

Florence

Eguide



Florence (Firenze) is the capital of Tuscany in Italy on the Arno River, between the Adriatic and the Tyrrhenian seas. Florence was centre of the Italian Renaissance and left us with a place of churches, monasteries, museums, galleries and palaces. Home of Leonardo, Dante, Machiavelli and Michelangelo. Today Florence is alive with industry, commerce, culture, art, science and plenty for the visitor to do.

Florence was founded by the Romans in the first century B.C 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.

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 Neighbourhoods

The Duomo

It would be very hard not to stumble across this popular heart of Florence. Not only can you see this famous dome from most points of the city, but it's a popular meeting place for tourist groups and tours. The main attractions here are what most tourists come to see, The Duomo, Baptistery, Giotto's Bell Tower and Ponte Vecchio, as well as many churches and historical buildings.

Santa Maria Novella

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

Piazza della Signoria

If you are into statues than you will see plenty of the best in this large Piazza. This L shaped square is a few blocks south east of the Duomo. The most famous art gallery in the world is accessed here, the Uffizi. 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.

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 cafes and eateries. San Marco is more of a residential area of Florence so apart from the main tourist attractions it can be a little quieter, and easier to get around.

San Lorenzo

Hard to miss as it is famous for it's 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 neighbourhood 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 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, dead Italians.

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 busier than its cousin up the river the Ponte Vecchio.

Oltrarno

This area is located on the southern side of the Arno. It is quieter, more luscious and laid back. 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.

Florence Art Galleries

Cenacolo di Santo Spirito

A collection of 11th Century Roamesque sculpture. *Piazza di Santo Spirito 29 (055 28043).*

Galleria dell'Accademia

Home of Michelangelo's David sculpted in 1501 and believed to be the most beautiful man ever created in art form. There is 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, and make sure you take your time with him as photos are not allowed with the camera police watching carefully. *Via Ricasoli (055 238 8609).*

Galleria d'Arte Moderna

Artworks here are from the 18th to 20th century, modern for Italy's old and rich art history. Work by Tuscan impressionists feature strongly at this gallery. *Palazzo Pitti (055 238 8616).*

Galleria del Costume

The focus of this gallery are dresses and outfits, with some styles dating back to 1700's. A good display tracing the history of fashion in Florence. *Palazzo Pitti (055 238 8713).*

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 it goes on and on. Rooms 31 and 32 are pretty spectacular as well. *Piazzale degli Uffizi, 50122. (055 238 8651).*

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 (055 274 1011)*.

Galleria Santo Ficara

This is known in Florence as an important city gallery with modern art from Italian and international artists. *Via Ghibellina, Santa Croce (055 234 0239)*.

Loggia della Signoria

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

Florence Churches

Badia Fiorentina

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

Basilica Di Santa Croce

This is one of Venice'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 (055 246 6105)*.

Basilica di Santo Spirito

Several chapels here are filled with fine renaissance art. *Piazza di Santo Spirito (055 210 030)*.



Battistero

This church is stunning visually and is 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 (055 230 2885)*.

Cappella Brancacci

A chapel with frescoes and one of the early works of the Renaissance period. *Via Santa Monaca (055 276 8224)*.

Cappelle Medicee

Designed by Michelangelo in the 16th century and features many of his sculptures. *Piazza Madonna degli Aldobrandini (055 238 8602)*.

Chiesa di Ognissanti

A highlight here is the masterpiece *Ultima Cena* (Last Supper) by Ghirlandaio. *Borgo Ognissanti (055 239 6802)*.

Chiesa di Santa Margherita

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

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 and started in 1296. You can climb the dome, visit the crypt and marvel at the exquisite stained glass windows when you visit this popular church. *Piazza del Duomo (055 230 2885)*.

Santa Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi

A stunning highlight in this former convent is the fresco of the crucifixion of Christ. *Borgo Pinti 58 (055 247 8420)*.

Santa Maria Novella

The church houses Trinita by Masaccio and frescos by Paolo Uccello. The Spanish Chapel has early Renaissance frescoes. *Piazza di Santa Maria Novella (055 21 5918)*.

San Lorenzo

The incomplete façade provides for a rustic appearance whilst inside the church is a good example of the Renaissance period. At the back are the Medici chapels. The sacristy has nine Michelangelo sculptures. *Piazza San Lorenzo (055 21 6634).*

San Miniato al Monte

An 11th Century church on top of a hill. 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 (055 234 2731).*

Santa Trinita

Built in the 13th Century on the Oltrarno side of the Ponte Vecchio with frescos by Pontormo depicting the life of St Francis of Assisi. *Piazza di Santa Trinita (055 21 6912).*



Florence Historic Buildings

Campanile

The bell tower designed by Giotto rises to 85 metre above the Piazza del Duomo, known to be the most beautiful bell tower in Italy. *Piazza del Duomo (055 230 2885).*

Casa Buonarroti

The house was owned by Michelangelo but he never lived in it. Now contains a few of his pieces. *Via Ghibellina 70 (055 24 1752).*

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 (055 238 8610).*

Pitti Palace

On the south bank of the Arno the Medici family palace houses an art collection. Behind are the Boboli gardens. *Piazza de'Pitti 1 (055 238 8614).*

Palazzo Vecchio

The old city palace with the 95 metre high bell tower. Built by Arnolfo di Cambio in the 14th Century.

