

FLORENCE

DISTANCE FROM THE BORG: 100KM



Rich in history, art, architecture, music, and cuisine, Florence is a veritable “best of” in the development of western culture. Thanks to a compact center, this capital city of 400,000 inhabitants and birthplace of the Renaissance, with hundreds of notable sights and museums, still remains a manageable and walkable city.

Before your trip, be sure to visit the Borgo library for our collection of Florence travel guides. For online research, Florence’s tourist office has a frequently updated site at www.firenzeturismo.it (click the British flag for English) with the latest in events and shows among many other useful features. For restaurant recommendations, *The Food Lover’s Guide to Florence: With Culinary Excursions in Tuscany* by Emily Wise Miller is a wonderful resource for mapping a foodie itinerary through Florence; it is available in the Borgo library. As you plan your visit, it is advisable to check in advance the days and hours a particular destination is open – our staff will be happy to assist.

Museums and points of interest

A note on reservations: Reservations allow you to bypass the regular line and obtain tickets to Florentine museums and monuments from a specially designated window at a particular point in time. They are not necessary for most sites, but are highly recommended for the Accademia and all but necessary at the Uffizi. Online ticketing is available at <http://www.florence-museum.com> or ask our staff if you would like assistance. The cost is 3 euro per reservation, but it isn’t charged until you pay for your tickets at the site.

The Cappelle Medicee (Piazza Madonna degli Aldobrandini) is an opportunity to glimpse the private lives of the powerful Medici from their personal chapel and mausoleum. Michelangelo created the allegorical Day, Night, Dawn, and Dusk figures. The chapel is an adjunct of the greater church, the Basilica di San Lorenzo (Piazza S. Lorenzo).

Walk in the steps of the Medici to the **Palazzo Medici Riccardi**, which may rank as Florence’s best, lesser-known artistic treasure. Michelozzo’s Renaissance palace, the first building in that style in Florence, received a Baroque facelift in 1659 when the Riccardi family took over. Benozzo Gozzoli’s 1459



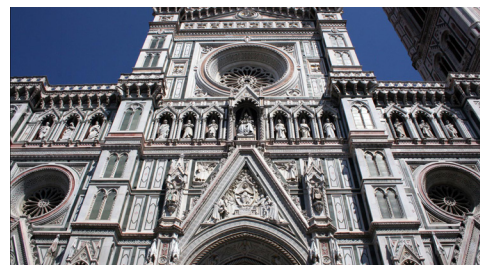
frescoes in the **Chapel of the Magi** should not be missed. Only eight visitors are allowed at a time, so ask our staff about calling ahead. Otherwise, the groups move relatively quickly and the art is definitely worth the wait.

The Accademia (Via Ricasoli) is Florence's second best-known museum after the Uffizi, one for which reservations are highly recommended. The museum began as Grand Duke Leopold's drawing-school teaching collection and includes a large selection of medieval religious works. The majority of visitors go to see Michelangelo's *David*, a monumental work. Be sure not to miss the sculptor's unfinished *Slaves*, tense figures who seem to be attempting escape from their stone prisons as one looks on. Lacking the smooth patina of a finished work, the skin of the physical, active figures truly seems to breathe. See our staff as far in advance as possible to inquire about reservations.

Florence's Gothic cathedral, **Santa Maria del Fiore**, is best known as the Duomo (Piazza del Duomo). The building itself was designed by Arnolfo di Cambio, but its crossing remained uncovered for one hundred years until Brunelleschi's 1436 competition-winning design solved the problem of how to cover such a large, open space. Most of the artwork was removed to the museum next door, but Vasari's impressive dome fresco survives in its original state. Giotto's bell tower stands beside the cathedral and his baptistery with the famous Ghiberti doors is across the piazza. One can climb the bell tower's 414 steps, but for the best climb, one should summit Brunelleschi's dome. The views from either are well worth the effort.

Across the Piazza del Duomo (9) stands the **Museo dell'Opera del Duomo** housing the works originally intended for the Cathedral and various other religious works from the city. The collection includes Arnolfo di Cambio's original works for the façade, Pisano's pieces for the bell tower, as well as works by della Robbia and Donatello, with models and drawings of the Cathedral itself. Two blocks south of the Duomo is Dante's house, **Casa di Dante** (Via Santa Margherita), a must for the literary pilgrim.

