

FLORENCE, ITALY

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INTRODUCTION

Firenze (Florence), the capital of Tuscany in Italy, is located on the Arno River, between the Adriatic and the Tyrrhenian seas. Florence was centre of the Italian Renaissance which established a place of churches, monasteries, museums, galleries and palaces. Today Florence is alive with industry, commerce, culture, art, science and plenty for visitors to do.

Florence attracts millions of art lovers from around the world and visitors are just as beguiled by the beauty of the city itself as they are by the paintings and sculptures found in its many museums. Nestled within the Tuscan region of northern Italy and surrounded by rolling vineyards and olive groves, Florence is the picture of the Italian ideal.

The city was home to many well-known artists, writers, explorers, and scientists. Amongst its most famous residents were Leonardo da Vinci, Donatello, Raphael, Michelangelo, Dante, Machiavelli, Boccaccio, Galileo and Amerigo Vespucci, to name a few.

Florence is home to a number of museums and galleries that house some of the world's most famous works of art. The Uffizi Galleries boasts one of the world's most extensive collections of Renaissance art. Included in the well-known works on display are Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, Da Vinci's *The Annunciation* and Dürer's *Adoration of the Magi*. The highlight of the Academy Gallery (Galleria dell'Accademia) is Michelangelo's statue of David.

Many of Florence's churches are works of art in themselves. The most famous of the city's churches is the Santa Maria del Fiore, known simply as the Duomo. The Duomo is perhaps Florence's most recognisable symbol and glimpses of its majestic dome can be seen around nearly every corner of the city. Other notable churches include the Basilica di Santa Croce, the Baptistery of St John, and the Great Synagogue of Florence.

Spanning the length of the Arno River is the architecturally stunning Ponte Vecchio bridge. The Ponte Vecchio is lined with shops selling gold jewellery, art and souvenirs. The Ponte Vecchio is a perfect spot for taking in the sunset view of the Tuscan hills, perhaps while enjoying a gelato.

Florence is also at the heart of Italy's fashion industry. Designer shops abound and the city is home to such world-renowned designers as Roberto Cavalli and the late Guccio Gucci. The city is particularly famous for its leather goods, and many workshops have set up business there. Visitors can be sure to find a range of genuine items at any number of shops and markets, from leather jackets and handbags to shoes and belts. Buyers should beware, however, of vendors trying to sell cheap knock-offs.

Most of Florence's main attractions are within walking distance of each other but buses and taxis are available for trips away from the city centre. Florence is notorious for its traffic and, aside from the main city centre, it is not pedestrian-friendly. Extra care should be taken when crossing busy streets. Although Florence is relatively safe, visitors should also be cautious of pickpockets.

Florence was founded by the Romans in the first century BC and was very much a world cultural centre between the 11th and 15th centuries. In the 15th century, Florence was ruled by the Medici family, the Grand Dukes of Tuscany. The Grand Duchy of the Medicis was succeeded by the House of Lorraine in the 18th century. In 1860, Tuscany became part of Italy and Florence was the capital from 1865 to 1871.

With a population of approximately half a million inhabitants still contributing to its rich history, Florence was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1982.

TOURIST INFORMATION

ESSENTIALS

Emergency = 113

Fire Department

Call **115** for a fire emergency.

Ambulance

Call **118** for an ambulance.

Medical Services

An Emergency Room is located at Ospedale Santa Maria Nuova, Piazza Santa Maria Nuova 1. Telephone 055 275 81.

Police Services

For an emergency call the Polizia (State Police) on **113** or the Carabinieri Police on **112**. The main Police Station can be found in Via Zara 2 (near Piazza Libertà) at San Lorenzo. Phone 055 497 71.

For problems with pick pockets and other tourist issues, you can contact the multi-lingual Tourist Aid Police on 055 203 911. Mon to Fri, 08.00 to 14.00.

All emergency calls are free from any telephone.

ADDRESSES

Be aware that, in Florence's street addresses, r stands for red. Black numbers are for private houses and red numbers are for commercial premises, therefore in the same street you can have the same numbers listed twice, one in red and one in black.

BUSINESS HOURS

Business hours are usually from 8am to 1pm and then again from 3.30 to 7pm from Monday to Saturday. Siesta breaks are still followed in Florence, however there has been some move towards the 8am to 2pm workday. Shops vary a lot with their opening hours, most close on Sundays.

CURRENCY AND MONEY HANDLING

Italy is a member of the European Union. The official currency is the Euro.

Banks are usually the best money exchangers and offer the best rates. You can also try post offices. The bureaux de change commissions can often be the more expensive. Travellers' schedules are accepted for exchange at banks and exchange centres. Visa and MasterCard are the most accepted credit cards in Florence.

LANGUAGE

Italian is spoken everywhere in Florence and the Florentines are not at all interested in listening to English. It is a good idea to know some Italian and to carry a small phrase book with you. It will help to decipher menus and allow you to understand some of the words that come very quickly out of Italian mouths! Pointing to what you want on the menu works and sign language can be effective as well, for instance writing on your hand always means "bill please".

Italians generally would rather the English-speaking tourists make *some* effort with the language and seem to appreciate it when they do. So try to use "buongiorno" and "ciao" when saying hello, "arrivederci" for goodbye, and "grazie" for thank you.

MEDICAL SERVICES FOR TOURISTS

24 Hour Medical Service* Via Lorenzo Il Magnifico 59 (near Piazza Libertà). Phone 055 475 411.

This medical service has multilingual doctors who see patients in the office or make house calls and cooperates with private insurers.

Venerabile Arciconfraternita Misericordia di Firenze* Via Calzaiuoli (near Piazza Duomo). Phone 055 212 221.

Open for outpatients from 14.00 to 16.00 Monday to Friday and staffed by multilingual doctors.

* A fee is charged for these services.

PHARMACIES – 24 HOUR

Farmacia Comunale 13, Stazione FS S. M. Novella, Piazza Stazione. Phone 055 289 435 or 055 216 761.

Farmacia Molteni, Via Calzaiuoli, 7r. Phone 055 289 490 or 055 215 472.

Farmacia All'Insegna del Moro, Piazza San Giovanni, 20r. Phone 055 211 343.

POST OFFICES

Down town Post Offices

Via Alamanni 18 r (near the S.M. Novella Railroad Station). Phone 055 267 491.*

Via Barbadori 37 r (near the Ponte Vecchio). Phone 055 288 175.

Piazza Brunelleschi 20 (near Piazza Ss. Annunziata). Phone 055 212 396.

Via Cavour 71 a (near Piazza S. Marco). Phone 055 463 501.

Via Pellicceria 3 (near Piazza Repubblica). Phone 055 273 6481.*

Via Pietrapiana 53 (near Piazza S. Croce). Phone 055 267 4231.*

Post Office opening hours are 08.15 to 13.30 Monday to Friday and 08.15 to 12.30 on Saturdays.

