

# FLORENCE TOURIST INFORMATION

## 1. LANDMARKS

Florence is considered by many to be an open-air museum. If you are interested in architecture, for example, you don't need to visit any museums: many of the palaces and squares are masterpieces of their own.

Designed by Michelozzo, Andrea di Cambio and Brunelleschi, among many others, many of the great palaces and piazzas in Florence are spectacular to behold. The main squares often display statues by Giambologna or Michelangelo. Ponte Vecchio, Old Bridge, is a treasure to admire.

**FLORENCE FROM PIAZZALE MICHELANGELO** Florence seen from above is a singular experience. Not just a perfect photo opportunity, but a moment of wonder. You are looking at the city that gave birth to incredible artists, amazing scientist and an enthralling history of discovery and power that has filled novels and movie theaters.

No matter what time of day, you will find that Piazzale Michelangelo truly offers a stupendous lookout over Florence. Don't be surprised if you also see it written as Piazzale Michelangiolo, this is most probably the archaic Florentine pronunciation and most definitely the one you see on street signs or the brown and white signs that indicate historic landmarks. In any case, however you spell it, it is one site that should not be missed. It may be a classic tourist stop, but it never fails to capture the heart and imagination of those who follow the path to the very top.



Many mistakenly believe that this piazza existed since the birth of Florence or that it was designed by Michelangelo. Actually it is a rather recent addition to the list of monuments in Florence, created in 1869 by Florentine architect Giuseppe Poggi, as part of major restructuring of the city walls in 1869.

Poggi's sumptuous terrace is typically 19th century which he intended as a showcase for the masterpieces (at least copies) of Michelangelo. Poggi designed a monument base dedicated to Michelangelo, where copies of Michelangelo's works, including the David and the Medici chapel sculptures from San Lorenzo, would be displayed. When the terrace was finished, Poggi designed the hillside building with a loggia as a museum for Michelangelo's works. However, the building never fulfilled its original destination and today it houses the Ristorante La Loggia, featuring both a coffee bar (everyday from 10 am - midnight) and fully fledged restaurant with panoramic terrace (check hours).

Today, the piazza is filled with tourists, vendors, and a bronze replica of Michelangelo's David. (The original is displayed at Accademia Gallery.) Recently (2016), the piazza was restructured to valorize the simplistic beauty of its spaces and give guests an opportunity to enjoy a peaceful setting above Florence.

If you're in downtown Florence, you can walk up to the Piazzale Michelangelo. You can also take the bus or if you have a car, drive up there! It can be reached by taking either bus 12 or 13 from the center or the red two-level sightseeing tour bus. It can also be

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reached by foot, climbing up from Piazza Poggi found at the base of the hill upon which Piazzale Michelangelo sits.

You can also follow the shady via Michelangelo from Piazza Ferruccio for 1 km or the 3km hike from Porta Romana and the exit of Boboli Gardens along via Machiavelli/via Galileo (both are frequently used by joggers). Another panoramic, historic route is to start at the Porta San Miniato near with the infamous icon/bar "il Rifrullo", and climb up via Scalea del Monte alle Croci and Scalinata del Monte alle Croci ...its short and follows the footsteps of Dante.

**PIAZZA DELLA SIGNORIA** The Piazza della Signoria has been the center of political



life in Florence since the 14th century with the prominent Palazzo Vecchio overlooking the square. It was the scene of great triumphs, such as the return of the Medici in 1530 as well as the Bonfire of the Vanities instigated by Savonarola, who was then

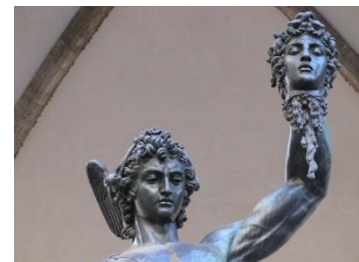


himself burned at the stake here in 1498 after he was denounced by the Inquisition as a heretic. A marble circle inscription on the piazza shows the location where he was burned. The sculptures in Piazza della Signoria bristle with political connotations, many of which are fiercely contradictory. The David (the original is in the Galleria dell'Accademia) by Michelangelo was placed outside the Palazzo Vecchio as a symbol of the Republic's defiance of the tyrannical Medici.

Bandinelli's Hercules and Cacus (1534) to the right of the David was appropriated by the Medici to show their physical power after their return from exile. The Nettuno (1575) by Ammannati celebrates the Medici's maritime ambitions and Giambologna's equestrian statue of Duke Cosimo I (1595) is an elegant portrait of the man who brought all of Tuscany under Medici military rule.



The graceful Loggia dei Lanzi, which sits to the right of Palazzo Vecchio and functions as an open-air sculpture gallery, was designed by Orcagna in 1376. Its curved arches foretell Renaissance classicism. The statue of Perseo holding Medusa's head, by Benvenuto Cellini (1554), is a stark



reminder of what happened to those who crossed the Medici. Together with Giambologna's Rape of the Sabines, these are two of many beautiful sculptures found under the arches of the Loggia dei Lanzi.

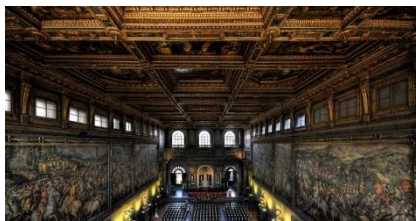
**PALAZZO VECCHIO MUSEUM AND TOWER** Palazzo Vecchio offers Roman ruins, a

Medieval fortress and amazing Renaissance chambers and paintings. A microcosm where art and history have been indissolubly bound for centuries. Palazzo Vecchio is the main symbol of civil power for the city of Florence, whose original project is attributed to Arnolfo di Cambio. Construction on the solid fortress began in 1299 above the ruins of the destroyed Uberti Ghibelline towers, testimony of the final victory of the Guelph faction. The entire construction also rests on top of the ancient theater of the Roman colony of Florentia (dating back to the first century A.D.), whose ruins can be admired in the underground level. This area can be visited with a separate ticket, (4 Euro) or a combination ticket which includes the Palazzo Vecchio Museum and the Archelological site. The area is suggestive organized



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with information and an interesting film to help you understand exactly what you are looking at underground.



From the very beginning, the main section of Palazzo Vecchio was destined to host the city council which was composed of chief members the Guilds of Florence (the Priori) who governed the Republic of Florence. In 1342, the Duke of Athens, Walter VI of Brienne, enlarged Palazzo della Signoria towards Via della Ninna, giving it the appearance of a fortress and even

adding a secret staircase for nightly exits. The severe medieval architecture conceals sumptuous halls and residential apartments. The Salone dei Cinquecento (Hall of the Five Hundred) was built from 1494 during the Republic of Fra' (friar) Girolamo Savonarola. The Hall is the largest and most important room in terms of artistic and historical value inside the palace. This impressive hall has a length of 54 meters, a width of 23 and a height of 18 meters. Paneled ceilings and large wall frescoes, golden decorations and imposing sculptures will leave you admiring in marvel.

Pier Soderini, who was appointed gonfaloniere for life, selected the two greatest Florentine artists of the time, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo Buonarroti, for the construction of two large murals to decorate the walls of the room, with battle scenes depicting victories of the Republic. Leonardo began to paint the Battle of Anghiari, while Michelangelo used another portion of the wall for the Battle of Cascina. The two geniuses of the Renaissance would have an opportunity to work for a certain period of time face to face, but none of their work was ever completed.



Palazzo Vecchio's current appearance is due largely to great works of renovation and interior decoration that were made around 1540, when Duke Cosimo I de' Medici and his wife Eleonora of Toledo decided to turn the palace into their residence. The court of the Medici was transferred to Palazzo Vecchio (from Palazzo Medici-Riccardi), which was transformed into a fascinating labyrinth of institutional chambers, apartments, terraces and courtyards. All the rooms (the so-called Quartieri Monumentali) are

magnificently decorated by artists such as Michelangelo, Giorgio Vasari and Donatello. Among the chambers, you will also discover secret routes, such as the spectacular private studiolo (studio) belonging to Francesco I, Cosimo's Tesoretto, and the ceiling trusses that support the ceiling of Salone dei Cinquecento to know the mastery of Renaissance engineers.

Between the first and the second floor, there is a mezzanine. It was created in 1453 by Michelozzo by lowering the ceilings of some rooms of the first floor. In these rooms Maria Salviati lived, Cosimo I's mother, and the young princes. Today, the mezzanine



houses the Loeser Collection, donated by the American art critic Charles Loeser who died in 1928. The second floor was the more private section of the palace, featuring the elegant Apartments of the Elements, the Apartments of Eleonora of Toledo, and the original Hall of Priors, along with many small chambers and a chapel frescoed by Bronzino. The

most interesting rooms are the private study of the Duchess Bianca Cappello (mistress and afterward second wife of Francesco I de' Medici) and the Hall of Maps, the original Guardaroba where the most relevant documents were kept together with the Mappa Mundi, a six-foot-tall sphere which had been the largest



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rotating globe of its era, and dozens of geographic maps painted on leather, showing the world as it was known in 1563.

The profile of Palazzo Vecchio is crowned by an austere crenelated battlement, extending upward along the tower called "Torre di Arnolfo" or Arnolfo's tower. It is one of the most imposing medieval towers remaining in Florence. Its height of 95 meters represents the highest civic symbol in the entire city. 416 steps will take you to the very top of the tower to enjoy a breathtaking view of Florence, passing through the guardian passages that also offer spectacular views of the city and entire valley. The tower is open to visits as far as the second crenelated battlement where you can admire the massive pillars which support the prison in which Friar Girolamo Savonarola was held during his last days. The Florentines nicknamed this secret and quite difficult to reach room the "Albergaccio" (or very bad hotel, definitely intended).

**PONTE VECCHIO** Open all of the time, along the pedestrian zone south of Piazza della Repubblica towards Palazzo Pitti. Built very close to the Roman crossing, the Ponte Vecchio, or Old Bridge, was the only bridge across the Arno in Florence until 1218. The current bridge was rebuilt after a flood in 1345. During World War II it was the only bridge across the Arno that the fleeing Germans did not destroy. Instead they blocked access by demolishing the medieval buildings on each side. On November 4, 1966, the bridge miraculously withstood the tremendous weight of water and silt when the Arno once again burst its banks.