The Basilica di Santa Croce (Piazza Santa Croce), is Florence's Franciscan monastery and a particularly special spot in a city full of monuments. Designed by Arnolfo di Cambio in the 1290s, it took one hundred fifty years to complete.





The resultant Gothic basilica is a prominent, sober space, packed with artistic greats. Giotto and his pupils frescoed the walls, which alternate with tombs of Italian artists, thinkers, and aristocrats, whose names and numbers will astound. Vasari himself designed the tomb of Michelangelo. Others include Galileo Galilei, Leon Battista Alberti, and Gioachino Rossini. The **Pazzi Chapel** is Brunelleschi's perfectly proportioned meeting room for the monks, a true ode to Renaissance human scale and harmony. The monastery also houses a leather school, with premium handmade leather goods on sale daily. Just north of Santa Croce, one can visit the very home where Michelangelo was raised, the **Casa Buonarroti** (Via Ghibellina 70).



The National Museum of the Bargello (Via del Proconsolo 4) is to sculpture what the Uffizi is to painting, offering a chance to see all of the Renaissance greats in one location with minimal waiting. The collection also includes works by Michelangelo, Rossellino, the Sansovinos, della Robbia, and Donatello, including his *David*. Particularly interesting are the submissions presented by Ghiberti and Brunelleschi in the competition to design the doors of Florence Cathedral's baptistery in 1401.



The **Galleria degli Uffizi** (Piazzale degli Uffizi) is the first and last word on the Renaissance, housing such great pieces as Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and *Primavera* among works by Cimabue, Giotto, Duccio, Signorelli, da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Caravaggio. Crowds gather long before the gallery opens every morning, so it is highly advisable to make reservations in advance. Visit the café when you finish, not simply for the food, but for the view. It is possible to visit the Uffizi with a combination ticket that allows access to the famous passageway connecting the Pitti Palace to the government chambers on the north side of the river. The **Corridoio Vasariano** (or Vasari's Corridor) traverses the Ponte Vecchio above the crowd and allows a glimpse into Florentine aristocratic life.

Next to the Uffizi and facing the Piazza Signoria is the **Palazzo Vecchio**, the old city hall that is still in use today. It is possible to tour its sumptuous salons including Vasari's "Hall of the One Hundred" and apartments and witness local government in action. The Institute and Museum of the History of Science, **Museo di Storia della Scienza** (Piazza dei Giudici 1), highlights the collection of Galileo's original instruments.



From the Piazza Signoria south, the Ponte Vecchio is the most famous bridge spanning the Arno, and the only one spared by Hitler during the war. It houses rows of high-priced jewelry shops and is traversed by a special passageway by Vasari that connected the Pitti Palace to the Uffizi.

The Pitti Palace (Piazza Pitti 1) was built as a base for the Medici court. Today, it houses several museums, with integrated tickets buying one entrance to period rooms, art collections and treasures, a modern art gallery, a costume gallery, and the **Boboli Gardens**, which is a lovely green space in a city of stone.

Eating in Florence

Coffee and breakfast: Chiaroscuro (Via del Corso 36R), www.chiaroscuro.it is excellent stop for an espresso and during the day, there is a good selection of classic bar food, soups and sandwiches. **Antica Sosta degli Aldobrandi** (Piazza Madonna 6R) is just in front of the Medici Chapel and comes highly recommended for cappuccini, pastries, and simple sandwiches. **Vivoli Caffè** is a Florentine institution for its gelato, but its convenient location and excellent pastries make it an alternative stop for breakfast. A Florentine institution since a regal from the Savoia family opened it in 1872 when Florence was capital of Italy, many consider **Rivoire** (Piazza della Signoria 4a) a must for a snack (famous for its hot chocolate) and people watching.



Light lunch on the run: To eat warm, crusty sandwiches, join the line that forms outside of **Antico Noè** under the archway in the Volta di San Piero, 6r. You will be rewarded with a hot, pressed sandwich stuffed with meat, cheese, tons of vegetables, and a range of sauces. Try the salsa rucola, an arugola pesto mayonnaise, then walk the few blocks to the Piazza Santa Croce to eat. If lunchtime finds you in the Santo Spirito area, try **Gustapannino** (Via de' Michelozzi 13/r, Piazza Santo Spirito,) knowing that having to elbow one's way to the register comes hand-in-hand with a truly excellent sandwich.