* Post offices marked with an asterisk * are open non-stop until 19.00 Monday to Friday.

Post Offices services include mailing letters and packages (including overnight and express services), purchasing postage and tax stamps, buying packing materials for mailing (boxes), prepaid international telephone cards, paying bills, sending money orders to anywhere in Italy (online) or abroad (MoneyGram), exchanging currency and sending faxes.

PUBLIC TOILETS

There are Florence City Council public toilets throughout the city:

Borgo Santa Croce 29r, hours: 10.00-20.00 from 01/11 to 31/03 and 09.00-22.00 from 01/04 to 31/10, disabled facilities and mothers' room, cost: €0.60.

Fortezza da Basso - inside the garden, disabled facilities and mothers' room.

Loggia del Grano, hours: 10.00-18.00 all year round, cost: €0.60.

Lungarno Pecori Giraldi - Tourist bus terminal, inside the multiethnic area, hours: 10.00-17.00 from 01/10 to 20/03, 09.00-19.00 from 21/03 to 31/05 and 09.00-22.00 from 01/06 to 30/09, cost: €0.60.

Parco delle Cascine, hours: 10.00-20.00 from 01/11 to 31/03 and 09.00-22.00 from 01/04 to 31/10, cost: €0.60.

Piazza de' Ciampi (interior garden), hours: 09.30-17.30 from 01/11 to 31/03 and 09.00-19.30 from 01/04 to 31/10, cost: free.

Piazza Ghiberti - inside S. Ambrogio's Market, hours: 07.00-14.00 all year round but closed on Sundays and public holidays, disabled facilities and mothers' room, cost: €0.60.

Piazza Madonna della Neve, hours: 07.00-23.00 from 01/11 to 31/03 and 07.00-02.00 from 01/04 to 31/10, cost: €0.50.

Piazzale Michelangiolo - Viale Galilei, hours: 10.00-22.00, disabled facilities and mothers' room, cost: €0.60.

Stazione FS S. Maria Novella - subway, hours: 08.00-20.00 all year round, disabled facilities, cost: €0.60.

Via dell'Ariento 14 - Central Market, hours: 07.00-14.00 inside the marketplace and 14.00-19.30 outside the marketplace, all year round, disabled facilities, cost: €0.60.

Via dello Sprone, hours: 10.00-20.00 from 01/11 to 31/03 and 09.00-22.00 from 01/04 to 31/10, disabled facilities and mothers' room, cost: €0.60.

Via della Stufa 25, hours: 10.00-20.00 from 01/11 to 31/03 and 09.00-22.00 from 01/04 to 31/10, disabled facilities, cost: €0.60.

Via Filippina angolo Via Borgognona, hours: 10.00-20.00 from 01/11 to 31/03 and 09.00-22.00 from 01/04 to 31/10, disabled facilities and mothers' room, cost: €0.60.

Via Sant'Agostino 8, hours: 10.00-13.00 then 15.00-19.00 on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, 09.00-14.00 on Saturdays, closed on Wednesdays and public holidays, opening times are for all year round, cost: €0.60 WC or €1.81 shower.

NOTE: All hours are subject to variation.

SAFETY

Florence is generally safe but watch out for pickpockets and purse snatchers. Keep a close eye on your belongings and a tight grip on your handbag and wallet when in the station and at the major tourist attractions. Older tourists are often considered easy targets to thieves.

TELEPHONE

There are plenty of public payphones around Florence. They can be found at the train station and in the squares, most of them accept phone cards which can be purchased at post offices and newsstands. Make sure you get the phone card that can be used in the country you are dialling to as there are several different international cards.

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|---------------------------|----|-------------------------|------|---|-----|
| International access code | 00 | Country (Italy) code | 39 | Florence area code (dial first for all local calls) | 055 |
| Local directory | 12 | International directory | 4176 | International operator and/or reverse charge | 170 |

TICKETS

Firenze Musei (Florence Museums) is a network of thirteen state museums in Florence (Accademia Gallery, Uffizi Gallery, Palatine Gallery, Silver Museum, Gallery of Modern Art and Costume Gallery, Medici Chapels, San Marco Museum, Bargello Museum, Cenacolo di Andrea del Sarto, Davanzati Museum, Boboli Gardens, Archaeological Museum, Museo dell'Opificio delle Pietre Dure) housing works of art from most of the collections of the Signori who ruled Florence (the Medici and the Lorraine families) as well as some works originally belonging to ecclesiastical bodies that fell into the hands of the State as a result of the 19th century suppression of religious bodies. To reserve admission tickets for all of the state museums in Florence, you may reserve by phone or online. Reservations, with fee, are particularly recommended during the high tourist seasons. Telephone bookings - 055 294 883; online bookings - www.firenzemusei.it.

Museo dei Ragazzi - Palazzo Vecchio, phone 055 2768224, www.museoragazzi.it.

Information and reservations for the Sistema Museale Didattico, the educational museum network, includes the following museums: Storia della Scienza, Stibbert, Topografico Firenze com'è ra, Brancacci Chapel in S. Maria del Carmine.

Entertainment Bookings

Bookings and advance ticket sales for theatres, cultural and sporting events. Box Office: Via Alamanni 39, phone 055 210 804, www.boxoffice.it. Reservations at the desk, by phone or online - credit card required.

TIPPING

Tips are not expected in Italy. If the menu says servizio incluso (usually 15%) you are not expected to tip as well. If you wish to tip the taxi driver it is best to round up to the next euro. As always if you are not happy with the service, don't tip.

TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRES

Azienda Promozione Turistica are located at Aeroporto A. Vespucci, phone 055 315 874, from 08.30 to 20.30; Via Manzoni 16, phone 055 233 20, from 09.00 to 13.00 Monday to Saturday; and Via Cavour 1r, phone 055 290 832 or 055 290 833, from 08.30 to 18.30 Monday to Saturday and 08.30 to 13.30 on Sundays and public holidays.

Comune di Firenze has an office in Borgo Santa Croce 29r, phone 055 234 0444.

Ufficio Informazioni Turistiche is located outside the main train terminal. Piazza Stazione 4, phone 055 212 245 or 055 272 8208, from 08.30 to 19.00 Monday through Saturday and 08.30 to 14.00 Sundays and public holidays.

Tourist information offices are staffed by qualified, multilingual personnel who provide general information and specifics about local happenings, art and cultural exhibitions and the city's museums.

Help for tourists is also available at the mobile police units parked at Via de' Calzaiuoli, Ponte Vecchio - Borgo S.Jacopo, and San Lorenzo.