It is possible to document the first bridge since 966 and even its reconstruction after the flood in 1345 however, the present construction is a bit of a mystery. Even though Giorgio Vasari, an artist & chronicler from the 1500's, attributed the bridge to Taddeo Gaddi, the construction seems to point more towards the involvement of the Dominican



friars with their keen sense of proportion, harmony and use of numbers. We do know however that the bridge was built as a system of defense, and the windows and artistic elements that we can admire now were added after the shops were sold to the merchants. When the Medici moved from Palazzo Vecchio to Palazzo Pitti, they decided they needed a connecting route from the Uffizi to the Palazzo Pitti on the other side of the Arno that would enable them to keep out of contact with the

people they ruled. The result was the Corridoio Vasariano, built in 1565 by Giorgio Vasari and which runs above the little goldsmiths' shops on the Ponte Vecchio. There have been shops on Ponte Vecchio since the 13th century. Initially, there were all types of shops, including butchers and fishmongers and, later, tanners, whose "industrial waste" caused a pretty rank stench in the area. In 1593, Ferdinand I decreed that only goldsmiths and jewellers be allowed to have their shops on the bridge in order to improve the wellbeing of all, including their own as they walked over the bridge.

Benvenuto Cellini, a 16th century goldsmith, is honored with a bust on the bridge. By night, the wooden shutters of the shops create a look like suitcases and wooden chests, making it a very suggestive route to take for an evening passeggiata, or stroll. Ponte Vecchio is a very romantic spot in Florence, with its great views over the river and of the bridge itself.

**PIAZZA DELLA SS ANNUNZIATA** This square is designed to be appreciated for its elegance, its harmonizing colors and its peaceful character. Having said this, one can understand that the approach to the square will make all the difference.

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The best way to enter the square is to walk down via dei Servi with the Duomo at your back. For 500 meters you will pass small shops, supermarkets and restaurants, an American style bakery (Sugar & Spice) and the café Robiglio dal 1928 (via dei Servi 112/r), which is definitely one of the more enduring cafés in Florence. They have a yummy display of pastries and serve a frothy hot cappuccino for breakfast (lunch or dinner). As you stand

in front of the café, you can begin to view the mammoth statue of Ferdinand I and the white portico of the church SS Annunziata, and if you walk for just a few more meters you will enter into an open and airy space. This is one of the few spaces in Florence that was purposely built with the Renaissance style, which meant that it embraces the idea of a "Utopian society": ordered and accessible to all men.

The first layout came with the construction of the church (in 1298) for which the square is named, and the design was purely functional. However as the city walls began to expand, and as the church grew in importance due to the miraculous painting inside, it was obvious that the square would need to reflect its growing prestige in the city life.

The tranquil and magical design you see today was projected by Brunelleschi in 1419. Before beginning work on his most famous piece, the cupola for the cathedral, he was busy drawing up plans for the Foundling Hospital located in the square (to the right of the entrance), the first of its kind in Europe. It is here in this very square that he introduces the use of proportions and harmony which would become a trademark of Renaissance architecture. Another famous architect to start a new trend was Bartolommeo Ammanati who began the construction of Palazzo Grifoni (to the immediate left of the entrance from the Duomo) in 1563, mixing for the first time color with the use of the characteristic "pietra". The work on the villa was finished by Bernardo Buontalenti, including the gardens and internal courtyard. Palazzo delle Due Fontane (to the immediate right), a rather recent construction, was restored in a manner to be considered a twin to Palazzo Grifoni, in order to maintain the symmetric harmony of the square.

Other than the church itself, which you can read more about in our article, there is the romantic loggia (or portico) next to the Palazzo Grifoni: Loggia dei Servi di Maria. Built between 1516-1525, on a designed created by Bacciod'Agnolo e Antonio da Sangallo il Vecchio, the arches and columns complete the symmetry in the square.

Though Brunelleschi intended for the circles between the columns on the Loggia for the



Hospital to remain empty, Andrea della Robbia was selected in 1490 - long after Brunelleschi's demise - to decorate the six frontal and 4 lateral concaves. The 10 "tondi" or medallions have the standard light blue backgrounds with white "putti" dressed in swaddling cloth to represent the abandoned children and orphans. One can't help but notice the massive statue of Ferdinando I de' Medici astride a stallion. This bronze was executed by Giambologna, who by now had reached international fame for his equestrian statues. The

life size statue of Ferdinando I was cast in 1602 using bronze from cannons on Turkish galleys captured in war, and was placed in the square in 1608. The two fountains were designed and created by Pietro Taccà, a loyal student and successor to Giambologna. Particularly noteworthy are the figures in the fountain. For some these creatures may conjure up images of the film "Creature from the Black Lagoon". The fountains were intended for the Port of Livorno but Ferdinando II, the grandson to Ferdinando I insisted

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that they remain in Florence in this square. You will find a copy of the fountain in the port of Livorno near the statue of the "Quattro Mori".

With the church of SS Annunziata and the large following for the Virgin, this square has been the scene for those events on the Florentine calendar which honor her. Namely the 8th of September and her birthday when the square lights up with colorful lanterns for the Rificolona Festival. The Florentine New Year Celebration was traditionally on the 25th of March, not only coinciding with the beginning of spring but also the "Annunciation" or the announcement to Mary that she was to bear the Son of God. The square was where the Florentines would gather, even today, with feasting, music and games. Every year, as tradition would have it, there is also a large market in the square of SS Annunziata for the 6th of January and the Epifania.

The namesake of the square is the stupendous Basilica della Santissima Annunziata, a virtual who's who when it comes to artists and their masterpieces. It's true claim to fame comes from the miraculous painting of the Mary as she receives the angel Gabriel and the message that she is to give birth to the Christ child.

### **PIAZZA SANTO SPIRITO IN THE OLTRARNO** When the Florentines say "Oltrarno"



(or "Diladdarno") they intend the whole area on the other side of the Arno River (the side opposite of the river to the Duomo). This area is also known as the historic district of Santo Spirito and San Frediano, and even today it is still inhabited by many native Florentines, even if it is often an area of choice by foreigners for its authentic atmosphere and lively quarters. You can call it a Florentine rive gauche or left bank: the Oltrarno is the meeting place of excellence for intellectuals, artists and bohémien. Though you will find it

animated during the day with markets, passing tourists and students of all ages, Piazza Santo Spirito really comes to life starting in the evening with the "movida" (the nightlife), filling up with both Florentine locals and visitors, creating an interesting and lively mix, sometimes even just a bit too much. The "action" really begins in the early evening as the local galleries, artisans and boutiques begin to close up for the night and the restaurants, "trattorie", cafès and nightclubs start to open. Facing onto the square itself there quite a few places with varying themes (formal, casual, rustic, elegant), many of which have terraces, patios and covered tables outside where you can sit and eat, nurse a cold beer or a glass of Chianti. Piazza Santo Spirito was founded in the second half of the 1200's. It was built to welcome the faithful that came to pray together with the Augustinian friars who had built a convent with a church dedicated to «Santa Maria d'Ognissanti e allo Santo Spirito» This church eventually became known simply as "Chiesa di Santo Spirito", for which the square is named. In the center of the Square is a large octagonal shaped fountain in pietra serena, (soft sandstone) which houses a marble decoration in the center.



At the end of the Piazza, opposite the Basilica, you will find a monument to Cosimo Ridolfi, agronomist and founder of l'Accademia dei Georgofili. This historic Florentine institution promotes the "art of Tuscan cultivation", in other words the study of agrarian agronomy, economy and geography in Tuscany.

It is impossible to miss the splendid Basilica di Santo Spirito as you enter into the square. Built on a design by Filippo Brunelleschi in 1444, the Basilica was the last masterpiece by this celebrated architect.



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At the time of his death the project was passed over to Antonio Manetti, Giovanni da Gaiole and Salvi d'Andrea, who finished the church by the end of the 1400's. The façade of the church was never finished and the present front face is deprived of any type of decoration. But don't let the simplicity of the façade fool you, inside there are several noteworthy pieces of artwork from artists like that of Filippino Lippi, Bernardo Rossellino, Maso di Banco and a wooden crucifix attributed to Michelangelo Buonarroti. To the left of the church you can enter the "Museo della Fondazione Romano" where you will find the beautiful Cenacolo di Santo Spirito, a true masterpiece by Andrea Orcagna. The Cenacolo (meaning a depiction of the Last Supper) is exhibited in the refectory in the historic Augustinian convent. This area was not originally in the project by Brunelleschi, and thus it has a different look about it: more of a late-Gothic charm. The Cenacolo was painted by Andrea Orcagna who also included Maria with a group of holy women painted over the Last Supper. Unfortunately over the centuries the affresco (in English: fresco painting) has been irredeemably ruined and only parts of it are visible today. Read more about the Cenacolo di Santo Spirito in this article.

Several "palazzo" and buildings from 1400's face onto the square, many of which were inhabited in the Renaissance by noble families and rich merchants. Among these buildings you will find the elegant Palazzo Guadagni, also called "Palazzo Dei", named after the family responsible for the construction of the building in the 1500's. The palace has a characteristic loggia on the upper level, where we would often find the residence of the Florentine aristocrats.

Piazza Santo Spirito regularly hosts many markets and fairs, all of which contribute to its reputation of a lively and "happening" place. Every weekday you will find stands for local artisans while on weekends there are stands filled with vintage objects and food products. On the 2nd Sunday of every month, except in July and August, you will find local and ethnic handcrafts at the "Mercato Arti e Mestieri d'Oltrarno." The 3rd Sunday of the month is dedicated to the Fierucolina di Santo Spirito with a mix of food products, organic producers and local agricultural.

**GIOTTO'S BELL TOWER** Giotto's Campanile" as the bell tower of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore is called in Italian is a splendid testimony of Florentine Gothic architecture of the fourteenth century. The Campanile is considered one of the most beautiful in all of Italy and when one admires it closely, you'll be able to see its great beauty, despite being surrounded by other masterpieces such as the Duomo and the Baptistery. Giotto began the construction of the bell tower begun in 1334 and, after his death, first Andrea Pisano and then Francesco Talenti continued to oversee and design the tower which was finally completed in 1359. Giotto's bell tower is 82 meters high and to reach the top you'll need to climb many steps, 414 steps to be precise. The climb up the tower is gradual since the tower has three middle floors - these are perfect to both take in the panorama of Florence's cathedral square below as well as to rest. The only drawbacks are that the steps are rather narrow and it is the only way up and down, so you need to share it with people coming down.



