



nileGUIDE

ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



Chi King

Top 10 Bars and Clubs in Tuscany

Siena, Florence, 7 Days

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Guide Description



AUTHOR NOTE: Tuscany is not the most cosmopolitan destination when it comes to its bars and clubs, but you can definitely count on a memorable Italian experience with some good quality wines and local entertainment on your night out in Florence or Siena.

Some of the best choices for drinks are young and loud places like Barone Rosso (II), where you get to dance to some nice live music, or Caffè Sant' Ambrogio, which tends to bring together large crowds of locals on weekends.

You see, in Tuscany, location is a crucial element when you choose where to go out, because enjoying the beautiful scenery and the attractive people is something Italians are really good at. The best place to start practicing these skills yourself is Enoteca Coquinarius, where you can order a glass of local wine and sit back and enjoy your true Italian moment.

contact:

tel: 0577 226656
<http://www.caffedelcorsosien.a.it/>

location:

Via Banchi di Sopra 25
Siena 53100

hours:

Mo to Su from 09:00 PM to
01:00 AM

1 Caffè del Corso

DESCRIPTION: Very centrally located, the place is filled with youngsters at aperitif time but also stays open late. There is a large choice of snacks downstairs but also sitting room upstairs. Excellent fruit based cocktails and live music. © wcities.com



Caffè del Corso

contact:

tel: +39 0577 4 7154
fax: +39 0577 4 7338
<http://www.ristorantealmarsili.it/inglese.htm>

location:

via del Castoro 3
Siena 53100

2 Ristorante Enoteca Al Marsili

DESCRIPTION: A very beautiful restaurant with traditional medieval interiors, Al Marsili offers authentic Siennese cuisine. 'Fat spaghetti in meat-and-mushroom sauce', 'shell pasta in a strong spinach-and-sausage sauce' and 'veal scallops with tomatoes and tarragon' are some of their specialties. The restaurant also has a wine bar which offers a wide variety of drinks to go with the food. One of the best places to enjoy fine dining in Siena. © wcities.com



photo courtesy of ristorantealmarsili

contact:

tel: +39 0577 28 6686
<http://www.barone-rosso.com/>

location:

Via dei Termini 9
Siena 53100

hours:

Mo to Su from 09:00 PM to
03:00 AM

3 Barone Rosso (II)

DESCRIPTION: Almost exclusively frequented by the young, there is live music every evening with dancing, beer and cold snacks. It is right in the center and can be reached by walking through the medieval streets of the city, close to Piazza Indipendenza. © wcities.com



Photo courtesy of Barone Rosso (II)

contact:

tel: 0577 292265
<http://www.comune.siena.it/main.asp>

location:

Piazza il Campo 1
Siena 53100

4 Teatro dei Rinnovati

DESCRIPTION: It would be difficult to find a more interesting theatre than this one which stands inside the Palazzo Pubblico where the republic of Siena's government body used to meet. It offers an excellent series of productions as well as classical music and opera. Students get reduced rates. Currently, it is being renovated. © wcities.com



Photo courtesy of Teatro dei Rinnovati

contact:

tel: +39 055 241035
<http://www.nottefiorentina.it/cafe-fiorenze/caffe-santambrogio.html>

location:

Piazza Sant' Ambrogio
Florence Tuscany 50121

hours:

10:30-3am, closed on Sunday

5 Caffe Sant' Ambrogio

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Grab a glass of wine and sit on the steps of the church. Watch life pass by.

DESCRIPTION: A night spot that accumulates a young crowd from mid 20s to early 40s. The place is hopping on weeknights and weekends. This caffe` humbles on simple and divine. There is not another place in Florence where one feels relaxed while people-watching during a busy night out. The nightlife in this area is up-and-coming with an accent on chic. Sant' Ambrogio is a meeting spot since the piazza connects with 5 streets. It is a pedestrian area with little or no cars trying to pass by. Caffè Sant' Ambrogio has an ample selection of wines. They serve lunch and have aperitivi every night from 7pm-10pm. With an array of seasonal dishes to pair with your red or white glass of wine. The staff and locals thrive on this wine bar because it is quaint, subtle and full of energy. Come and visit this zone where Florentines look their best but also learn to let loose. © NileGuide