GETTING ABOUT

REACHING FLORENCE

By Air

The Amerigo Vespucci Airport is the regional airport for Florence and is 5 kilometres from the city centre. It is connected to the city using the Volainbus which runs every half an hour. Alternative access airports are Galileo Galilei Airport in Pisa (the main international airport for the area) and Guglielmo Marconi Airport at Bologna.

By Road

The A1 connects Florence with Bologna and Milano from the north and Rome and Naples from the south. The Autostrada del Mare connects to Prato, Pistoia, Montecatini, Lucca, Pisa and all resorts on the Tyrrhenian sea.

By Train

The main station is Firenze Santa Maria Novella but there are other stations, Firenze Campo Marte and Firenze Rifredi.

FLORENCE TRANSPORT

Car

Driving can be very difficult in Florence, so you are best to find parking for your car and look for other means to get around. The traffic jams are huge and one-way streets can be frustrating for the tourist who doesn't know where he is going. It is far easier to hire a car if you want to explore the countryside outside of the city.

Bike

The alternative to driving is to hire a bicycle or motor scooter, these modes of transport make it easier to avoid the traffic jams and are a popular way to see the sights of Florence. **Bicycle and Scooter Hire:** Alinari, Via Guelfa 85R (near the train station) - phone 055 280 500; Geordie Chopin - phone 055 245 013; or Florence by Bike - phone 055 488 992.

Bus

The local bus station, Piazza della Stazione, is located behind the train station in Florence. You need to have purchased your ticket before boarding. Passes can be purchased for an hour, three hours or 24 hours. Tickets can be purchased at newsstands and tobacco (tabacchi) shops and must be validated once on board. Phone 055 56501.

A great way to see the many sights of Florence is to catch a double-decker sightseeing bus at the Piazza della Stazione (train station). These buses are opened topped and feature an audio commentary of the sights. There are two routes: an inner city tour of most of Florence's historic sites, and a longer tour (approximately 50 minutes) of the outskirts of Florence stopping at the beautiful hilltop village of Fiesole. Your ticket purchase allows you 24 hours of travel which makes it an economical way to travel the city if you do not have transport. The inner city tour leaves every 15 minutes and the longer trip departs hourly. You are not required to book, just turn up at the stop at the train station.

Taxi

Taxis are plentiful and always ready to take your fare. Taxi ranks are at most of Florence's main squares, they also provide a radio service. Phone 055 4390 or 055 4798.

Walking

As Florence is a city covering a small area, walking is ideal. It is a pedestrian friendly city, so you will find good paths and road crossings, however be careful when crossing at the pedestrian crossings as the traffic does not always stop until you are actually on the crossing. Walking around the city is also a great way to discover some out-of-the-way churches and eateries.

ORIENTATION

Although a large city, Florence is compact and very easy to get around, even on foot. Most of the popular sights are in and around the city centre. The Duomo sits at the centre of this historic city and there are several neighbourhoods branching out from here, all with their distinct tourist attractions.

FLORENCE DISTRICTS

The Duomo

It would be very hard not to stumble across this popular attraction in the heart of Florence. Not only can you see the famous dome from most points of the city, but it's a popular meeting place for tourist groups and tours. The Duomo's marble steps are often taken up with weary travellers resting their feet and reading their travel books, looking for their next work of art. There are souvenirs and refreshments aplenty in this area but prices are higher in anticipation of the tourists wallets being full. The main attractions here are what most tourists come to see, the Duomo, Baptistery, Giotto's Bell Tower and the Ponte Vecchio, as well as many churches and historical buildings.

Oltrarno

This area is located on the southern side of the Arno River and is a must-do when in Florence. It is quieter, more luscious and laid back than many other places. There are plenty of trendy hotels and eateries here as well as a thriving after-dark nightlife. The main tourist attractions are the Pitti Palace and the serene Boboli Gardens. Go that bit further and to get a spectacular view of Florence from the Piazzale Michelangelo. There is a huge car park here as well as a large restaurant with the best view of the city. There is also another replica of David which is green and covered in bird excrement, just the way statues were intended to be!

Piazza della Signoria

If you are into statues then you will see plenty of the best in this large Piazza. This L-shaped square is a few blocks southeast of the Duomo. The most famous art gallery in the world is accessed here, the Uffizi, and with it there are hoards of tourists, either in lines waiting to get in or just browsing. The massive complex of Palazzo Vecchio can be viewed here as well. There is plenty of activity here day and night, with dining and entertainment.

Piazza Santa Trinita

This is where you can trip over yourself chasing down some of Italy's famous designers and their wares. Glitzy boutiques offer some original fashion pieces as well as shoes and accessories; all the big labels can be found here. Located close to the Ponte Santa Trinita, a lovely stroll over this bridge gives a great view of the Arno and is a lot less busy than its cousin up the river, the Ponte Vecchio.

San Marco

This is the home of David: he can be found at the Galleria dell'Accademia along with other unfinished works by Michelangelo. Situated just north of the Duomo, the piazza has a lot of good cafés and eateries. San Marco is more of a residential area so, apart from the main tourist attractions, it can be a little quieter and easier to get around.

San Lorenzo

San Lorenzo is hard to miss as it is famous for its markets and shops and is always a hive of activity. Close to the Duomo, the strong smells of leather come from the market stalls. It also houses a large fresh produce market that is undercover.

Santa Croce

This region, situated at the eastern end of the city, has many original leather workshops as well as trendy fashion and shoe boutiques. The Piazza Santa Croce was built in the middle ages and was famous for its jousts, tournaments and games. Also found here is the Basilica di Santa Croce, known for housing Michelangelo's tomb along with other famous, departed Italians.

Santa Maria Novella

Definitely not the prettiest part of Florence but Santa Maria Novella is very functional and often the first port of call as the train station is here. This district is within walking distance of most inner city sights, and cheaper forms of dining and accommodation can be found here. The area is often very busy with tourists, workers and vendors. A highlight and must-see is the church of Santa Maria Novella.

TOURS

A large choice of tours is available in Florence. We recommend that you browse for your choice and book online at [Travel eGuides](https://www.travelguides.com).

ATTRACTIONS

ART GALLERIES

Florence is famous for its magnificent artwork so it is not surprising that most people come here to view several of the many galleries in this city. There are two that seem to attract the longest lines, Galleria dell'Accademia and the Uffizi. The line-ups to enter, especially at peak tourist times, are very long, hot and tiring. Pre-booking your tickets before you arrive is the best chance to get into the galleries quickly and comfortably. Both galleries require you to pass through a security check and once that is done you are free to roam at your leisure. Galleria dell'Accademia is not large and will only require one or two hours of your time, however the Uffizi could take all day depending on how long the queues are at the more popular rooms and whether you wish to take your time with every work of art.

Cenacolo di Santo Spirito

A collection of 11th century Romanesque sculpture. Piazza di Santo Spirito 29.