**TOWER OF SAN NICCOLÒ** The Tower of San Niccolò is located in Piazza Poggi along the Arno River just below the terrace of Piazzale Michelangelo. Although it's far less popular than the previous two, the Tower of San Niccolò stands out for its majesty within the district of San Niccolò. The tower of San Niccolò was part of the defensive wall which Arnolfo di Cambio designed in 1200 to protect Florence and it was one of the entrances into the city so it was actually a gate into



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the city. The tower is the only one of the city gates to have arrived intact to our present day, even in its height (30 meters). All of the other tower-gates in Florence were actually reduced in height in 1500 because they were an easy target for enemies which were by then equipped with firearms, but the tower of San Niccolò was actually spared of this because it was naturally protected by the hill of San Miniato which sits right behind it. The San Niccolò tower is therefore "only" 30 meters so the top can be reached by climbing "just" 160 easy steps (compared to the other two). Do not be fooled by the lower height of the tower as the view from the top is quite extraordinary and allows you to enjoy the main monuments of the historical center and the surroundings of Florence. The nearby terrace of Piazzale Michelangelo is actually more or less about the same height. The San Niccolò tower is, unfortunately, only open in the summer and, even then, only in the afternoons (It usually is open to the public from June 24th, the feast day of the patron saint of Florence, up until September 30th and only in the afternoon (approximately from 5pm to 7/8 pm).

**PIAZZA DELLA REPUBBLICA** Piazza della Repubblica is one of the main squares in Florence and marks the center of the city since Roman times. The Colonna della Dovizia or also known as the Column of Abundance marks the point where the *cardo* and *decumanus maximus* met and where the Roman forum stood. The present column dates to 1431 but the statue on top is a copy and the original is visible at the bank Cassa di Risparmio in via dell'Oriuolo.

During medieval times the area around the column was densely populated with markets, tabernacles and churches...it was the center of the city. It was the location of the market and the Jewish Ghetto, who were obligated to live here by Cosimo I. Stories tell us that the column once held a bell, which was rung where pick pockets were found to be roaming this once busy market square to warn the shoppers to be careful.



Through the centuries the square managed to retain its medieval look up until the 18th century when the town council decided to widen the square and "clean up" the center. Medieval towers, churches, workshops, homes and original seats of some of the Guilds were destroyed. One can see how the square looked at that time through prints and paintings housed at the museum Firenze come era (Florence as it was). Sadly, its present rectangular form and architecture reflects the result of



the urban "clean-up period" Florence went through during its time as capital of Italy (1865-71: another sad destruction of the period was the tearing down of the 13th century walls that surrounded the city to make way for a wide boulevard). The square today doesn't even look like it did even just 150 years ago. The square originally displayed a large bronze equestrian monument to King Vittorio Emanuele II, now located in the square named after him at the entrance to the Cascine Park. The Arch of Triumph also housed several allegorical statues created in clay which were not replaced once they quickly wore down.

The square today is an impromptu stage to street artists and shows, particularly after sunset. Piazza della Repubblica is home to the historical Caffé Gilli, Caffé Paskowski and Caffé delle Giubbe Rosse which were meeting points for many of the city's artists and writers in the past. Also facing onto the piazza are the Hotel Savoy on Via Roma and the central Post Office, located under the arches of the portico that extends to each side of the Arch of Triumph. Another modern icon, who has taken up residence on the outer edges of the square is the Hard Rock Cafe, who frequently hold concerts and parties under the portico.



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**PIAZZA SANTA MARIA NOVELLA** Piazza Santa Maria Novella is one of main squares



in Florence and one of the most beautiful, making it one of the top attractions in the city. The historical center is divided into 4 quarters and life in the quarter of Santa Maria Novella revolves around its square. The enchanting beauty of the Dominican Basilica of Santa Maria Novella's Renaissance facade is usually what impresses the most at first sight, but any visitor will quickly find themselves spending time in the square at one of many fairs and festivals organized there throughout the year. The latest renovation of the piazza included closing the side streets to traffic, removing all parking spaces, and adding metal and glass benches in the middle of the square which, unfortunately, get quite hot in the summer but which can a great place from which to enjoy the view of the church when the weather permits it. The piazza is host to many fairs and festivals throughout the year, many food-related. If you see stands in the piazza when you visit, make sure to go take a look as you might discover delicious goods such as artisan chocolate or fresh made pastries.

The piazza was born in 1287 by decree of the Florentine Republic during the years that the Dominican convent and church of Santa Maria Novella was being renewed and enlarged. Right away, the piazza became theater to festivals, tournaments and other contests. The two marble obelisks, each one sitting atop four bronze turtles by Giambologna and topped with a Florentine lily, were the "goal areas" for the "Palio dei Cocchi", a race on chariots similar to the Roman two-horse chariots which started being raced here in 1563.

**CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA NOVELLA** The main attraction in the piazza is obviously



the basilica. Architecturally, it is one of the most important Gothic churches in Tuscany. Enlarged between 1279 and the middle of the 1300s, the facade by Leon Battista Alberti dates to the 1470s and it is the oldest standing facade to still exist in Florence (all of the other main churches had their facades redone or actually finished in more recent times). The interior

holds extraordinary works of art including Masaccio's Trinità, Ghirlandaio's fresco cycle in the Tornabuoni Chapel and Giotto's Crucifix, among others. The convent was built between 1279 and 1357 by Dominican friars near a 7th century church located in the fields just outside Florence's medieval walls. The lower part of the marble facade, which is Romanesque in style, is believed to have been executed by a Dominican architect, Fra Jacopo Talenti da Nipozzano, while the upper part was completed only 100 years later in 1470 by Leon Battista Alberti. Thus, the facade is not only the oldest of all the churches in Florence but it is also the only church with its original, planned facade still in place today! As you will see, the church of San Lorenzo never even received its planned marble facade while others were completed centuries later. Inside, the church is vast and looks even longer than it is thanks to the clever coloring of the central arches. The layout is supposed to be work of Brunelleschi, the same architect of the Duomo's cupola.

From the very beginning, great works of art were conceived for the church by masters such as Masaccio, Giotto, Filippino Lippi, Duccio di Buoninsegna and Ghirlandaio, just to name a few.



The Trinità, or Trinity, by Masaccio is on the far wall right in front of you as you enter the church through the side door. The Trinità (1424-25) is one of the earliest paintings to demonstrate mastery of perspective. Also notice that the Virgin Mary is not portrayed as a young girl as in so many other paintings; here, she is older and is clearly a mother.

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The entire church was initially covered in frescoes but these were painted over in the 16th century by Vasari when he carried out massive works ordered by Cosimo de' Medici. The Trinità was fortunately only covered by a massive painting and actually "rediscovered" around 1860 when further refurbishments were carried out.

The Strozzi Chapel, to the right of the main altar, is dedicated to St. John the Evangelist and scenes of his life are portrayed in the beautiful frescoes by Filippino Lippi. He began working on the chapel in 1487 but then the Strozzi were exiled from Florence by the Medici. The chapel was finished only in 1502 after the Strozzi returned to the city. As Lippi dies in 1504, this is one of his last works.

The Tornabuoni Chapel is the main chapel you see at the front of the church, right behind the main altar which today sort of hides it. The altar actually used to be smaller and placed in the center of the chapel but was enlarged in the 19th century with the large engraved marble altar we see today. The Tornabuoni chapel is dedicated to both the Virgin Mary, to whom the church is dedicated (scenes on the left), and to St. John the Baptist (scenes on the right). The frescoes are by Domenico Ghirlandaio and his workshop, in which a very young Michelangelo was apprenticed. The three young lads giving their backs to the observer in the bottom right scene "Mary visits Saint Elizabeth" are said to be his work. After restoration, the vibrant colors are still stunning and Ghirlandaio's penchant for including important people of the day in contemporary clothing make his work to be actual "photographs" of his days.



The Gondi chapel to the left of the main altar contains a wooden Crucifix by Brunelleschi from 1410-15 which he completed in competition with his friend Donatello. Brunelleschi saw the crucifix Donatello had created for the Bardi Chapel in Santa Croce and was said to have exclaimed that Donatello's Christ looked like "a farmer on a cross" and said "I'll show you how Christ is supposed to be". He said that Christ was a man but not just any particular man and Brunelleschi then set out to show what he meant by that. The result is this Crucifix: carved in wood and then painted, observe the beautiful, majestic inclination of the head and the realistic detailed carving of the muscles in His body.

The Strozzi di Mantova Chapel (left transept) is dedicated to St. Thomas Aquinas and decorated with frescoes (1351-7) by Nardo and Andrea di Cione depicting Paradiso e Inferno, Paradise and Hell. Dante himself is represented in the Last Judgment just behind the altar. The polyptych is by Andrea di Cione, called the Orcagna. Orcagna had originally done frescoes in the main Tornabuoni chapel but these were painted over by Ghirlandaio; after restoration of the Ghirlandaio frescoes, some synopses of Orcagna's original frescoes were recovered and today can be seen in the museum in the small cloisters right next to the church.



The Nativity scene by a young Sandro Botticelli is from about 1475 and is now on the inner wall of the facade above the main door. It was placed here after the fresco was found in 1860 behind another altar painting. The pulpit has 4 beautiful bas-reliefs by Buggiano, Brunelleschi's adopted son. The first one, the Annunciation, is said to be particularly lit by a direct ray of light passing through the round stained glass window on March 25, the day of the Annunciation which for centuries was considered the start of the new year on the Florentine calendar.



The museum is composed of the two first cloisters of the ancient convent,



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the Spanish Chapel and the large refectory. The first, the Green Cloister, has frescoes by Paolo Uccello with scenes from the Old Testament on 3 of the 4 sides and, being outside, some are in bad shape but can still be admired. Continue on to the magnificently decorated Chapter House, called the Cappellone degli Spagnoli or Spanish Chapel ever since it was used by the courtiers of Eleanor of Toledo, wife of Cosimo I. The chapel features frescoes by Andrea di Bonaiuto depicting Jesus Christ's passion, death and resurrection on the front wall as you enter. To the right, in the Triumph of the Doctrine, the dogs of God (a pun on the word Dominican - domini canes) are sent to round up lost sheep into the fold of the church. To the left, you'll find another fresco by Bonaiuto, the Triumph of the Catholic Doctrine, while the entrance wall frescoes depict stories of the life of St. Peter Martyr. The tour ends in the ancient refectory where precious liturgical objects belonging to the church's sacristy are on display as well as a few recovered synopses from Orcagna's frescoes in the Tornabuoni chapel. The other cloister, the magnificent Grand Cloister, has been home to the school of Warrant Officers and Brigadiers of the Carabinieri since 1920, and as such has been closed to the public. In September 2016 the new school for the Carabinieri is finally complete and the school is moving out, then the spaces occupied by the school will be restored and will be incorporated into the Santa Maria Novella - but no dates have been made public, so for now, the Grand Cloister and other areas remain generally closed. The Grand Cloister of Santa Maria Novella is called that precisely because it is quite large, with 56 arcades surrounding the internal courtyard corridor. Along one end, it sides with the famous Santa Maria Novella Pharmaceutical and Perfume Laboratory whose entrance is on Via della Scala and on its east side with the Refectory of the Santa Maria Novella museum complex. Another side is the back of the cloister which faces onto the main train station square. Built between 1340 and 1360, it hosted along three of its four sides dormitories for the friars living here. Two centuries later, two noble Florentine families and the Grand Duke Cosimo I de' Medici financed the decorations of all of the walls with frescoes of the life of St. Domenic and other Dominican saints, scenes from the life of Christ (at the corners) and portraits of important members of the Santa Maria Novella community (on the pillars). The fresco cycle was largely painted within 1570 and 1590 by over 15 various artists from the Accademia known for similar collective works, such as Alessandro Allori, Santi di Tito and Poccetti. The size, iconography and clear narrative style of the scenes make it one of the most representative of the Counter-reformation.