Sitting down for lunch: **Caffè Coquinarius** (Via dell' Oche 15/r) is a great choice for a light or filling sit-down lunch, just steps from the Duomo. The broad offerings include interesting pasta and meat dishes, or a salad from the ten or so highly creative concoctions and a shared plate of crostini. Combining upmarket ambiance with light dining options, **Caffè Italiano** (Via della Condotta 12) is one of Florence's more famous restaurants, located between the Uffizi and Santa Croce. For something a bit more rustic and less expensive, try the nearby spin-off **Osteria del Caffè Italiano** (Via dell'Isola delle Stinche 11/13r) in the fourteenth-century Salviati Palace. The restaurant's pastry shop, **Dolcissimo** (Via Maggio 61r) is packed with gorgeous treats and the Pizzeria (Via Isola delle Stinche) also comes highly recommended with traditional Neapolitan pizzas. For a larger sit-down lunch, try **I Quattro Leoni** (Via Vellutini 1r,) nestled in the Oltrarno neighborhood.

Dinner: The latter section of lunch options would all be excellent for a more casual dinner. Also consider the famous **Acqua al Due** (Via della Vigna Vecchia 40r, reservations required) for their filetto all'aceto balsamico. **La Giostra** (Via Borgo Pinti 12r, 055241341,) prides itself on being intentionally hard to find although just steps from the Duomo. For something more formal, **Il Caffè Italiano** (Via Condotta 12, reservations necessary) is the perfect place for the Florentine T-bone or bistecca fiorentina.

Gelato and dessert: A particular favorite is the **Gelateria dei Neri**, named after its street, the Via dei Neri (20r.) at the convenient location between Santa Croce and the Uffizi. Some of the flavors in the three rows of cases are surprising, others classic, but all are wonderful. Interesting gelato choices include fig and ricotta or coconut and crisped rice. The fruit flavors are excellent, and in a fourth case facing the street, sample from a selection of granita flavors like coffee and blood orange. Not far away, **Vivoli** (Via Isole delle Stinche 7r) is the place everyone will ask you about upon your return home and for good reason, but be prepared to elbow your way to the register and pay extra for the name. Near the Duomo, **Grom** (Via delle Oche 24r) is the newest outpost of the famous Torino institution where ingredients are king, like the café flavor made with Guatemalan coffee. If afternoon finds you on the southern side of the Arno, try **Porta Romana** for a choice of hundreds of teas, coffee, decadent homemade crepes, fresh biscotti, and even cheesecake and to stock up on food souvenirs.





Markets and food souvenirs: **Mercato Centrale** in San Lorenzo is one of three nineteenth century covered food markets, built when Florence was the capital of Italy post-unification in 1860. Today, it is the number one foodie destination in a city of gourmet delights and could easily fill a few hours. One stand sells fresh pasta with a glass window where you can watch the production, others set up barrels of dried fruit, perfect for snacking during the day. There is plenty of fresh produce, cured meat, and local cheese to be sampled and purchased from a variety of vendors. There are also several stands that sell hot food for a lunch on the run, the most famous of which is Da Nerbone (inside the market and open for lunch only).

Even more local, and therefore cheaper than Mercato Centrale is the **Mercato Sant'Ambrogio** where Via Pietrapiana joins Borgo Santa Croce. Inside are meats and cheeses, outside are produce and flowers. The market's restaurant **Tavola Calda da Rocco** is open for lunch, an inexpensive and totally typical Italian experience. Point to your choice among the pre-prepared options and eat with the market workers.



Shopping: The biggest commercial stretches are along the **Via dei Calzaiuoli** (between the Duomo and the Palazzo Vecchio,) for major Italian retailers like Furla, Benetton, and Max&Co; the **Via del Corso/Borgo degli Albizzi** (between the Piazza della Repubblica and Sant'Ambrogio,) for souvenir and Italian specialty shops; and the **Borgo San Frediano/Via Santo Spirito/Borgo San Jacopo** area (from Porta San Frediano to the Ponte Vecchio in the Oltrarno neighborhood) for fashion and housewares. **The Via Tornabuoni** and the **Via della Vigna Nuova** (from Ponte Santa Trinità north) area houses the city's most upscale shopping, including flagships Loro Piano, Prada, Ferragamo, Fendi, Armani, Versace, Zegna, D&G, Gucci, and Pucci. Just to the east, the **Via Roma/Piazza della Repubblica/Via Calimala** stretch houses more major retailers, including two Zara outposts and the flagship Rinascente department store.