Galleria dell'Accademia

Home to Michelangelo's 'David' which was sculpted in 1501 and believed to be the most beautiful man ever created in art form. There are also an interesting collection of unfinished sculptures by Michelangelo as well as a fine collection of ancient musical instruments. However, once in the room with David, it is very hard to look at anything else. Make sure you take your time with him as photos are not allowed with the camera police watching carefully. Thousands flock to Florence to see David, making the queue at this gallery quite long. Pre-booking before you arrive can turn a two hour wait into a 10 minute one. Via Ricasoli.

Galleria d'Arte Moderna

Artworks here are from the 18th to 20th centuries, modern for Italy's old and rich art history. Work by Tuscan impressionists feature strongly at this gallery. Palazzo Pitti.

Galleria del Costume

The focus of this gallery is dresses and outfits, with some styles dating back to 1700s. A good display tracing the history of fashion in Florence. Palazzo Pitti.

Galleria degli Uffizi

The finest and the oldest art gallery in the world was built in the mid 16th century. It is filled with some of the best artworks by the most famous artists ever known. There are 45 rooms so make sure you take your time to select the artworks you wish to see and head to those rooms first. You can see da Vinci in room 15, Michelangelo in room 25, Raphael in 26 and Botticelli in room 10, and the list goes on and on. Rooms 31 and 32 are pretty spectacular as well. There is an audio tour system that you can hire that will give you a run down on what you are viewing. The queues seem to last all day so advanced bookings are advised. If you have booked, you need to take your confirmation letter to another office in the building, however they will only accept that 15 minutes prior to your booked time, so it will be of no benefit to you to arrive any earlier or you will be turned away until then. Another important tip for this gallery is to find [public toilets](#) before you enter as the line-up here is long too. Piazzale degli Uffizi, 50122.

Galleria Palatina

Found in the Palazzo Pitti complex, this gallery has a large selection of masterpieces featuring a good range of Raphael's works. Palazzo Pitti.

Galleria Pananti

If you are looking for some modern Italian art this gallery is the place to go. It hosts contemporary exhibitions and is an art auction house as well. Via Maggio, Oltrano.

Galleria Santo Ficara

This is known in as an important city gallery with modern art from Italian and international artists. Via Ghibellina, Santa Croce.

Loggia della Signoria

More of an arcade than a gallery, the Loggia della Signoria features some beautiful sculpture and painting in an open air format. Piazza della Signoria.

CHURCHES

Like most of Italy, churches are impressive landmarks in the towns and cities and Florence is no exception. Not only are they places of worship but they have become impressive art galleries and museums due to the high quality art and decorations of their interiors and exteriors. Florence churches are especially impressive as often the art work has been done by world famous artists.

Most churches are open for display but they stick to strict opening hours and are not open for touring when a service is on. Some churches charge a fee to enter and others are free to wander around. There is usually notification of entry costs at the front door.

A lot of churches in Florence have a dress code and it is enforced, especially if there is a sign out the front stipulating the correct attire for entry. Anyone wearing shorts, short skirts, singlet tops where shoulders are shown, or the midriff showing will not be allowed entry. If you are out sightseeing for the day, there is strong possibility that you will see a church that you would like to enter, so make sure you have dressed according to the dress code. For females it is a good tip to have a light cardigan in your bag to cover up just in case you see a church you would like to enter.

Badia Fiorentina

This 10th century abbey has a Romanesque bell tower. Via del Proconsolo.

Basilica Di Santa Croce

This is one of Florence's most stunning churches and it contains the tombs of Galileo, Michelangelo, Machiavelli and Dante. The highlight is the Crucifix by Cimabue and the Pazzi Chapel. Piazza Santa Croce 16.

Basilica di Santo Spirito

Several chapels filled with fine renaissance art. Piazza di Santo Spirito.

Battistero

Stunning visually and one of Florence's most popular churches with tourists. Famous for its impressive doors that recreate scenes from the old and new testaments. The doors were affectionately titled 'The Gates of Paradise' by Michelangelo. Piazza San Giovanni.

Cappella Brancacci

A chapel with frescoes and one of the early works of the Renaissance period. Via Santa Monaca.

Cappelle Medicee

Designed by Michelangelo in the 16th century and features many of his sculptures. Piazza Madonna degli Aldobrandini.

Chiesa di Ognissanti

A highlight here is the masterpiece Ultima Cena (Last Supper) by Ghirlandaio. Borgo Ognissanti.

Chiesa di Santa Margherita

Famous for being Dante's place of worship is this little 11th century church. Via Santa Margherita.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS**Campanile**

The bell tower designed by Giotto rises to 85 metre above the Piazza del Duomo. Known as the most beautiful bell tower in Italy. Piazza del Duomo.

Casa Buonarroti

This house was owned by Michelangelo but he never lived in it. It now contains a few of his pieces. Via Ghibellina 70.

Forte di Belvedere

Once a fort for the Grand Duke in the 16th century, it now hosts exhibitions and is a great place to visit and view the city. Costa di San Giorgio.

Giotto's Tower

Climb the tower to view Florence and the Duomo.

Palazzo Davanzati

This 14th century medieval mansion has been undergoing restoration. Via Porta Rossa 13.

Palazzo Strozzi

This mammoth building made of golden coloured stone dates back to the 15th century. Piazza degli Strozzi.

Palazzo Vecchio

The old city palace with a 95 metre high bell tower was built by Arnolfo di Cambio in the 14th century. The Sala dei Gigli houses Donatello's Giuditta e Oloferne. Piazza della Signoria.

Chiesa di SS Michele e Gaetano

This Baroque-designed church dates back to the 11th century but was overhauled in the 17th century. Via de' Tornabuoni.

Duomo

Florence's most visible cathedral known for its majestic dome. The Duomo took over 150 years to build after being started in 1296. Climb the dome, visit the crypt and marvel at the exquisite stained-glass windows. Piazza del Duomo.

Santa Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi

A stunning highlight in this former convent is the fresco of the crucifixion of Christ. Borgo Pinti 58.

Santa Maria Novella

The church houses Trinita by Masaccio and frescoes by Paolo Uccello. The Spanish Chapel has early Renaissance frescoes. Piazza di Santa Maria Novella.

San Lorenzo

The incomplete façade of this church provides a rustic appearance whilst inside is a good example the Renaissance period. At the back are the Medici chapels. The sacristy has nine Michelangelo sculptures. Piazza San Lorenzo.

San Miniato al Monte

An 11th century church on top of a hill. It has a chapel with frescoes by Spinello Aretino and in the cemetery is the grave of Carlo Lorenzi, author of Pinocchio. Via delle Porte Sante.