**THE HOSPITAL OF SAN PAOLO** On the side opposite the church, you'll first notice the Loggia of the San Paolo hospital, built at the beginning of the 13th century. In the second half of the 15th century, the hospital was enlarged given the need there was for hosting pilgrims and taking care of the sick. The arches between each column have round glazed terracotta reliefs of saints by Andrea della Robbia. The lunette shaped relief of The Embrace between St. Dominique and St. Francis over the right portal is also by Andrea della Robbia. The hospital no longer exists today - it is now the home of the Novecento Museum, a museum dedicated to contemporary works of art in Florence from the 19th century to today.



**FLORENCE'S CATHEDRAL, THE DUOMO** Florence's cathedral stands tall over the city with its magnificent Renaissance dome designed by Filippo Brunelleschi, with the baptistery right across. The cathedral named in honour of Santa Maria del Fiore is a vast Gothic structure built on the site of the 7th century church of Santa Reparata, the remains of which can be seen in the crypt. The cathedral was begun at the end of the 13th century by Arnolfo di Cambio, and the dome, which dominates the exterior, was added in the 15th century on a design of Filippo Brunelleschi. A statue to each of these important architects can be



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found outside to the right of the cathedral, both admiring their work for the rest of eternity. The church was consecrated as soon as the dome was in place although the façade (front of the church) was only half finished by then. It was just decoration, and thus remained unfinished up until the 19th century. At that point, it was actually redone by the likes of the time and finally finished. The exterior is covered in a decorative mix



of pink, white and green marble. The interior, by contrast, is pretty stark and plain but quite enjoyable on warm summer days since the temperature inside tends to be cooler. The mosaic pavements are certainly its main attraction within. Please note the clock above the entrance on the inside of the church. It was designed in 1443 by Paolo Uccello in accordance with the *ora italica*, where the 24th hour of the day ended at sunset. The biggest artwork within the cathedral is Giorgio Vasari's frescoes of the Last Judgment (1572-9): they were designed by Vasari but painted mostly by his less-talented student Frederico Zuccari by 1579. Entrance into Florence's cathedral remains free and for this reason you'll at times find a long line to get in. Don't worry, the line moves pretty quickly! But in an effort to reduce the line, the cathedral administration is trying to increase the number of visitors allowed at any one time into the church as long as noise level remains low. The solution has been to require any group of over 4 visitors to rent either the radio or audio guides (cost is 2-2,50 euro per person) so that the level of noise inside the church remains low and larger amounts of people can be allowed inside at any one time.

After seeing the Duomo from all sides and visiting the inside of the cathedral, all you



need to do to complete the experience is climb to the top of the cupola. Built by Filippo Brunelleschi who won the competition for its commission in 1418, the dome is egg-shaped and was made without scaffolding. The raising of this dome, the largest in the world in its time, was no easy architectural feat. 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 only way to see the inside of the dome up close and enjoy the extraordinary view of Florence it offers is to climb its 463 steps (there is no elevator): the route takes you by the interior of the dome where you can admire Giorgio Vasari's frescoes of the Last Judgment (1572-9) up close. While they were designed by Vasari, they were actually mostly painted by his less-talented student Frederico Zuccari and finished by 1579. The frescoes were subjected to a thorough cleaning completed in 1996, which many people saw as a waste of restoration funds when so many more important works throughout the city were waiting to be salvaged. The scrubbing did, however, bring out Zuccari's innovative colour palette. Continue upwards through the two shells of the cupola and out onto the lantern, from which you can enjoy impressive views of the city.



If you suffer from a fear of heights or dark, narrow spaces, then a climb up to the dome might not be for you. The way up (and down) are basically narrow corridors built by the workmen who built the cathedral to be used by themselves for maintenance, they were never thought of as being open to the public. They are narrow, the steps can be steep and the entire climb is 463 steps. When you reach the base of the drum right below the cupola's frescoes, you actually come out onto a walkway (you can see in the photo above). It is less than a meter wide, there is a glass as a protection and you can admire the immense size of the frescoes up close as well as LOOK DOWN about 40 meters into the central part of the

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cathedral. You are not exposed here and cannot fall -- but if you fear heights, this part might be hard to manage. The climb up the dome is within the two domes so spaces are narrow, steps steep. People have different tolerances for heights so consider these points to decide whether to climb or not.

Around the Piazza del Duomo, it is recommended to visit the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, where many of the original statues and decorative elements from the cathedral as well as Ghiberti's original Baptistery doors (the ones outside are copies) can be seen up close.

**Admissions: OPA Pass € 15 - a single ticket for all 5 monuments in Piazza Duomo (cupola, bell tower, baptistery, crypt below cathedral, and Opera del Duomo Museum). Hours: Monday-Friday: 8:30am - 7pm, Saturday: 8:30am - 5:40pm, Sundays 1-4pm. Last admission no later than 40 minutes before the advertised closing time, Entry via the Porta della Mandorla (north side of the cathedral). Visitors are required to climb 463 steps, No lift (elevator) available. <http://ilgrandemuseodelduomo.it/>**

### **BAPTISTERY DEDICATED TO ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST**



When you think about the Baptistery of St. John in Florence it's easy to remember Dante's words in the Divine Comedy describing it as "my beautiful San Giovanni". Located in Piazza del Duomo, right in front of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, it is one of the most important



monuments in Florence. Its origins are unknown although it is believed that it was built over the ruins of a Roman temple dedicated to Mars dating back to the 4th-5th century A.D. It was first described in 897 as a minor basilica. In 1128, it was consecrated as the Baptistery of Florence and as such is the oldest religious monument in Florence. Up until the end of the 19th century, all Catholics in Florence were baptized within its doors. Today, young children can still be baptized here on the first Sunday of the month, but as they only have space and time for 4, you have to make the request with ample time. The Baptistery, dedicated to Florence's patron saint, has an octagonal plan and an octagonal lantern with a cupola. Outside it is clad in geometrically patterned coloured marble, white Carrara marble and green Prato marble that is typical of Florentine Romanesque architecture.



On three of the four sides there are three large doors famous for their decorations. The most important door has always been considered the eastern doors, the ones that lead to the Duomo. All of the doors have been originally located on the Eastern side before being moved. The oldest pair of doors are the bronze doors presently found on the South side of the baptistery. Made by Andrea Pisano around 1330, the doors consist of 28 quatrefoil panels depicting scenes from St. John's life. They have now been moved to the Museum Opera del Duomo for restoration (April 2016). It was possible to still see traces of gold on some of the panels, while the bright spots are oxidized bronze from the patina of millions of hands that have touched sections.



Today's Northern Doors are by Lorenzo Ghiberti (1403-1424) and depict Stories of the Life and Passion of Christ taken from the New Testament. The original doors are now on display in the Museum behind the Duomo, and copies are on display at the

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Baptistery. At the beginning of the 15th century, the Arte of Calimala (the Wool Merchants' Guild) announced a public competition to design the Baptistery's northern doors. Many famous artists participated in this competition including Ghiberti and Brunelleschi. Every artist had to design a quatrefoil panel depicting the Binding of Isaac using the lowest quantity of bronze. Ghiberti created a balanced and carefully detailed panel, thanks to his skills as a goldsmith. Brunelleschi's work was completely different from both a technical and artistic point of view: Isaac writhes in pain and all the figures are so realistic they seem to come out of the panel. The new relationship between space and the human body already foreshadow Brunelleschi's achievement in perspective. His panel, however, was heavier than Ghiberti's and the bronze casting was not so perfect. Ghiberti won the hearts of the judges (though he was already the favorite, since he had already created the doors that were facing the Duomo) and was awarded the commission to create the northern doors. The "cradle of the Renaissance" was not yet ready to "understand" Brunelleschi's revolution and preferred the traditional gothic aesthetics, still vibrant and lively at that time. These last doors were so magnificent, it was quickly decided they were even better than the previous doors Ghiberti had designed and were to take place of honor, facing the Duomo. These golden Eastern Doors are most famously known as the Gates of Paradise after a famous quotation by Michelangelo. The panels depict scenes from the Old Testament. Above the doors stood three different groups of statues. Over the southern doors, the famous bronzes depicting the Beheading of St. John by Vincenzo Danti stood until they were restored in 2008 - the original is in the Museum Opera del Duomo. Above the northern doors stood the bronze group by Giovanni Francesco Rustici depicting St. John the Baptist Teaching between the Pharisee and the Levite modeled between 1504 and 1509. Above the Gates of Paradise stood the Baptism of Christ by Andrea Sansovino and an Angel by Innocenzo Spinazzi, added in 1792. These are all beautiful statues that we highly recommend you view at the Opera del Duomo Museum where all of the originals are conserved; the statues found on the Baptistery today are copies but most of them unfortunately have not been yet replaced. Its interior deserves a special visit to view the beautiful 13th century mosaics on the inside of the cupola, the spectacular mosaic marble pavement with geometrical patterns and oriental zodiac motifs. There is also the monumental tomb of Baladassare Cossa - Antipope John XXIII - created by Donatello and Michelozzo between 1422 and 1428.

The Gates of Paradise received their name by Michelangelo who is believed to have exclaimed: "they are so beautiful that they would be perfect for the gates of paradise". The doors consist of 10 rectangular panels, displayed in two lines. They depict scenes of the Old Testament from left to right and from top to bottom. In each panel, Ghiberti described more than one scene so that there are over fifty scenes depicted. All around the frame of the doors Ghiberti added 24 small bronze busts of famous Florentines, including his own self-portrait. The original panels of the Gates of Paradise are now displayed at the Opera del Duomo Museum, the ones in situ are copies.