Katie Greenaway

contact:

tel: +39 055 295232
<http://www.oldstove.it/index.html>

location:

Piazza della Signoria 30r
Florence Tuscany 50122

hours:

Every day from 10am-2am

6 Old Stove Signoria

DESCRIPTION: Found in the heart of Florence in Piazza della Signoria, OldStove Signoria, formally known as Michael Collins Pub, is a perfect stop for the museum-going folk. Close to the Uffizi Gallery you can enjoy a cold European beer and relax before you head to the next museum. The nightlife here is full of action and energy. There is karaoke performed in the basement on most weekends. Many students and tourist and locals call OldStove Signoria home. There is an upstairs where you can watch the football match that is on that day. In the basement there is an enormous space where many bands come to play live and other nights people tend to sit down and chit chat the night away. The staff are very friendly and speak English pretty well. The outside cafe area is usually full while the weather is nice. A great spot to people-watch in the piazza. When there is karaoke things usually can get pretty lively while the drinks keep flowing. © NileGuide



Katie Greenaway

contact:

tel: +39 055 293082
fax: +39 055 293457
<http://www.spaceelectronic.net/>

location:

Via Palazzuolo 37
Firenze FI

hours:

Daily 11pm-4am

7 Space Electronic Discoteca

DESCRIPTION: Three levels of dancing, hip grinding, karaoke and house music definitely make you feel like your taking off at Space Electronic Discoteca. You can't miss the giant neon sign and overhang outside, but the lack of windows will definitely make you wonder whats happening on the other side of the rope. Come here if you are single, with a big group or solo if your brave(not if you a lady). Depending on the amount of liquid courage you consume you can even sing some karaoke. Every night there is a party going on. Come on down!



Space Club

contact:
tel: +39 055 280260
<http://www.oldstove.it/index.html>

location:
Piazza San Giovanni 4r
Florence Tuscany 50122

hours:
Every Day 10am-2am

8 Old Stove Duomo

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Take advantage of the air-conditioning in the summer time.

DESCRIPTION: Old Stove Duomo sits in Piazza del Duomo where people come to gaze at the mighty Duomo. There is an outdoor cafe that many tourist enjoy to rest their feet. They offer pub food such as hot dogs, sandwiches and burgers. A traditional Irish pub atmosphere, OldStove Duomo has been a meeting place for many people. The staff is very friendly and down-to-earth. They have a wide range of beers from the most important Irish, Belgian, Scottish and Italian beers. There are many international beers bottled or on tap as well, such as Budweiser and Corona. As an alternative to their great selection of beer, Strongbow cider is also available along with a full bar featuring a great selection of signature cocktails, and wine. Happy hours from Sunday to Thursday 6:00pm to 9:00pm. You can also pay with American dollars for happy hours as well. Ask the bartender when you stop in for a cold brew.

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<http://www.coolintown.com/c/scheda/Old-Stove-Duomo/26>

contact:
tel: 39 55 230 2153
<http://www.coquinarius.it/>

location:
Via delle Oche, 15r
Florence 50123

hours:
Mon-Sat 9am-until late

9 Enoteca Coquinarius

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

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

DESCRIPTION: A wine bar full of warmth and the scents of the seasons, Coquinarius has a small menu of different types of bruschette for antipasti, tasty meats and fish. Salads are a forte here; creative choices include toppings such as sun-dried tomatoes, eggplant, sunflower seeds, zucchini flowers or pear. This elegant and striking enoteca that has a wide range of wines from Italy, California, Argentina, Austria and Chile. The camerieri(waitstaff) are very kind and full of life. It is a great place to sit for the afternoon, bring a book, enjoy the chiacchiere(chatter) of the other patrons, or get lost in the glass of wine. Wines are served by the glass or bottle in this relaxed, inexpensive experience of true Italian style. Even though it is located right smack dab in the city center where there are tons of tourist traffic, however you will find the place filled with Florentines enjoying an afternoon bite at this venue.