Santa Trinita

Built in the 13th century on the Oltrarno side of the Ponte Vecchio with frescoes by Pontormo depicting the life of St Francis of Assisi. Piazza di Santa Trinita.

Piazza della Signoria

The best of architecture in Florence, here you can find medieval halls, monuments and fountains all around a central square. Palazzo Vecchio, Piazza della Signoria.

Piazzale Michelangelo

Michelangelo Square on a hilltop above Porta San Niccolo.

Pitti Palace

On the south bank of the Arno, stands the Medici family palace which houses an art collection. Behind are the Boboli gardens. Piazza de'Pitti 1.

Ponte Santa Trinita

This beautiful bridge was designed by Michelangelo but was blown up by the German forces in World War II. Engineers rebuilt it to the same specifications and added all the decorative statues. It was finished in 1958.

Ponte Vecchio

The oldest bridge over the Arno, built in 1345, is lined with shops. In World War II all of the bridges in Florence were reduced to rubble except this one. A stunning sight beholds visitors when they cross the Ponte Vecchio at night.

Spedale degli Innocenti

Known to be Europe's first orphanage, built in 1444. This imposing building is full of babies and cherubs, Botticelli's famous Madonna with Child and an Angel is housed here. Piazza Santissima Annunziata 12.

MUSEUMS

Casa Buonarroti

Michelangelo owned this house but never resided here. Displays over 200 of his paintings and drawings and has a well stocked library. Via Ghibellina.

Casa di Dante

Devoted to Dante and his work, here you can glimpse into life as it was in Florence when Dante lived here. There are also various editions of his Divine Comedy. Via Santa Margherita.

Loggia del Bigallo

A small museum with fine art and sculpture treasures. Piazza San Giovanni.

Macchine di Leonardo

Displays of Leonardo da Vinci's ideas. Via Cavour 21.

Museo Archeologico

Houses some amazing exhibits and relics of Greek, Roman and ancient Egyptian artefacts. Via della Colonna.

Museo degli Argenti

A vast display of the wealth of the Medici dynasty and consisting of 25 beautifully decorated rooms, highlighted by the cameo and jewellery rooms. Palazzo Pitti.

Museo dell'Antropologia e Etnologia

Established in 1869, this museum displays unusual exhibits which have a bearing on Italy's history. Via del Proconsolo 12.

Museo delle Porcellane

Works of fine porcelain are the main displays here, with some very intricate pieces that have survived the centuries. Housed in the casino at Giardino di Boboli.

Museo di Storia della Scienza

The History of Science Museum is an historic collection of scientific instruments used in mathematics, physics, biology, chemistry and astronomy including some of the original instruments used by Galileo Galilei. Piazza de Giudici 1.

Museo Horne

14th and 15th century collections of paintings, sculptures, furniture, ceramics and coins are on display. Via de' Benci.

Museo Marino Marini

Displays over 200 works by the famous Italian sculptor, Marino Marini. Piazza San Pancrazio 1.

PARKS AND GARDENS

Boboli Gardens

Landscaped gardens with fountains, ponds and sculptures. Piazza de Pitti.

Campo di Marte

A popular sporting area for locals especially on weekends. The large, grassed areas make it popular for soccer and games.

Parco Carraia

This pretty park is surrounded by countryside and is a lovely green space to relax and picnic in. A short stroll from Porta San Miniato outside the city gates. Via dell'Erta Caninna, San Niccolo.

Museo Nazionale Del Bargello

Houses Renaissance and Mannerist sculptures with works by Michelangelo, Donatello, Ammannati, Bandinelli, Andrea and Jacopo Sansovino, Desiderio da Settignano, Giambologna and Antonio Rossellino. Via del Proconsolo 4.

Museo dell'Opera del Duomo

The Cathedral Museum is a treasure trove of artworks including Michelangelo's famous obsession 'Pietà'. Piazza del Duomo 9.

Museo di San Marco

Designed by Michelozzo and decorated by Fra Angelico during 1437-1447. A section of this museum is a convent that was converted in 1866 and now houses a treasure trove of religious art works by some of Italy's finest. Piazza San Marco 1.

Museo of Sacred Art and the Cloisters

Situated in the Basilica of S. Maria Novella, it houses art and religious relics that belonged to the Dominican friars.

Museo Salvatore Ferragamo

If you love shoes, head to this tiny museum! Eighty years of footwear are displayed here with most formerly adorning some very famous feet. Via de' Tornabuoni.

Museo Stibbert

This unusual museum is housed in a crumbling 14th century palazzo outside the walls of the city. Nestled in a beautiful park it houses one of the world's most distinguished collections of centuries old weapons and costumes. Everything from military relics to Botticelli art can be found here. Via Stibbert.

Museo Zoologico La Specola

Houses a collection of preserved and pickled animals and wax models of varying parts of the human anatomy. Via Romana.

Museum of Natural History

This vast museum has categories including mineralogy and lithography with about 45,000 mineral fragments and geology and palaeontology which is home to about 300,000 fossil and rock specimens, as well as a botanical museum. Via G. La Pira.

Opificio delle Pietre Dure

Situated in the convent of San Niccolo, a highlight are the beautiful stone paintings. Via degli Alfani 78.

Parc delle Cascine

The largest park in Florence can be found on the western side of the city. This former game reserve now houses tennis courts, pools and walking or jogging tracks. Viale della Catena.

Piazza d'Azeglio

Great for picnics, relaxing and it has a small playground.

Teatro Romano

This hillside archaeological park is located approximately 30 minutes from the city. Historical ruins of roman theatres and baths can be found here. Fiesole.

PLACES OF INTEREST

If you become worn out from art galleries, churches and museums, you may like to take to the Tuscan countryside which surrounds Florence. There are many great day trips from Florence where you can visit incredibly old cities and villages, and, yes, you can visit many more churches as well! To travel outside of Florence the rail service is good and has trains travelling to all the major cities daily.

If you want to view the countryside of Tuscany and surrounds, car hire may be the way to go. This allows you to stop and take in the atmosphere of this very famous wine region. To drive to cities outside of Florence, it is best to take the Autostrade (toll road). This is a fast, efficient way to travel through Italy. Just remember to watch the signs for your exit to the city you wish to visit. You can collect a ticket at the start of the Autostrade and whenever you exit there will be a toll booth where you can make an automated payment. The toll is calculated on how far you have travelled on that road.

There are also many bus tours for half day and full day tours of the Tuscan region.

CHIANTI REGION

One of the world's most famous wine regions is located between Florence and Siena. The rolling hillsides and beautiful scenery start 20km south of Florence and travel in several directions throughout the Tuscan countryside.