**BASILICA OF SANTA CROCE** The Basilica di Santa Croce (Basilica of the Holy Cross) is the principal Franciscan church in Florence, Italy, and a minor basilica of the Roman Catholic Church. It is situated on the Piazza di



Santa Croce, about 800 metres south-east of the Duomo. The site, when first chosen, was in marshland outside the city walls. It is the burial place of some of the most illustrious Italians, such as



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Michelangelo, Galileo, Machiavelli, the poet Foscolo, the philosopher Gentile and the composer Rossini, thus it is known also as the Temple of the Italian Glories (Tempio dell'Itale Glorie). The Basilica is the largest Franciscan church in the world. Its most notable features are its sixteen chapels, many of them decorated with frescoes by Giotto and his pupils, and its tombs and cenotaphs. Legend says that Santa Croce was founded by St Francis himself. The construction of the current church, to replace an older building, was begun on 12 May 1294,[1] possibly by Arnolfo di Cambio, and paid for by some of the city's wealthiest families. It was consecrated in 1442 by Pope Eugene IV. The building's design reflects the austere approach of the Franciscans. The floorplan is an Egyptian or Tau cross (a symbol of St Francis), 115 metres in length with a nave and two aisles separated by lines of octagonal columns. To the south of the church was a convent, some of whose buildings remain. The Primo Chiostro, the main cloister, houses the Cappella dei Pazzi, built as the chapter house, completed in the 1470s. Filippo Brunelleschi (who had designed and executed the dome of the Duomo) was involved in its design which has remained rigorously simple and unadorned. In 1560, the choir screen was removed as part of changes arising from the Counter-Reformation and the interior rebuilt by Giorgio Vasari. As a result, there was damage to the church's decoration and most of the altars previously located on the screen were lost. The bell tower was built in 1842, replacing an earlier one damaged by lightning. The neo-Gothic marble façade dates from 1857-1863. The architect Niccolò Matas from Ancona, designed the church's façade, working a prominent Star of David into the composition.



Matas had wanted to be buried with his peers but because he was Jewish, he was buried under the threshold and honoured with an inscription. In 1866, the complex became public property, as a part of government suppression of most religious houses, following the wars that gained Italian independence and unity. The Museo dell'Opera di Santa Croce is housed mainly in the refectory, also off the cloister. A monument to Florence Nightingale stands in the cloister, in the city in which she was born and after which she was named. Brunelleschi also built the inner cloister, completed in 1453. In 1966, the Arno River flooded much of Florence, including Santa Croce. The water entered the church bringing mud, pollution and heating oil. The damage to buildings and art treasures was severe, taking several decades to repair. Today the former dormitory of the Franciscan friars houses the Scuola del Cuoio (Leather School). Visitors can watch as artisans craft purses, wallets, and other leather goods which are sold in the adjacent shop. The Basilica became popular with Florentines as a place of worship and patronage and it became customary for greatly honoured Florentines to be buried or commemorated there. Some were in chapels "owned" by wealthy families such as the Bardi and Peruzzi. As time progressed, space was also granted to notable Italians from elsewhere. For 500 years funerary monuments were erected in the church including those to Leon Battista Alberti, Ugo Foscolo, Galileo Galilei, Niccolò Machiavelli, Michelangelo Buonarroti and Gioachino Rossini.

**Address: Piazza Santa Croce 16, 50122 Florence. Admissions: Full Ticket euro 6,00, Reduced euro 4,00. Opening hours Monday - Saturday: 9:30am - 5pm, Sundays and holidays: 2pm - 5pm.**

<http://www.santacroceopera.it/en/default.aspx>



**MERCATO DEL PORCELLINO** On the way to the Ponte Vecchio, one will encounter to the right, a market (Loggia del Mercato Nuovo) which hosts this peculiar boar made of bronze. Legend has it that

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wishes will be granted (or everyone will one day return to Firenze, or receive fortune and good luck, amongst others) if you rub its polished snout while placing a coin in its mouth which must slide and fall into the underlying grating. The best chance for a photo will be at night when the market closes and the vendors have completely cleared the market area; otherwise, photos will have merchandise and tourists as background. While at this market, do peruse through the vendors and look down at the floor for a large marble circle which is known as the "Stone of Shame" as it was the place where insolvent merchants were publicly shamed before heading to prison or exile.

[http://www.mercatodelporcellino.it/index\\_en.html](http://www.mercatodelporcellino.it/index_en.html)

## 2. MUSEUMS

**UFFIZI GALLERY** One of the most famous museums in the world, the Uffizi Gallery boasts exceptional collections of paintings and ancient sculptures. Among the paintings dating back to the 14th century and Renaissance period, plenty of masterpieces such as by Giotto, Simone Martini, Piero della Francesca, Beato Angelico, Filippo Lippi, Botticelli, Mantegna, Correggio, Leonardo, Raffaello, Michelangelo, Caravaggio, as well as by pre-eminent German, Dutch and Flemish painters. The invaluable collection of statues and



busts adorning the corridors was gathered by the Medici family and is made up of Roman copies after lost Greek originals. Originally built to host the administrative offices of the Medici's government, today the Gallery is located on the last floor of the imposing building constructed between 1560 and 1580 after a design by Giorgio Vasari. Like a very precious treasure chest, the Uffizi Gallery will grant itself to visitors just a little bit at a time: from the initial uncertainty on where to get tickets, getting through lines to get inside and at the metal detector, then taking two flights of Renaissance-era stairs before you arrive at the actual entrance to the museum. Finally, the Gallery unveils its stunning frescoed ceilings and the start of its collections. The museum is organized as a long labyrinth of rooms with amazing work of art displayed roughly in chronological order along a U-shaped Renaissance building which was never created to be a museum. Cosimo de' Medici had entrusted his favorite architect Giorgio Vasari to create a grandiose building right next to Palazzo Vecchio, the seat of power, to host the magistrates, the seats of the Florentine Guilds, a vast theatre and judiciary offices (hence the name "Uffizi" which means offices in Italian). These spaces were not "born" as a museum nor intended to welcome up to an average of 10.000 people a day, which they do now. The halls of the top floor of the Uffizi at first were only accessible to the Grand Ducal family, servants and only a few select guests where the family started to place the many pieces of their personal private collections. Guests were welcomed on the top floor to admire the grandiose collection of Roman sculptures the Medici loved to collect.



The art-fond Medici family also collected for centuries manuscripts, gems, coins, cameos and, with Francesco I, there is the first private room dedicated to items that were "any kind of wonder" which they thought were interesting objects. Buontalenti created for Francesco I an octagonal shaped Tribune to host Francesco's favorite works



of art and jewels. The Tribune is considered the most ancient and precious heart of the Uffizi, still maintaining its original shape from its construction in 1584. The concept of "museum" will be developed much later by Peter Leopold of the Lorraines in 1769,



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when he opened the Uffizi Gallery and its treasures to the public. He would have never imagined that it would become one of the most frequented museums in the world.

Start from the Gothic painters which include Giotto and Cimabue, who left us some of the largest altarpieces. The magic of the first hall is the sensation of being welcomed inside an ancient church, with low lighting reminding us about candle lights. Enjoy a walk through the Hall of Early Renaissance painters (Sala 8) like Paolo Uccello and Masaccio and a special stop in front of the unmistakable Portraits of the Dukes of Urbino, by Piero della Francesca. The profile of Federico da Montefeltro is one of the most impressive portraits of the Renaissance. A few steps from the diptych you'll find the largest hall of the museum, housing the most stunning and breathtaking paintings by Sandro Botticelli (Sala 10-14). Stop for a few minutes to simply admire in silence the large panel of the Allegory of Spring and the canvas of the Birth of Venus. The newly reopened and renovated halls now have a double ceiling with more soft, better lighting to really enjoy these masterpieces.

The Tondo Doni by Michelangelo and Raphael's portraits (now in halls 35 and 66), and Leonardo da Vinci's one and only completed panel painting, The Annunciation, these are considered the apex of Renaissance works, described by Vasari as "The School of the World" for any painter. Enjoy the great view from the wide windows in the Corridors to see the San Miniato Church and the Bardini Gardens across the Arno and, last but not least, the Ponte Vecchio over the Arno river. Touring the Uffizi is surely one of the highlights of visiting Florence. The best part of the day to visit is doubtless in the afternoon; better after 4pm once large groups have left the museum. Take your time, enjoy glancing at the portraits, the views over the hills, the unforgettable privilege of walking through "the Medici offices" with patience and respect for timeless treasures.



Visitors to the Uffizi may also visit the famous Vasari Corridor linking Palazzo Vecchio and the Uffizi to the Pitti Palace on the other side of the Arno. Over 1 km long, the passage way was commissioned in 1565 by Cosimo I to celebrate the marriage of his son Francesco to Joanna of Austria and was completed in only 6 months. The private corridor enabled the Medici to move freely between the seat of government and their private residence without having an escort and without walking among the commoners on the street. Apart from the delightful views of the city through the corridor's circular windows, its entire length contains a selection of 17th and 18th century paintings, including a unique self-portrait collection of painters. A visit to the corridor is NOT POSSIBLE AT THIS TIME as it is closed for renovations until 2018.

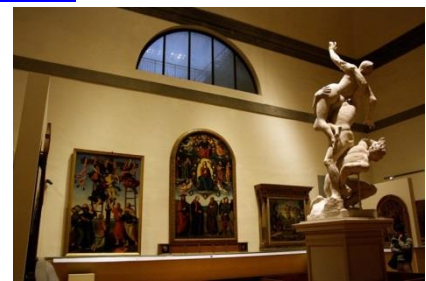
### Absolute Must See's at the Uffizi

- Botticelli's Primavera and Birth of Venus (hall 10-14)
- Filippo Lippi's Madonna and Child with Two Angels (hall 8)
- Titian's Venus of Urbino (hall 83)
- Lots of other works, including works by the early Masters Cimabue and Giotto (hall 2), Early Renaissance pioneers Fra Angelico and Masaccio, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo.