The Ferragamo Museum (Via Tournabuoni 2, www.ferragamo.com) in the Palazzo Spini Feroni is now open in its newly renovated space. Exhibits draw from the collection of 10,000 shoes created by the designer between 1920 and 1960 and chosen to focus on a particular theme. There are also some older, period shoes and a collection of handbags.

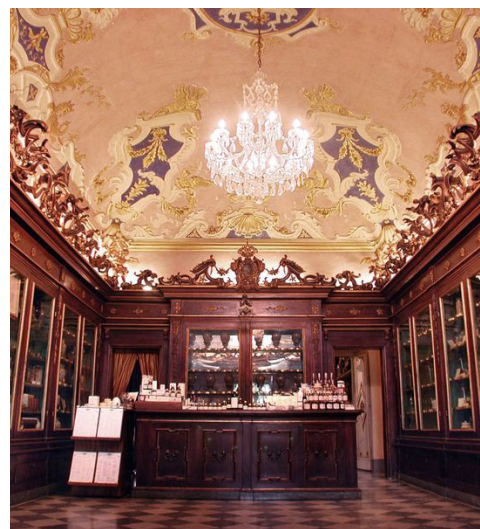
Florence, and even more so, its neighboring city Arezzo, are world renowned for gold jewelry production. Long rows of jewelers, each shop window more jam packed with glittering pieces than the next, line either side of the Ponte Vecchio. Reputable stores include Greys jewelry at two locations, in Piazza S. Piero and Borgo degli Albizzi, and Pestelli in Via Borgo SS. Apostoli, 20r. For extravagant, artistic creations, see Alessandro Dari in Via San Niccolò 115r. For inexpensive souvenir shopping, take the time to wander the San Lorenzo market or the **Mercato Nuovo**, which is a more manageable space south of the Piazza della Repubblica on the Via Calimala. The market is located in a covered loggia known lovingly as Il Porcellino because of Pietro Tacca's 1612 fountain.

For perfumes, lotions, and soaps that take their inspiration from the Tuscan hillside, visit the Apothecary at the church of **Santa Maria Novella** (Via della Scala 16.) **The Officina Profumo Farmaceutica di Santa Maria Novella** (Via della Scala 16) is the home base and store for the upmarket line of bath products, like pomegranate soap and rose water produced by Dominican monks. This historic pharmacy in a 14th century piazza is a fantastic site for sniffing and shopping, and an opportunity to bring home the alluring aromas of Tuscany like the very products provided at Borgo Finocchietto. Choose from a large array of aromatic salves, tinctures, and soaps.

Another classic Florentine product is the paper, both marbled and intricately decorated with ink and gold leaf. It is widely available in the city. A handmade leather-bound journal or address book makes a lovely souvenir. **The Giulio Giannini & Figlio** store at Piazza Pitti 37 has been in the family for six generations

Getting to Florence

Begin by leaving Buonconvento, heading north toward Siena on the S2. As you approach Siena, follow signs for "Firenze" as they direct you to turn left at the big stoplight outside of the city. Continue downhill and enter a roundabout, which you will exit at 10:00 where signs point for "Firenze." This is the Raccordo Siena-Firenze, which continues approximately 60 km to Certosa. There, the highway empties into another rotary. Exit at 11:00 toward "Certosa" and "Firenze Centro." Follow this road straight until a "tutti le direzioni" sign directs you right at a fork. Turn a slight right onto the Via del Gelsomino. At the top of this hill is a stoplight (the Viale del Poggio Imperiale,) from which you have several choices, depending on where you prefer to park.



Parking at the **Porta Romana** is nearby and offers the quickest route out of the city at the end of the day. At the stoplight, turn left where signs direct to “Porta Romana.” Continue downhill and into a rotary. Exit the rotary at 2:00 to go under the arches of the Porta Romana. Parking is immediately on your extreme left. Take a pass from the machine and drive along the long narrow lot to find a space.

Parking at the **Santa Maria Novella train station** gives one direct access to the heart of the city. From the Porta Romana, exit the rotary to the right just after the gate and follow the road alongside the wall. Follow signs for the train station (a picture of the head of a train, or the word “Stazione,”) as they snake around the city’s circumference, through several roundabouts and across the river west of the main city. Follow signs as they turn you right off of the Viale circling the city and into its center. This will take you along the right side of the train station. As you near its front, follow signs to turn left into its underground parking deck. Take a ticket and pay on your way back to the car.

TIMING IN BRIEF:

75 to 90 min drive

Minimum 3 hours exploration