Public transport does not exist in this area so car travel is the best form of transport. Car rental agencies are available in Florence, with the drive being pleasant and uncomplicated although some roads can be small, hilly and winding. Wineries are scattered throughout the rolling hills, with huge Tuscan mansions located at the heart of them. When you are not driving through vineyards, it's olive groves which line the roads. Most of the larger vineyards have cellar door sales and tasting, however it is advisable to book as they often only have the tasting as part of a meal or a tour. Signs that say 'Degustazione' or 'Vendita Diretta' usually indicate these wineries.

CINQUE TERRE

To experience one of the best walks of a lifetime, take a trip to Cinque Terre. It is a long day from Florence but possible, or best combined with an overnight stop.

Cinque Terre (five lands) is a hilly stretch along the Mediterranean Sea, that has five villages dotted in the hillsides. Four of the villages are not connected to roads. For centuries the townsfolk used paths in the hillside to walk to their neighbouring towns. These paths are now a very popular tourist walk which could take five hours in total depending on your level of fitness and how long you dawdle in each pretty village.

Monterosso

You can commence the walk from either end of the Cinque Terre but, if you have a car, you will need to start at Monterosso as this is the only town that can be accessed by car; there is plenty of parking here. This is the largest of the towns and it has the most popular beach. It is the only sandy beach near the five villages. There are also many eateries and tourist shops here. It is best to pick up a map at the tourist office and start your walk straight away. Just as you are leaving Monterosso you will see a ticket booth selling Cinque Terre cards. This card allows you access to the walk at a cost of about three euros, or you can purchase a walk and train card as well, which can be used at any train station along the way. The Cinque Terre cards can also be purchased at any ticket booth along the way, train stations in all of the villages, and information centres. Once you have your card you will need to show it at all of the checkpoints on the walk. The first leg of the walk from Monterosso to Vernazza is the most rugged and difficult, but also has the most spectacular views, and is estimated to take between 1 to 1½ hours. The view on the descent into the idyllic town of Vernazza is hard to match.

Vernazza

This is by far the prettiest and the most popular of the towns. As you descend into the town you still see sparkling blue water surrounded by colourful buildings, all centred around the Piazza Marconi. You may not be ready to dine yet but this is a great spot to sit and have a drink, eat a gelati and apply more sunscreen before ascending to the next village. If you feel like walking a little more in Vernazza, you can climb to the Castello Doria which is an 11th century fortress that sits above the town and offers more spectacular views. There is another tough walk between Vernazza and the next village of Corniglia but the paths are good, Be prepared for an another undulating 1 to 1½ hours.

Corniglia

This village has a hilltop location and is the smallest and quietest of the five. There is a beach here to cool off in the sea but no sand to stretch out on. Best to stop for a drink and rest as well because, when you leave Corniglia there is a long, long descent via stairs to the train station and the path that leads to the next town. A good reason to start your Cinque Terre walk from the Monterosso end because these stairs are better going down than coming up! The walk from Corniglia to the next village, Manarola, becomes slightly easier and will take about an hour. The paths are good but it does get congested with other tourists coming from the other direction, so it seems to slow down a little. The views are spectacular and the path has a rural feel as it goes past many farms.

Manarola

You will have to stop and hold your breath, and maybe get the camera out, when you see Manarola as it is like viewing a real life postcard as you descend into the pretty village. Manarola doesn't have beaches as such but it has swimming holes surrounded by concrete walls which attract a lot of sunbathers. This village is very popular with the young set which gives it a vibrant, busy air. There are plenty of cafés, bars and restaurants here and, by this stage of the walk, you may feel like sitting for a bit longer and take in the view over an antipasto platter and a glass of wine. The last leg of the journey only takes about 20 minutes and it is a very different path to the final town of Riomaggiore.

Riomaggiore

The hiking stops when you leave Manorola as you enter the Via dell'Amore (Road of Love). This smooth, flat, covered path hugging the cliffs is a shrine dedicated to lovebirds all over the world. It takes about twenty minutes to walk but will take a lot longer if you stop to read all of the dedications of love written on the walls; even some marriage proposals can be found scrawled here! It is a beautiful, romantic stroll especially if you come at sunset. The road leads to the Riomaggiore train station but, if you keep walking through the long tunnel, you will enter the township. Riomaggiore is a busy place with people ending or starting their journey on the Cinque Terre. It is a fishing village and has plenty of swimming spots for hot tourists seeking to cool off. It is here that you can travel back by train or take a ferry. The ferries travel backwards and forwards all day, usually hourly. It is a great way to relax and be amazed at just how steep and far was the walk. The ferry stops at the five villages and takes only about 30 minutes. When you get back to Monterosso you can take a well-deserved dip in the sea.

FIESOL

If you are desperate for a break from the crowds and art tours, a trip to Fiesole, 8km north of Florence is the answer. Offering a stunning view of Florence below, this very old city is steeped in history and drama. Founded 400 years before Florence, the two cities waged many battles until Florence finally won. Now Fiesole is peaceful and quaint and a popular retreat for wealthy holiday-makers with their villas nestled in Fiesole hillsides. A great way to enjoy a trip to Fiesole is on the open topped tour buses which leave from the train station in Florence every hour. You can hop off, walk around for 15 minutes to an hour and enjoy the stunning vistas. If you are looking for a quieter, out-of-the-way dining location, Fiesole is ideal and offers many good eateries.

LUCCA

This stunning Italian city is a favourite with many due to its protective Renaissance wall that seals the city from its countryside surrounds. Inside the wall is a well preserved town that is full of life and energy. One of the highlights of Lucca is exploring what is behind the walls and the best way to do that is by pedal power. There are many bike hire outlets where you can hire for an hour and ride the perimeter of the walls which cover 4km, however a walk would do just as well. There are six entry points to the city and it is mostly pedestrian access only. There are plenty of parking spaces outside the walls; some are free and some charged by the hour. Lucca is located 62km west of Florence and can be reached by car, train or bus.

PISA

A popular day trip from Florence is Pisa, 81km west of Florence. Most people go for one reason only and that's to view the amazing Leaning Tower. The centre of Pisa is a stunning site with its cathedral, baptistery and, of course, the famous tower, which has required much work to ensure its exact lean. The tower can be accessed and climbed but you need to book a ticket that gives you a time when you can walk up it; there could be a wait of a couple of hours. Whilst waiting you can do what all the other tourists do and surround the tower to take photos of your loved ones pretending to hold the tower up! Unfortunately the area around these magnificent structures is taken up with cheap touristy markets, with many of the vendors walking around on foot shoving fake branded watches and sunglasses in your face.

SIENA

Don't be fooled by this sinister looking, brown brick, gothic city; inside its walls is a treasure trove of history and entertainment. Most famous for its controversial Palio, bare-back horse race which is held twice a year, Siena is a short trip (35km) from Florence.