**Address:** Piazzale degli Uffizi 6, right next to Piazza della Signoria and Palazzo Vecchio  
**Admissions:** Full € 8,00 (€ 12,50 during exhibits), Reduced € 4,00 (€ 6,25 during exhibits)+ € 4 prebooking fee + online commissions depending on where you book online. **Opening hours:** Open from 8:15 a.m. to 6:50 p.m. Tuesdays through Sunday, entrance every 15 min. <http://www.uffizi.it/index.php?en/171/gli-uffizi>



**GALLERY OF THE ACADEMY OF FLORENCE** The Galleria



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dell'Accademia di Firenze, or "Gallery of the Academy of Florence", is the home of Michelangelo's sculpture David. It also has other sculptures by Michelangelo and a collection of Renaissance paintings. It adjoins the Accademia di Belle Arti or academy of fine arts of Florence, but despite the name has no other connection with it. The Galleria dell'Accademia has housed the original David by Michelangelo since 1873. The sculpture was allegedly brought to the Accademia for reasons of conservation, although other factors were involved in its move from its previous outdoor location on Piazza della Signoria. The original intention was to create a 'Michelangelo museum', with original sculptures and drawings, to celebrate the fourth centenary of the artist's birth. Today, the gallery's small collection of Michelangelo's work includes his four unfinished Prisoners, intended for the tomb of Pope Julius II, and a statue of Saint Matthew, also unfinished. In 1939, these were joined by a Pietà discovered in the Barberini chapel in Palestrina, though experts now consider its attribution to Michelangelo to be dubious. The "David" in the Accademia is the original. There is a replica in the Piazza della Signoria.



The Accademia welcomes the visitor in the Hall of the Colossus, name taken from the huge models of the Dioscuri of Montecavallo which were displayed in this large hall in the 19th century. It now hosts in the center the plaster model for the stunning marble sculpture of Giambologna's Rape of the Sabine Women. Giambologna prepared the model as an exercise in creating a tightly-knit group of three figures from just one large block. The glance will land upon the large number of panel paintings hanging on the four walls, such as works by Perugino, Filippino Lippi, Pontormo, Domenico Ghirlandaio and Bronzino. You might feel overwhelmed at first sight but if you take a seat around Giambologna's plaster, you may comfortably enjoy this rich Renaissance collection and recognize two of the most important works. Next to the entrance on the right you'll clearly pinpoint a narrow rectangular chest (Cassone Adimari). It is the front panel of a



wedding chest belonging to the Adimari family, depicting a typical Florentine Renaissance wedding feast and portraying medieval streets, monuments (Baptistery on the left) and precious brocade garments witnessing the customs and wealth of the noble families of the 1450s.

Left to the chest, you cannot miss a small shaped panel by Botticelli, the Madonna of the Sea. It owes its name to the dim seascape in the background and its charm is preserved in the gold fine details and symbols defining the two characters. The pomegranate held by baby Jesus, symbol of Christ passion and the star "Stella Maris", glittering on Mary's dark blue robe.

The Accademia hosts the Grand Ducal collection of forty instruments exposed in the museum wing belonging to the Luigi Cherubini Conservatory. The collection unveils that music played a primary role in the official celebrations of the Medicean Court. Discover the roots of the invention of the Piano, created by Bartolomeo Cristofori for the Medici and explore the collection of Harpsichords, violins, violoncellos and wind instruments. Not to miss the original handmade Antonio Stradivari red spruce and maple wood "Medici violin" besides the multimedia explanation of the grandiose festivals arranged in town by the Medici in villas or theaters expressing proudly the richness of the fine cultural atmosphere of the 17th century. The most famous section of the Galleria is surely the Hall of the Prisoners, displaying Michelangelo's unfinished "Slaves". Today the arrangements of the Prisoners along the corridor is a growing crescendo of emotions to the feet of David, exposed under a



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circular skylight. Next to the Tribuna of David you'll find a series of paintings by Alessandro Allori which are a delightful vocabulary of the symbolism of flowers. Chase the key for explaining hidden messages among a triumph of botanical species like tulips, daisies, lilies, lilies of the valley, citrus and forget-me-nots are displayed a few steps from David. Next to the Allori large panels you'll find the antic roots of the museum, the ancient core of the hospital which now is part of the Galleria dell'Accademia. In 1784, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Pietro Leopoldo, converted the friary hospital of San Matthew and the convent of San Niccolò di Cafaggio to house the Gallery so students in the adjoining Accademia delle Belle Arti (Fine Arts Academy) could study the greatest works of the past. Exactly in the "Gipsoteca Bartolini" you'll find traces of the 19th century plaster casts by Lorenzo Bartolini, one of the greatest sculptors and brilliant professors of the Academy.

The last section of the gallery downstairs is dedicated to Florentine Gothic painting. Gold backed altarpieces by Giotto and his followers like Bernardo Daddi and Orcagna constitute an invaluable art collection coming from the most important Florentine churches and antic suppressed convents. Brilliant colors of the recent restorations will introduce you to the fashion style and hairstyles of the Florentines of the Middle ages and Renaissance.

The first floor of the Accademia is the definitely less crowded but very involving and informative (Giovanni da Milano & the Late 14th century rooms). It will give you the chance to learn how the altarpieces were prepared carefully starting by the selection of every poplar wood central vein. A video focusing on egg tempera painting shows clearly how the drawing was created on the wood altarpiece, carefully decorated first with gold-leaf application and eventually painted with a mixture of natural pigments and egg yolk. You'll be fascinated by this antic technique described by the Renaissance painter and illuminator of manuscripts Cennino Cennini. These antic techniques are still alive in Florence in the fascinating art craft laboratories of the restorers.

**BARGELLO NATIONAL MUSEUM** The Bargello Museum is located in the impressive Palazzo del Bargello, a fortress with powerful embattlements which surround the austere facade. Begun in 1255, the building was the headquarters of the Capitano del Popolo and later of the Podestà and Council of Justice. In 1574, it became the living quarters for the Captain of Justice (chief of police) and was used as a prison. Despite a series of alterations and additions which altered the original plan during the 14th and 15th centuries, the palace preserved its pleasant severity, best seen in the beautiful



courtyard, the balcony and the large hall on the first floor. A covered staircase, built in the 14th century, leads to an upper loggia. The walls of the courtyard are covered with dozens of coats of arms of the various Podestà and Giudici di Ruota (judges).

Since 1859, the building houses the Museo Nazionale (the first national museum in a unified Italy) which brings together many important Renaissance sculptures and masterpieces of the minor arts from varying periods, including masterpieces by Donatello, Luca della Robbia, Verrocchio, Michelangelo and Cellini. The museum was subsequently enriched with splendid collections of bronzes, majolica, waxes, enamels, medals, seals, ivories, amber, tapestries, furniture and textiles from the Medici collections and those of private donors. For Renaissance art lovers, the Bargello is to sculpture what the Uffizi is to painting.

The enormous entrance hall has heraldic decorations on the walls with the coats of arms of the podestà (13th-14th centuries). From here, you enter the open courtyard which is irregular and unique. More coats of arms of the podestà are



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here, and under the porticoes, are insignia of the quarters and districts of the city. Various 16th century statues by Bandinelli, Ammannati, Giambologna and Danti are set against the walls.

The courtyard leads to a Hall with a collection of 14th century sculpture, including works by Nicola Pisano.

The Hall closest to the staircase houses important 15th century works by Michelangelo, including Bacchus (1470) and Apollo (1530). There are also works by Giambologna, Cellini, Ammannati and Sansovino who made a Bacchus of his own to compete against Michelangelo's. The bronze bust of Cosimo I by Cellini is also in the same room.

The open staircase leads to the Loggia, ornamentals with various works by other 16th century artists including the delightful bronze animals made for the garden of the Medici Villa of Castello. The first room to the right, once the Salone del Consiglio



Generale, is now the Donatello Room and contains many of his works such as St. George (1416), the young St. John, the marble David (1408) and the bronze David (1430), the first delicate nude of the Renaissance.

In the same room, easily overlooked, is a particular display which should not be missed. In 1401, Filippo Brunelleschi and Lorenzo Ghiberti competed to earn the most prestigious commission of the day: the decoration of the north doors of the baptistry in Piazza del Duomo. For the competition, both designed a bronze bas-relief panel on the theme of the Sacrifice of Isaac: both panels are on display, side by side. The judges chose Ghiberti for the commission, you can decide for yourself whether or not they were right. The museum also houses a collection of goldwork and enamels from the Middle Ages to the 16th century, as well as seals and various metal objects, rare ivory carvings from ancient times up to the 15th century, glazed terracotta sculptures by Giovanni and Andrea della Robbia, busts by Verrocchio, sculpture by Mino da Fiesole and Pollaiuolo and military paraphernalia from the Middle Ages to the 17th century. The museum is completed by tapestries in the Sala della Torre and works by artists such as Pisanello, Cellini, Michelozzo and others.

**Address: Via del Proconsolo 4, Florence. Admissions: Full Ticket € 8,00 (price increase from Sept. 1, 2016) Reduced: € 4,00. Opening hours: Open Monday - Sunday: 8:15 am - 2pm. Ticket office closes at 1:20pm, museum starts closing at 1:50pm. Days of closure: The museum is closed on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of every month (therefore open on the 1st, 3rd and 5th Sundays of every month). It is also closed on the 1st, 3rd and 5th Monday of the month.**

<http://www.bargellomusei.beniculturali.it/index.php?it/269/museo-nazionale-del-bargello>

**PALAZZO PITTI AND BOBOLI GARDENS** This enormous palace is one of Florence's largest architectural monuments. The original palazzo was built for the Pitti family in 1457, designed by Filippo Brunelleschi and built by his pupil Luca Fancelli. The original construction consisted of only the middle cube of the present building (the middle seven windows on the top floor). In 1549, the property was sold to the Medici and became the primary residence of the grand ducal family. The palace was then enlarged and altered; from 1560, Bartolomeo Ammannati designed and added the grandiose courtyard and two lateral wings.



Under Cosimo II de' Medici, the layout of the piazza and opening up of the view were begun. The facade then assumed its present appearance,



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except for the two projecting wings, added by the House of Lorraine in the early 18th century. Behind the palace lie the famous Boboli Gardens.

Today, the Pitti Palace houses some of the most important museums in Florence: on the first floor is the Palatine Gallery, containing a broad collection 16th and 17th century paintings, and the Royal Apartments, containing furnishings from a remodeling done in the 19th century; on the ground floor and mezzanine the Silver Museum (Museo degli Argenti) displaying a vast collection of Medici household treasures; and the Gallery of Modern Art is on the top floor, holding a collection of mostly Tuscan 19th and 20th century paintings. In the separate Palazzina del Cavaliere on the upper slopes of the Boboli Gardens is the Porcelain Museum, while the Palazzina of the Meridiana contains the Costume Gallery, a showcase of the fashions of the past 300 years.

The Palatine Gallery occupies the whole left wing of the first floor of the Pitti Palace, which was the residence of the Medici Grand Dukes. In 1828, when Tuscany came under the rule of the Lorraine family, the most important paintings in the Palace were hung in the Gallery and opened it to the public. It is an impressive collection comprising works by Raphael, Titian, Correggio, Rubens, Pietro da Cortona and other Italian and European masters of the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Continue reading about the Palatine Gallery and the Royal Apartments [here](#).