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editor

Siena Snapshot

History

It would have been much too easy to have built a city on a plain, and the builders of many Tuscan cities have always been known for enjoying a challenge. In keeping with this tradition, Siena originated on three hills, on land full of orchards and gardens, and provided tough construction work for even the most ingenious builders. These three hills, bordered by the Elsa and the Arbia, marked out the original three sections of the city. These three sections, Di Città, San Martino, and Camollia, were later joined by over 50 districts, which have now been concentrated into 17. There are several different stories about the foundation of the city. Though originally an Etruscan settlement, it may have long been under the rule of a Gaulish tribe named the Saenones. Others maintain that it was Senio, the son of Remus, who was the founder of the city. The discussion is by now somewhat old and tired, and yet it still monopolizes the conversations here. There is no doubt, however, that the city is of Etruscan origin, and was a part of the Roman Empire under Augustus. Lombards governed the city during the Dark Ages and they were later succeeded by Frankish counts. This state of affairs continued on into the next millennium, when, faced with such a cumbersome Guelph neighbor as Florence, Siena chose to lay its loyalty with rivaling Ghibelline forces. Siena was Ghibelline of sorts until 1186 when it was besieged by imperial forces, but fortunately this rule did not last long and soon the city returned to its former state. The years between 1235 and 1236 were a turning point for the city, as Florence imposed a difficult peace-treaty upon Siena who lost possession of Poggibonsi and Montalcino. Times were also changing on a domestic level, when the nobility were forced to accept a city ruled by a council made up of both noblemen and merchants. In 1260, Siena enjoyed military revenge over Florence at the battle of Montaperti, after which they humiliated the flag of Florence by leading it around the city on a donkey.

Unfortunately, this act of vengeful defiance was to be one of Siena's last, as the fortunes of the empire were in decline. A papal excommunication as a result of the city's Ghibelline allegiance threw off the entire economy, as it legally prevented debtors from paying their dues into Siennese

banks. The city was then defeated at Monteriggioni on June 11, 1269 and was facing both military and political defeat as the Ghibelline leader Provenzano Salvani died. A new Guelph city government allied to Florence was formed, and despite the change, this new administration worked better than expected. This was a time of great commercial expansion, artistic exploration, and civic virtue; however, the good times couldn't last forever, and in 1326, there was a period of economic decline, which was in turn followed by the plague in 1348. At this time, the Ghibellines regained power and took over the government alongside Charles IV. Finally, out of desperation, the city came under the control of Gian Galeazzo Visconti, until his death three years later.

These trials and tribulations were hardly isolated in central Italy towards the end of the middle ages. Both from a military and political point of view, the Golden Age saw more flashes of iron and steel weapons than the metal itself. However, one thing is certain: the people who hail from Siena come from a land that has been fed and watered with the blood of its people. In 1530, King Carlo V hurled himself into the fray, and created his own government, but after 20 years a rebellion exploded and the imperialists were hounded out. After an impromptu agreement made with their rival Florence, which neither worked nor lasted, the battle came to a head in 1553, and during the two year siege that followed, the defenders of Siena lived on insects and mice.

The beginning of the so-called "Iron Century" coincided with the end of the cultural age of art and literature, which in the course of a century had seen the likes of Machiavelli, Leonardo, Raffaello, Carpaccio, Crivelli, Bosch, Lotto, Titian, Piero della Francesca, Pontormo, Palladio, Tintoretto, the Della Robbia, Parmigianino and Dürer. The authority of Siena then fell to the Medici clan, was subsequently handed over to the Lorena family, and finally came under the rule of the Savoy dynasty based in Turin. The rest, as they say, is history.

©

Hotel Insights

Siena is a blessed city that attracts a diverse mix of tourists, thanks to a number of different attractions. It is a university town as well as a center of art and religion, not forgetting a delicious gastronomic culture! As a result, the city caters for a wide variety of visitors. The hotels range from luxury accommodation, which offers comfort and charm in settings that seem to date back to the Middle Ages, to hostels or bed and breakfast lodgings that are perfect for travelers on a more restricted budget. These places are all over the town, all you need to do is look up and you will see them—as fortunately the various types of accommodation are not limited to one area, but rather can be found in all the districts. The city has become ever more welcoming in the last few years, as open borders and increased globalization have led to more tourists and increased competition in the industry. The challenge of innovation has been accepted and won, and the evidence of this can be found in the current range of activities that the city has to offer.