Duomo

This is one of Italy's first Gothic cathedrals and is filled with stunning mosaics, marble and artwork. A highlight of this church is the crypt, located beneath the floor and filled with decorative frescoes which are available to be viewed. Piazza del Doumo.

Piazza del Campo

This is believed to be one of Italy's most beautiful squares, however it's more of a bowl than a square. The higher edge is lined with cafés and shops which are mostly filled with tourists.

Torre del Mangia

This is the second tallest tower in Italy and, for the view of a lifetime, you can climb the 503 steps to the top. Piazza del Campo.

ENTERTAINMENT

NIGHTLIFE

Florence attracts a young trendy crowd to its streets and piazzas at night time and the nightlife in the city doesn't disappoint. There are plenty of clubs, pubs, bars and discos to be found, pumping out music until the small hours.

Most clubs have replaced entrance fees with a drinks card system. The idea is to have the card stamped when you order drinks and you pay the total when you leave.

Auditorium Flog

Hosting live gigs from local bands to national acts, this huge space also feature DJs and plenty of dancing. Via M Mercati.

Bebop

This casual venue offers a variety of musical entertainment including jazz, blues and country. Via dei Servi.

Central Park

This popular venue has four dance floors, one of which is outdoors. Via Fosso Macinante.

Exmud

Located underground and very popular with the younger set, there is a cocktail bar and a courtyard. Corso dei Tintori.

Jazz Club

Popular with the post thirty set and lovers of jazz. Live jazz can be enjoyed on Friday and Saturday nights with other styles of music on most other nights of the week. Via Nuova de' Caccini.

J.J. Cathedral

Aptly named as you can drink under the shadow of the huge Baptistery in Florence's popular Piazza San Giovanni. There are two floors for drinking and dancing and balconies to enjoy the view and the night air. Piazza San Giovanni.

Meccano

There are three dance floors here and is a popular nightclub with locals and tourists. Viale degli Olmi.

Space Electronic

This is a popular dance space with young locals and tourists. There are a couple of levels of dance floors with entertainment in the form of karaoke and disco. Via Palazzulolo.

CINEMAS**Cinema Fulgor**

Some films are shown here in their original language and others are dubbed. Thursday night is when mainstream English language movies can be viewed. Via Maso Finiguerra.

OUTDOOR CINEMAS**Arena di Marte**

There are two screens in this large outdoor venue. One shows cult and mainstream films and the other shows not so new release blockbusters. Palazzetto dello Sport di Firenze, Viale Park.

THEATRES**Accademia Bartolomeo Cristofori**

A fine collection of early keyboard instruments are on display and often chamber concert performances are held in the hall next door. Via di Camaldoli, Oltrano.

Palasport Mandela Forum

Florence's major venue for national and international touring artists. Seating capacity 7,000. Located outside the city gates. Viale Paoli.

Teatro Cantiere Florida

This former cinema which seats 288 patrons and is a popular venue to view young and upcoming Italian actors in plays and dramatic performances. Via Pisana.

Teatro Comunale di Firenze

Florence's main theatre which presents opera, ballet and concerts. September to December is the best time for opera and concerts are performed from January to April. Corso Italia.

Teatro della Limonaia

Contemporary entertainment with a variety of styles from dance to modern theatre performances. Via Gramsci.

Teatro della Pergola

This theatre hosts Italian plays and is also a popular venue for the famous Maggio Musicale Festival held from May to July. Via della Pergola.

Tenax

This very popular, modern dance venue hosts well known Italian and international bands. It turns into a vibrant nightclub late at night with DJs and a packed dance floor. Via Pratese.

The Fiddler's Elbow

Florence's first Irish pub is very popular with locals, students and tourists, which explains why often there is standing room only. Piazza Santa Maria Novella 7a.

Universale

This venue was originally one of Florence's old theatres. Now it is a popular venue for all ages of party goers and has a restaurant, bars and dance areas. Via Pisana.

Yab

This modern nightclub is only open from October through to May and provides DJ-style music. It is a popular venue as it is located in the heart of Florence. Via Sassetti.

Odeon Cinehall

This is the main cinema in Florence. Most movies here are screened in their original language with subtitles. Piazza degli Strozzi.

Chiardiluna

Set in woodland surrounds, this venue screens recent commercial releases. However, be warned, it can get pretty chilly here and the mozzies can be a problem. Via Monte Oliveto.

Teatro del Sale

Part club, part restaurant and part theatre, hosting imaginative plays and performances. Breakfast, lunch and dinner all served, with evening entertainment starting at 9.30pm. Via dei Macci 111r.

Teatro Everest

This restored 1950s hall is a venue for new and experimental theatre. Via Volterrana, Galluzzo.

Teatro Goldoni

This beautifully restored 18th century theatre only seats 400 patrons and hosts chamber music recitals, small operas and ballet performances. Via Santa Maria, Oltrano.

Teatro Puccini

This theatre hosts musicals and light operas, with the main focus being on comedic performances. Piazza Puccini.

Teatro Verdi

This theatre plays host to some famous and popular operas, ballet and classical music events. Via Ghibellina.

Saschall-Teatro di Firenze

This theatre hosts mainstream acts from Italy and abroad. It has a seating capacity of 4,000. Via Fabrizio de Andre.

RESTAURANTS

Tuscan fare is the delight of Florence and restaurants are in abundance here. The Tuscan food is fresh, locally produced and rich in good quality oils and fresh produce. Antipasto plates are the highlight of Tuscan dining, especially when served with a good Chianti. The fresh, juicy steaks are produced in the region and, of course, pizza is served up in abundance as well.

Eating in Florence can be a highlight of your holiday but there are a few things of which to be aware. The eateries in piazzas and main squares are often overpriced and have high service charges, with the food not always the best quality. Take your time to hunt out the smaller eateries in the side streets. When you read the menu, take note of the service charge which ranges from 10-15% and goes on top of your bill. If you are charged 'servizio' you are not required to tip. There will also be a cover charge, usually €2.50 which covers the bread brought to your table. Often the menu is displayed before you choose to eat but the wine menu is not displayed. Ask to look at the wine list as it could be more expensive than the food. Water (aqua) is charged for as well. 'Frizzante' is akin to soda water or mineral water, and 'naturale' is normal bottled water.

Breakfast (la colazione) is usually a very light meal of croissants and coffee. If you order coffee, you will be served a short black espresso. If you prefer flat white, ask for a cappuccino as it is often served as coffee with milk but no chocolate on top. In Florence many cafés have two ordering systems; if you order a coffee and stand at the counter and drink it, you could save up to €3, rather than having it at a table.

If you opt to eat lunch (il pranzo) out, it can be better value to order one or two antipasto platters and share with a carafe of wine.

Dinner (la cena) has many courses and sometimes the food just keeps coming and coming. Often the best choices are antipasto, 'primo piatto', which is usually pasta, risottos or soups. The secondo 'piatto' is usually a smaller serve of fish, meat or chicken served unaccompanied. If you want vegetables or salad, there is an extra charge.