The Gallery of Modern Art, located on the second floor of the Pitti Palace, has a fine collection of paintings and sculpture, mostly Italian, dating from the late 18th century to World War I. The elegant rooms, which were inhabited by the Lorraine grand dukes, are decorated with works of the neo-classical and romantic periods. There is also a splendid collection of works by artists of the Macchiaioli movement and of other Italian schools of the later 19th and early 20th centuries. The Museum houses an extraordinarily rich collection of precious objects, many of which were commissioned by members of the Medici family. The works of art range from Florentine workmanship to other schools and countries and include rock crystal vases and works in pietre dure (semi-precious stones), ivory, gems, cameos, silver, carpets, clocks and chinaware.

The Museum is situated in the left wing of the Pitti Palace on the ground floor and in the first mezzanine. The state rooms, which formed part of the grand-ducal summer apartment, are decorated with important 17th-century frescoes by Giovanni da San Giovanni where the theme is the evocation through mythology of Medici history at the time of Lorenzo the Magnificent.



Until a few years ago, the Porcelain Museum was a section of the Museo degli Argenti and was situated in the mezzanine of the Pitti Palace. In 1973 with the total

rearrangement of this complex the collection was transferred to the Casino del Cavaliere at the top of the Boboli gardens' slopes. Built in the 18th century as a retreat for the Grand Duke, the Casino has proved a particularly ideal setting for the conservation and display of a unified collection.

The collection consists mainly of table porcelain used by the Gran Ducal and Royal Houses of the Medici, Lorraine and Savoy. The collection can be described as princely, in that many pieces were made for the grand ducal court or were gifts from other European rulers. The grand dukes made use of the local Florentine manufactory of Doccia for their large services in daily use, which are well represented in the museum.

The Costume Gallery occupies the 18th century Palazzina della Meridiana, a wing of the Pitti Palace overlooking the Boboli Gardens. The collection comprises six thousand items including costumes dating from the 16th to the 20th centuries, theatre costumes and accessories. It is the only museum of the history of fashion in Italy and one of the most important in the world. A selection is exhibited in rotation every two years. There are frequent special exhibitions devoted to particular aspects of the collection.



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Boboli gardens comprise the largest monumental green area in Florence. Their history goes back over four centuries, for Cosimo I commissioned the designs from Niccolò Pericoli, known as Tribolo, in 1549. Work was continued by Ammannati, Buontalenti and Parigi the Younger. Noteworthy places are: Buontalenti's Grotto (1583), the Amphitheater with the Roman basin and the Egyptian obelisk at the center, Neptune's Fishpond, the statue of Plenty by Giambologna and Tacca (1563), the Grand Duke's Casino, the Cavalier's Garden, Parigi's Fountain of the Ocean. More than a garden, more than just a "green lung" in Florence, the Boboli gardens are one of the greatest open-air museums in Florence that embraces another site of culture in Florence, the Pitti Palace. The park hosts centuries-old oak trees, sculptures, fountains and offers peaceful shelter from the warm Florentine sun in summer, the beautiful colors of the changing foliage in the fall and smells of blooming flowers in the spring. The Boboli gardens are a spectacular example of "green architecture" decorated with sculptures and the prototype which inspired many European Royal gardens, in particular, Versailles.



Its creation and development spans four hundred years, from the 15th and 19th centuries. The original fields and gardens were laid out behind Santa Felicita in the Oltrarno by the Borgolo family, the name from which Boboli is thought to derive, and were bought in 1418 by Messer Luca Pitti. In 1549, the property was purchased by Cosimo I's wife Eleonora di Toledo, and was greatly enlarged to become the Medici family's new city residence. The original plan at that time was drawn by Niccolò Tribolo, although the complete works were completed only after his death in 1550 by other court architects, including Giorgio Vasari, Bartolomeo Ammannati and Bernardo Buontalenti under the reign of Francis I, who succeeded his father Cosimo. The Medici and the Lorraine families continued to enrich and enlarge the garden in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries generating an outdoor museum, the scenographic setting to exhibit both Roman and Renaissance statues. Highlights of the gardens in particular are the Amphitheatre, the "Viottolone", the Garden of the Cavaliere, the Koffeehouse and the Grotta Grande.

**Address: Piazza Pitti. Admissions: Full: € 7,00, Reduced: € 3,50, combined ticket for the Silver Museum, Costume Gallery, Porcelain Museum and Bardini Gardens. Ticket price goes up during temporary exhibitions to € 10 full price, € 5 for reduced. Opening hours: Open everyday from 8.15 a.m. to 4:30pm (Nov-Feb), to 5:30pm (March), to 6:30pm (April-May, Sept-Oct) and to 7:30pm (June-August), Last entrance is 1 hour before closing time. Closing Days: Closed on the 1st and last Monday of each month, January 1, May 1, and December 25.**

<http://www.polomuseale.firenze.it/en/musei/pitti.php?m=palazzopitti>

**MEDICI CHAPELS** The Medici Chapels form part of the monumental complex of San Lorenzo. The church of San Lorenzo was the official church of the Medici from their



period as private residents in their palace in Via Larga (now via Cavour), becoming their mausoleum up to the time of the extinction of the line. Giovanni de' Bicci de' Medici (died 1429) was the first who wished to be buried there with his wife Piccarda in Brunelleschi's small Sacristy. Later, his son Cosimo the Elder, was buried in the crossing of the church. The project for a family tomb was conceived in 1520 when

Michelangelo began work on the New Sacristy, corresponding to the Old Sacristy by Brunelleschi on the other side of the church. It was above all Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, future Pope Clement VII who wished to erect a mausoleum for certain members of his family, Lorenzo the Magnificent and his brothers Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino (1492-1519) and Giuliano, Duke of Nemours (1479-1516).

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The architecture was complete by 1524, its white walls and pietra serena interior based on Brunelleschi's designs. Entered through the back of the San Lorenzo Church, the chapels are divided into three distinct parts: the crypt, the Cappella dei Principi (Chapel of the Princes) and the New Sacristy. The crypt is the part where minor members of the dynasty were unceremoniously laid to rest. In the 19th century it was tidied up and now includes numerous tomb slabs. The Chapel of the Princes has a huge dome designed by



Buontalenti and begun in 1604 but not completed until the 20th century. Six of the Medici Grand Dukes are buried here. The New Sacristy was built by Michelangelo between 1520 and 1534 and is a reminder that the Medici were enlightened patrons. Michelangelo worked on the sculptures of the sarcophagi, but the only ones actually completed were the statues of the Dukes Lorenzo and

Giuliano, the allegories of Dawn and Dusk, Night and Day and the group of Madonna and Child placed above the sarcophagus of the two "magnifici" and flanked by Saints Cosmas and Damian. The latter were executed by Montorsoli and Baccio di Montelupo, pupils of Michelangelo. As a result of the complex history of the chapel and its elaborate symbolism, many interpretations have been made of its sculptures. The figure of Night is regarded as one of Michelangelo's finest works. In 1976, numerous drawings and sketches executed on walls were discovered in a small space beneath the apse and sacristies of the church. These drawings, fifty-six in all, show legs, feet, heads and masks, and may be related to the statues and architecture of the sacristy.

The Chapel of the Princes was built by the architect Matteo Nigetti (1560-1649) in 1604-1640 to the designs of Don Giovanni de' Medici, a member of the family who practiced architecture in a semi-professional way. The mausoleum is a rare example in Florence of the Baroque style, and its huge cupola and lavish interior were conceived as monuments to the greatness of the Medici.



Its sumptuous octagonal interior was conceived to hold the grand ducal tombs and is completely covered with hard stones or marble, mainly of foreign origin; the princely sarcophagi are completed with bronze statues of the Grand Dukes set into niches. The execution of the inlay in hard stones lasted for three centuries; the process of covering the walls, mainly carried out in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was fraught with problems on account of the difficulties of working the materials and their very high cost.

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**Address: Piazza Madonna degli Aldobrandini 6, 50123 Firenze. Admissions: Full euro 8,00, Reduced euro 4,00. Ticket office closes 30 min before closing time. During special exhibitions, ticket price goes up to euro 8 (4 euro reduced). Opening hours - Summer: open from 8:15 a.m. to 5 p.m. everyday (until Nov. 1) - Winter: (starting in Nov) open from 8:15 am to 2pm (last entrance at 1:20pm). The museum is open on the 2nd and 4th Monday of the month and the 1st, 3rd and 5th Sunday of every month. Days of**

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**closure:** Closed on the 2nd and 4th Sunday and 1st, 3rd and 5th Monday of each month as well as New Year's Day, May 1st, Christmas.

<http://www.bargellomusei.beniculturali.it/index.php?en/268/museo-delle-cappelle-medicee>

**SAN MARCO MUSEUM** It is worth visiting the setting of the Museum of San Marco for its architecture alone. This consists of the former Dominican convent restored and enlarged to its present size for Cosimo the Elder de' Medici by his favorite architect Michelozzo (1396-1472). Consecrated in 1443, this building was the scene of fervent religious activity, highlighted by



personalities such as St. Antonino Pierozzi, Bishop of Florence, the Beato Angelico (c.1400-1450) and, later, Girolamo Savonarola. Fra' Angelico was a Dominican monk who later became Prior of the convent and who decorated in a style perfectly adapted to the architecture of the chapter house, cloister and the brothers' first floor cells. The museum offers the visitor an example of a perfectly preserved fifteenth century convent, its rational and harmonious plan based on Brunelleschi's innovations. Everything is designed to coordinate and simplify the monastic life within its walls as much in its calm cloister as in the light-filled library, one of the finest interiors of the Renaissance.



On the other hand, the complex also contains the museum of Fra' Angelico's works in the form of frescoed interiors and the panels displayed in the large alms-house. Among the first series, the most famous is the Crucifixion painted in the Chapter House, permeated by the contemplative melancholy found in the refined spirituality of the Dominicans; in the cells, austere yet full of meditative inspiration for the brethren, are the Annunciation, the Three Maries at the Tomb, Noli me tangere and others. The panel paintings in the refectory include the youthful works of Angelico such as the superb reredos showing the Last Judgement and the Deposition set against the background of the Tuscan hills.

Apart from Angelico's paintings, the museum also has a very beautiful Last Supper frescoed by Ghirlandaio at the end of the fifteenth century, and in its library a fine series of illuminated manuscripts. These were created in the convent in the same spirit of meditative creativity characteristic of Fra' Angelico's work. Savonarola's cell and the one where Cosimo the Elder retired to meditate are both open to the public.

