the city. A minimum fare starts at EUR 4.

Cars

Cars are not recommended. Most of Florence's narrow streets are limited to locals with properly marked vehicles and filled with locals zooming around on scooters. And if you dare to drive you will quickly learn that the Renaissance never gave thought to parking.

Walking

Walking rates as the best means for negotiating Florence's narrow maze of cobblestone alleys and streets. Downtown is very compact with most of the major tourist attractions located within several blocks of each other. Be sure, however, to carry a map.

Motorini

Mopeds, if anything, will make you look like a local. Riders must be 18 and helmets are mandatory. Alinari(+39 055 280 500), Maxirent(+39 055 265 420), and Massimo(+39 055 573 689) are good rental sources. Expect to pay around EUR 30 per day.

Flying Into Pisa(PSA)

Pisa's Galileo Galilei(+39 050 849 300/ <http://www.pisa-airport.com/>)(PSA) is the larger of the two airports that service Tuscany, but is situated 58 miles west of Florence. Major airlines include:

Air France(+1 800 871 1366/ <http://www.airfrance.com/>) Alitalia(+1 800 223 5730/ <http://www.alitalia.com/>) British Airways(+1 800 247 9297/ <http://www.ba.com/>) Continental(+1 800 525 0280/ <http://www.continental.com/>) Delta(+1 800 221 1212/ <http://www.delta.com/>) easyJet(+44 870 600 0000/ <http://www.easyjet.com/>) Lufthansa(+1 800 645 3880/ <http://www.lufthansa.com/>) RyanAir(<http://www.ryanair.com/>) Sky Europe(+421 2 4850 4850/ <http://www2.skyeurope.com/>) TUI(+49 511 2200 4713/ <http://www.tuifly.com/>) United(+1 800 538 2929/ <http://www.united.com/>) US Airways(+1 800 622 1015/ <http://www.usairways.com/>)

Trains& Coaches from Pisa to Florence

Riding the train is a good travel option to Florence. The Pisa Aeroporto station provides a train about one every hour between 6:30a-10:30p. Rides last an hour and a half. One-way fare: EUR 5.40.

A new coach service from Pisa to Florence is offered by Terravision(<http://www.terravision.com/>)

Florence Snapshot continued

www.terravision.eu/florence_pisa.html/), with trips taking just 70-80 minutes and costs EUR 8 one-way.

Rental Cars: Avis(+1 800 831 2847/ <http://www.avis.com/>) Hertz(+1 800 654 3131/ <http://www.hertz.com/>) Europcar(+39 041 541 5654/ <http://www.europcar.com/>) Thrifty(+1 800 367 2277/ <http://www.thrifty.com/>)

The drive to Florence on the E76 takes about 45 minutes.

© NileGuide

Fun Facts

Top 12 Florence Facts

1. Weird Fact: Florence streets can be one name at one end of the street and another name at the other end. For example, Via Martelli is the street leading away from Piazza del Duomo then at the first intersection it turns into Via Cavour.

2. Fun Fact: Florence is the capital city of the province of Florence and the Italian region of Tuscany.

3. Interesting Fact: Via Chiantigiana is the most beautiful road in all of Italy. Winding through the vineyards and woodlands surrounding Florence connecting to Siena.

4. Weird Fact: Fiasco is an Italian word referring to a glass bottle or flask with a long neck. According to the Oxford English dictionary fiasco--meaning a failure or complete breakdown--comes from the Italian expression fare fiasco, to make a bottle. Nobody knows how this Italian expression came to be in the English language. Today, old trattorie are still called fiascheria--working men's taverns. Back in the day was known as taverns with hearty, cheap Tuscan wines and later for a more homey Tuscan specialities that paired with the wines.

5. Fun Fact: How do the Italians really eat pasta? The correct technique involves piercing some pasta near the edge of the bowl, not in the center but at the twelve o'clock position, then twirling the pasta around the fork against the rim of the bowl.

6. Historical Fact: In 1339, Florence became the first city in Europe with paved streets.

7. Random Fact: Florence was home to the infamous Medici family from the 14th century to the 18th century. Leonardo da Vinci, Niccolò Machiavelli, Galileo Galilei, Amerigo Vespucci, Donatello, Raffaele, Roberto Cavalli, and Guccio Gucci, fashion designer and Gucci fashion was founded in Florence 1921.

8. Historical Fact: The Grand Duchy of Tuscany was the first state to abolish capital punishment in November 1786.

9. Interesting Fact: Florence has had two floods; one on November 4, 1333 and November 4, 1966.

10. Fun Fact: What would come to be thought of as Italian was first formalized in the first years of the 14th century through the works of Dante Alighieri, who mixed southern Italian languages, especially Sicilian, with his native Florentine in his epic poems known collectively as the Divine Comedy. Dante's much-loved works were read throughout Italy and his written dialect became the standard that all educated Italians could understand. Dante is still credited with standardizing the Italian language and, thus, the dialect of Florence became the basis for what would become the official language of Italy.

11. Historical Fact: Florence Nightingale, famous for revolutionizing the field of nursing, was named for the city of her birth.

12. Fun Fact: Florence is best known for leather and gold

© NileGuide

Florence Snapshot continued

Weather

Statistics	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temperature C												
Average High	11	12	16	19	24	28	32	32	27	21	15	11
Average Mean	6	7	11	13	18	22	25	25	21	16	11	7
Average Low	2	3	6	8	12	16	18	19	15	12	7	4
Temperature F												
Average High	51	54	61	66	75	83	89	89	80	70	59	52
Average Mean	43	45	51	56	64	72	77	77	69	61	51	45
Average Low	36	37	42	47	54	61	65	66	59	53	44	38
Rainy Days	6	6	6	7	7	6	4	5	7	8	8	8
Rain Fall (cm)	3.4	3.7	3.2	6.0	4.5	3.8	2.3	2.8	5.5	8.6	8.9	5.2
Rain Fall (in)	1.4	1.5	1.2	2.4	1.8	1.5	0.9	1.1	2.2	3.4	3.5	2.0

© NileGuide