The Sala dei Gigli houses Donatello's Giuditta e Oloferne. *Piazza della Signoria (055 276 8224).*

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 (055 276 8465).*

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 (055 249 1708).*

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 also adding 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.

Palazzo Strozzi

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

Piazzale Michelangelo

Michelangelo square on a hilltop above Porta San Niccolò.



Florence Museums

Casa Buonarroti

Known for being the house that Michelangelo owned but never resided in, displays some of his earliest paintings and drawings. There is also a well stocked library and over 200 drawings by Florence's favourite son. *Via Ghibellina (055 241 752).*

Casa di Dante

A museum devoted to Dante and his work. Here you can have a glimpse into life as it was in Florence when Dante lived here. There are also various editions of his Divine Comedy. *Via Santa Margherita (055 21 9416).*

Loggia del Bigallo

This small museum has some fine art and sculpture treasures. *Piazza San Giovanni (055 230 2885).*

Macchine di Leonardo

Displays of Leonardo da Vinci's ideas. *Via Cavour 21 (055 29 5264).*

Museo Archeologico

This museum houses some amazing exhibits and relics of Greek, Roman and ancient Egyptian artefacts. *Via della Colonna (055 235 75).*

Museo dell'Antropologia e Etnologia

Established in 1869 and displays unusual exhibits that have a bearing on Italy's history. *Via del Proconsolo 12 (055 239 6449).*

Museo Horne

14th and 15th century collections of paintings, sculptures, furniture, ceramics and coins are displayed here. *Via de' Benci (055 244 661).*

Museo di Storia della Scienza

Museum of the History of Science is a 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 (055 26 5311).*

Museo degli Argenti

A vast display of the wealth of the Medici dynasty, here you can see displays of jewellery, vases and antiques. This museum consists of 25 rooms which are beautifully decorated; a highlight is the Cameo and Jewellery room. *Pallazzo Pitti (055 238 8709).*

Museum of Natural History

This vast museum has categories including Mineralogy and Lithography that has about 45,000 mineral Fragments. And Geology and Palaeontology that houses about 300,000 fossil and rock specimens as well as a botanical museum. *Via G. La Para.*

Museo di San Marco

Designed by Michelozzo and decorated by Fra Angelico during the period 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 (055 238 8608).*



The National Museum of the Bargello

Museo Nazionale Del Bargello houses Renaissance and Mannerist sculpture with works by Michelangelo, Donatello, Ammannati, Bandinelli, Andrea and Jacopo Sansovino, Desiderio da Settignano, Giambologna, and Antonio Rossellino.

There are many artistic highlights here including the room dedicated to Andrea del Verrocchio that houses a striking bronze statue of the ever popular David. *Via del Proconsolo 4 (055 238 8606).*

Museo Salvatore Ferragamo

If you love shoes head to this tiny museum. 80 years of footwear are displayed here with most formerly donning some very famous feet. *Via de' Tornabuoni (055 336 0456).*

Museo delle Porcellane

As the name suggests, fine porcelain are the main displays here, with some very intricate pieces that have survived the centuries. *Giardino di Boboli. (055 265 1816).*

Museo dell'Opera del Duomo

The Cathedral Museum, with works removed from the Duomo, including sculptures by Donatello. A treasure trove of artworks can be viewed here in airy spaciousness with a highlight being Michelangelo's famous obsession *Pieta*. *Piazza del Duomo 9, Florence (055 230 2885)*.

Museo Marino Marini

Displays over 200 works by the famous Italian sculptor, Marino Marini. *Piazza San Pancrazio 1 (055 219 432)*.

Museo Zoologico La Specola

Don't be expecting to see live animals as this museum houses an absurd collection of preserved and pickled animals and wax models of varying parts of the human anatomy. *Via Romana (055 228 8251)*.

Campo di Marte

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

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 (055 475 520)*.



Parco Carraia

This pretty, out of the way park is surrounded by countryside and is a lovely green space to relax and picnic in.

It can be found a short stroll from Porta San Miniato outside the city gates. *Via dell'Erta Caninna, San Niccolo*.

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.

Opificio delle Pietre Dure

Situated in the convent of San Niccolo a highlight are the beautiful stone paintings. *Via degli Alfani 78 (055 265 111)*
Florence Parks

Piazza d'Azeglio

A great place to intermingle with the locals, this park is great for outdoor picnics, relaxing and also has a small playground.

Boboli Gardens

A landscaped garden with fountains, ponds and sculptures. *Piazza de Pitti (055 265 1816)*.

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 (055 36 2233)*.

Teatro Romano

This hillside archaeological park is located approx 30 minutes from the city. Historical ruins of roman theatres and baths can be found here. *Fiesole (0555 9477)*.



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PO Box 1131
Noosaville DC
Queensland 4566
Australia