Some precious relics and fragments remaining from the nineteenth century destruction of the city's old centre are arranged in the underground rooms together with a rare and evocative collection of bells.

**Address: Piazza San Marco 1, 50123 Firenze. Admissions: Full euro 4,00, Reduced euro 2,00. Ticket office accepts only cash payments. Opening hours: Open from 8:15 a.m. to 1:50 p.m. Monday through Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Holidays 8.15 a.m.-4.50 p.m.**

**Closed: 2nd and 4th Monday and 1st-3rd-5th Sunday of each month, January 1, May 1, December 25**

<http://www.polomusealetoscana.beniculturali.it/index.php?it/190/museo-di-san-marco-firenze>

**GUCCI MUSEUM** A recently developed museum located in Piazza Signoria can fill a few hours with enjoyment and excitement. Any fashion guru or aspiring fashionista will appreciate the Gucci Museum. With a collection of all styles created by the Italian company Gucci, originally founded by Guccio Gucci in Florence, Italy. This museum is equipped with a café, restaurant, bookstore, and a Gucci store filled with vintage items for sale.

**Admissions: 6 Euros. Opening hours: 10a.m. to 8 p.m.. ☎ +39 055 759233027.**



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### 3. EATING AND DRINKING



There are many restaurants, cafès and pizzerias in Florence offering traditional typical dishes and if you're looking for an authentic place to eat at for experiencing the Tuscan true cuisine and top wines, then a few suggestions from locals may be helpful for selecting the best ones.

When one is abroad, choosing a place for eating at is not always as simple as it may appear. Many restaurants and cafes show flashy signs for drawing

tourists with misleading advertising: generally, the fact that a place is crowded with tourists only, is always a negative signal. On the contrary, if you notice many locals eating at a certain place, then take a seat with no doubt: traditional Tuscan dishes and good value for money are guaranteed.

Like all Italian cuisine, Tuscan cooking is based upon using the most *fresh and simple ingredients* of the season including many *legumes, cheeses, vegetables and fruits*. Typical dishes are based upon what Tuscans find fresh and local at the market that week, making them often very *easy to prepare and involving few ingredients*. Although the food may be simple, it is rich in flavor, very hearty and quite filling. All meals are served accompanied by the regional bread: a *white, plain, unsalted loaf*. This tradition dates back to the 16th century when there was a tax put on salt, changing the way locals thought about baking bread. This old tradition of *unsalted bread* has carried on and now marks Tuscan bread apart from other regions in Italy. It may seem flavorless at first but its real job is to soak up all the leftover juices left on your plate, giving it all the flavor it needs and leaving your bread basket empty at the end of the meal.

The bread is also flavored by using a variety of ingredients for crostini such as *crostini di fegatini* (liver paté) or the simple and delicious *fettunta*, a grilled slice of bread with garlic, olive oil and salt. The fettunta is a great way to take your hand at olive oil tasting too - there is nothing better than unsalted bread to truly indulge in the pure *flavor of local olive oil*, which is the base for all Tuscan dishes. Other appetizers that you will commonly come across are wooden cutting boards covered with cured meats which include *prosciutto, lard from "Colonnata" and different types of sausages*, all cured for long periods of time creating distinct, rich flavors. A wonderful place to get a taste of Tuscan bread and different crostini is at *Fuori Porta*, a wonderful restaurant in the area of San Niccolò, just before heading up to Piazzale Michelangelo with great outdoor seating and a long wine menu. They are famous for their crostini, which is a larger version of a crostini topped with either set ingredients or with whatever you please such as roasted ham, mozzarella, fresh tomatoes and porcini mushrooms.

**Primi or Pasta Dishes** Also stemming from history, many Tuscan dishes were invented based on the principle of "waste not" such as *ribollita - a tuscan vegetable and bread soup - and pappa al pomodoro - a tomato and bread soup* (left photo). Both use stale bread as the base that is flavored with a variety of vegetables and legumes. Ribollita, traditionally a poor-man's food, is hearty and thickened with the leftover bread, cannellini beans and inexpensive vegetables that you can often find year-round such as onions, carrots, celery, kale and cabbage.



Pappa al pomodoro is another very traditional dish made simply with the day old *bread, tomatoes, olive oil and sometimes a hint of garlic*, depending on the recipe. As simple as these dishes sound, they are flavorful enough to have become a favorite among

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locals and also among tourists throughout the decades. Other first course dishes in Tuscany are simple pastas such as *pappardelle allalepre o al sugo di cinghiale*, a fresh, egg noodle pasta with either a hare or wild boar sauce.

Another common dish coming from this principle is *Trippa* and *Lampredotto*, particularly in Florence. It is served both as street food as well as in five star restaurants. Trippa is the cow's stomach lining which is often tenderized by stewing it in a tomato sauce for a long period or served marinated as a salad. Lampredotto is served mostly as street food, which you can find at one of the many *food kiosks* throughout the city or in the markets during lunch time, and is also made from the stomach and served as a sandwich with a green parsley sauce and the juice from the broth in which it was cooked. Both of these are very typical Florentine foods but do take to only a certain crowd.

**Secondi or Main Course** One cannot talk about Tuscan cuisine and forget to mention



the famous steak that comes from *Valdarno* and *Mugello* called "*bistecca alla fiorentina*". The Tuscan steak, which comes from a *special cow breed*, the *Chianina*, is served very rare alongside roasted potatoes and beans. It can be found at most Tuscan restaurants throughout the region but some are better than others. The bistecca is cut and served based on

how many people there are at the table and, to show off as well as have you approve the size of the steak, they will typically come and show you the steak before they cook it.

Tuscany is also known for its *wild game* such as *wild boar*, *hares*, *pheasants* and *other birds*. They are often tenderized in a stew such as *cinghiale in umido* (stewed wild boar), roasted such as *faraona arrosto* (roasted guinea-fowl) or served as a sauce over pasta, as mentioned above. Cinghiale is definitely the most foreign to travelers and often most well liked as it is rich in flavor but not too gamey tasting.

**Contorni or Side Dishes** Tuscan side dishes don't vary too much from other regions



but you can be sure to always find *beans* and some kind of hearty green *vegetable sautéed in olive oil* on the menu. You will often see *sauteed spinach* or *chicory in olive oil and garlic*, which they do very well - you will never have guessed you are eating a vegetable! You will also always find *side salads*, *roasted potatoes* and when in season, *artichokes prepared in various methods*, *grilled mixed vegetables* such as eggplant and in the summer months.

**Dolce or Dessert** Tuscany isn't famous for their desserts and meals are generally



finished with a simple piece of *fruit* or *bowl of fresh berries* when in season. After all, having just packed in all those courses, it may be hard to find room for a rich dessert. This being said, the most traditional dessert comes from a nearby town just 20 minutes north of Florence, Prato. Plates of *cantucci*, small hard, almond flavored cookies, are served

alongside the *Vinsanto wine* for dipping. Between the sweet wine and the crunchy cookie, the pairing is unbeatable and a nice, light way to finish a Tuscan meal. Of course, an Italian meal cannot be mentioned without mentioning coffee. Meals are always closed with an *espresso* no matter what the hour.

## 4. Tourist Info Contact

In order to make the best of their stay in Florence, tourists must be as well oriented as possible and to learn all is necessary for them in terms of street names, piazzas and

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significant tourist objectives in order to streamline their experience of Florence. To this end, Florence is serviced by five tourist information offices able to provide information and printed materials to any visitor resorting to their services.

Thus, the main tourist information office is located nearby the Piazza del Duomo.

**Location:** Via Cavour 1, Firenze

**Open:** Monday to Saturday from 8.30 a.m. to 6.30 p.m. Sunday and public holidays from 8.30 p.m. to 1.30 p.m. ☎: +39 055 290832 – Fax +39 055 2760383 e-mail

<http://www.firenzeturismo.it/en/>

Via Manzoni is another thoroughfare to host a further establishment of this kind.

**Location:** Via Manzoni 16, Firenze **Open:** Monday to Friday from 9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m.

☎: +39 055 23320 – Fax +39 055 2760383 e-mail <http://www.firenzeturismo.it/en/>

The Amerigo Vespucci Airport of Florence too host a tourist information office, which is only natural, since plenty of tourists land at this airport which stands out as one of the main entrance gates in Tuscany.

**Location:** Amerigo Vespucci Airport, Peretola via del Termine 1 (arrivals), Firenze

**Open:** Monday to Sunday from 8.30 a.m. to 8.30 p.m. ☎: +39 055 315874 – Fax +39 055 315874

e-mail <http://www.firenzeturismo.it/en/>

Finally, tourists can resort to information services provided by the office located in Borgo Santa Croce, an office which operates a little more differentiated depending on the tourist season.

**Location:** Borgo Santa Croce 29, Firenze **Open:** Mar – Nov: Monday to Saturday from

9.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m., Sunday and public holidays from 9.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m.. Dec –

Feb: Monday to Saturday from 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m., Sunday and public holidays from

9.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m.. ☎: +39 055 2340444 – Fax +39 055 2264524. e-mail

<http://www.firenzeturismo.it/en/>

### 5. Further touristic opportunities in the neighbourhood

Florence is a great starting point and base for a tour of Tuscany. Attractive day trips include Pisa, Lucca, San Gimignano, Arezzo, Fiesole, Lucignano, Siena, and of course the wine zone of Chianti. Greve in Chianti is the market town of the Chianti zone and it is in the hills surrounding Greve that you can rent a B&B room or a small apartment on a working vineyard for less than a hotel in Florence. The SITA Pullman buses take you to Greve and Panzano in about an hour. From then on you see few cars and many cypress and olive trees.

The SITA bus station is just west of the train station in Florence. This is where to go to catch a bus to Siena, San Gimignano, and so on. If you're at the roundabout, facing the train station, go 90 degrees left and stay on the left until just past the fork. You will see the entrance to the SITA garage on your right.

If you are to visit one place in Florence, it has to be the Piazzale Michelangelo. It offers an amazing view of the city. There is a lovely walking trail and even a large church, San Miniato, at the top of the mountain. It is a must see.

Fiesole is in the hills above Florence, only a short bus ride away from the center. It offers a beautiful view of the sunset, and a small museum located on ancient Roman and Etruscan ruins of a temple and an amphitheater. Take advantage of the **weekends before and after the Forum** and don't miss the opportunity to pay a visit.

For further news about Tuscany and its surroundings

<http://www.turismo.intoscana.it/site/en/>