Wine can be ordered by the glass, bottle or carafe. Often the carafe is the best option as it is cheaper. The wine is still very good and you can order by half or full carafe, with the full usually being a litre.

Listed below are just a sample of the dining venues to be found in Florence.

BUDGET

Cibreino, Italian

The 'little brother' of the famous Cibreo restaurant offering a cosier atmosphere and a shorter menu of the dishes cooked in the same kitchen as Cibreo. Save room for the sensational chocolate tarts. Via dei Macci 118. Phone 055 234 1100.

Osterria delle Belle Donne, Italian

Colourful and rustic, this eatery's menu highlights traditional Tuscan dishes but always giving an alternative. Alfresco dining is available on the terrace. Via delle Belle Donne 16r. Phone 055 238 2609.

MID-RANGE

Il Latini, Tuscan

Opened in 1950, this restaurant will offer an unforgettable experience as you will most likely share the table, the traditional set meal and endless wine with strangers, even if you have a reservation. 'Arrostato misto' (assorted roast meats) would make a great and generous choice for everyone. Via del Palchetti 6r. Phone 055 210 916.

La Giostra, Tuscan

Probably the most popular in Florence for superb food with affordable prices, this place is run by a Hapsburg prince who fell in love with cooking and became a renowned chef.

SPLURGE

Cibreo, Italian

Without the popular pasta and grilled meat that completely miss from the menu, this famous restaurant gained the prestige with the personalized service and the innovative menu. The waiters will explain point by point the whole list of daily specials, spiced up with the chef's favorite ingredient – the hot pepper. Via Andrea del Verrocchio 8r. Phone 055 234 1100.

Antico Noe, Fast Food

For a quick snack on the go, choose from stuffed panini or sandwiches with fresh ingredients that you can order from a list or design yourself. The wine-by-the-glass list is a real bargain. Volta di San Piero 6r. Phone 055 234 0838.

Il Vegetariano, Vegetarian

Self-service with friendly atmosphere, their menu is a flavour combination from all over the world from spicy Tunisian couscous to Tuscan traditional dishes. This place is usually packed. Via delle Route 30r. Phone 055 475 030.

Delightful Italian crostini and pasta, together with the old Hapsburg recipe of the lavish Viennese Sachertorte orchestrate a unique and surprising menu. Borgo Pinti 10r. Phone 055 241 341.

Osteria de Benci, Italian

Offering a charming atmosphere and huge portions, go and taste the fresh 'salumi' (mixed Italian meat products - not salami) and don't leave Florence before trying their rich 'cibrò delle regine' – spiced chicken livers and gizzards on toast. Via de'Benci 11-13r. Phone 055 234 4923.

L'Osteria di Giovanni

A family run place, sophisticated but cosy atmosphere and a well-trained chef/owner – this is the best restaurant in Florence. The menu highlights refined Tuscan delights - try the ribollita (traditional soup) and don't miss the superb bistecca alla fiorentina. Via del Moro 22. Phone 055 284 897.

ITALIAN**Buca dell'Orafo**

Authentic Tuscan food served in a family setting, located near The Ponte Vecchio. Via Volta dei Girolami. Phone 055 213 619.

In Centro

Located in a cellar under the Palazzo Antinori, classic dishes are served here at high prices, however the wine is good and reasonably priced. Via del Trebbio. Phone 055 213 768.

MEDITERRANEAN**Sesame**

Moroccan inspired dishes can be found here if you are looking for a change from the Italian fare. Via della Conce. Phone 055 200 1831.

SEAFOOD**Fuor d'Acqua**

Fresh seafood caught from the Tuscan coast is served up here. Via Pisana. Phone 055 222 299.

SHOPPING

The centre of Florence is full of fashion boutiques but beware, purchasing fake goods is a serious offence and attracts a large fine so resist those fake Gucci sunglasses, Rolex watches and Prada purses!

Florence is a shopper's dream, especially if it is the designer labels you crave. However, there is a good mix of chic and cheap shopping. There are plenty of exclusive shops and lots of markets with good value clothing, accessories and souvenirs. If it's leather you're looking for, it can be found in abundance - coats, bags, gloves and, of course, what we all come to Italy for ... shoes!

Department Stores

One of the best with the most reasonable prices is La Rinascente which can be found in the city centre in Piazza della Repubblica. Coin is also good for purchasing reasonably priced Italian fashions and accessories. Via dei Calzaiuoli. Oviesse is a discount clothing chain which can be found near the train station. Principe is a fancier store that is upmarket and exclusive and sells most lines including home ware and linen. Via del Sole 2, Santa Maria Novella.

Ponte Vecchio

Not only Florence's most famous bridge, it is also popular for its shopping. Tiny shops jutting out over the Arno are well preserved and filled with sparkling original jewellery and other pieces, made by some of the best goldsmiths in Italy. This bridge can get very congested so be ready for the pushing and shoving when it comes to window shopping here.

The Mall - Outlets

Indulge your taste for labels at half the price if you are happy with last season's designs. Catch the Mall's shuttle bus for €25 return. You must call to book. Local buses go twice daily. Via Europa 8, Leccio Regello.

Via de'Tornabuoni

This exclusive row is full of the names associated with high class fashion. Well worth a stroll to see some ritzy boutiques in magnificent buildings. Ferragamo is the place for designer boots and shoes and there is even a shoe museum upstairs. If you turn into Via della Vigna Nuova you will find more exclusive labels such as Dior, Prada, Gucci, Versace and many more.

MARKETS**Mercato Centrale di San Lorenzo**

Two markets in one: a covered fresh food market over two levels, a great way to shop for your homemade antipasto platters; and an outdoor market selling a variety of clothing, accessories and souvenirs. Open from 7am to 2pm Monday to Saturday.

Mercato di Sant'Ambrogio

Purchase some of the freshest and cheapest farmers' produce at this popular market. Located just north of Santa Croce. Open from 7am to 2pm Monday to Saturday. Piazza Ghiberti, Santa Croce.

Oliviero

The Tuscan fare here is very fresh and diverse. Via delle Terme. Phone 055 287 643.

Quattro Leoni, Italian

Located near Santo Spirito, a cosy place to enjoy a traditional Tuscan delight - asta with funghi porcini, pasta with unexpected pears or savoury Florentine steaks. Via dei Vellutini 1r. Phone 055 218 562.

Trattoria Cavolo Nero

This elegant eatery not easy to find but worth looking for. Via dell'Ardiglione. Phone 055 294 744.

I Quattro Amici

Offers many different varieties of seafood dishes in a modern setting. Via degli Orti Oricellari. Phone 055 215 413.

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