In the surrounding area, there are many quality hotels and lodgings, which have also sprung up in the last few years thanks to the consistent presence of foreign tourists who come for long-term stays. It is no coincidence that some areas are now ironically nicknamed Chiantishire or Toskana Fraktion. This is a particular kind of tourist trend that demands high quality service, and often tourists rent out entire villas with grounds or apartments in town. Even the smallest villages now offer decent accommodation on a level that is high above the norm. There are also good quality, large, youth hostels in the area such as the Ostello Guidoriccio.

Agriturismo However, the true growth industry is in the large number of farms that now accept guests, such as the Agriturismo dell'Arnano. The idea of a farm holiday was a foreign invention that was imported to Italy, originally intended to get the holidaymakers to help pick olives or thresh grain; however, this led to the ruination of both the holiday and the crops! The idea started in the Trentino-Alto Adige and Veneto regions but has really found its place in central Italy. The farms now have a much more positive image, and guests can stay in villas or country

Siena Snapshot continued

cottages and have the chance to play all kinds of sports in the fresh countryside air. Archery and horseback riding are particularly popular. These farm holidays also work well because they are near the city and are very cost effective. Guests may also make use of centers that offer a new kind of gourmet tourism, teaching people how best to taste and appreciate local resources. This is an extremely worthy way to avoid the prevailing standardization of food. Guests study dishes before they taste them and learn the history of the oils and wines (the history is just as delicious as the flavors themselves), all of which is part of local culture and merits consideration. There are also many tours dedicated to a single wine or delicacy.

Spas Another attraction worth mentioning is the spas. Chianciano offers spas and hotels, including the Grand Hotel Chianciano Terme, as well as a range of pleasures for those seeking thermal parks with massages, gyms, a dietary center, and courses on well-being. Everything available is of a very high standard— as it should be for one of the most famous thermal water centers in Italy and Europe.

©

Restaurants Insights

The food in this area is more or less typical of the whole of Tuscany, which specializes in the great marriage of flavors and aromas. However, let's start with the distinguishing factors that set Siena apart. If you are looking for something slightly different, this is the place to be, as the high standard of food in Siena makes difficult to find fault in anything new you may try. A great example is *theribollita*, a vegetable soup eaten with bread *croûtons*, a favorite dish that can spark a number of heated discussions in its nuances. Every table has its own variations and secrets that aren't mentioned in the recipe books, but rather are only discovered by tasting.

There is a diverse range of restaurants in the city, from five star restaurants to farms that offer homemade food. One thing they all have in common though, is high quality. *Osteria le Logge* is a friendly and lively establishment that is a local favorite, and a busy one at that. Be sure to head there early to get a good seat. If you are looking for a light snack during the heat of the day, *Taverna del Capitano* offers some great

light dishes and wine options. With a menu that changes on a daily basis to highlight the best produce available, you are ensured a fresh meal on your table. For a dining experience with a view of the Tuscan countryside, check out *Bel Soggiorno* and delight in the carefully crafted delicacies as you gaze out at the rolling hills that surround the city.

Even a simple trip to the market can be enlivened by the diversity of food surrounding you, and it is not uncommon to face such dilemmas as which type of olive oil to purchase. It is common knowledge here that there are many different types of olive oil, each with a specific purpose—some should be used solely for cooking and others for seasoning. Once you have climbed that hurdle, you may face the debate of which oil to use for different types of cooking projects—if you are cooking quickly, then you should use oil made from mature olives, which is full of flavor and lively; but if, on the other hand, there is a slow cooking time, the oil should have a very delicate flavor and be odorless. And the seasoning oils? There is a sweet kind of olive oil, made from mature olives, with a light odor and flavor of almonds and walnuts. There is also fruity oil that smells of fresh fruit with a bitter, spicy aftertaste. And finally, don't forget the character oil, made from unripe olives with an aggressive, spicy flavor. The choice is yours— well actually, the choice is up to your host, which is just as well, as they will know what to choose from experience. If you are very brave, try to spark a debate with the cook to persuade them to use one kind of oil instead of another. It is rare that anyone ever wins in this kind of discussion. To pick up some high-quality wine of your own, *Ristorante Enzo* is a combination restaurant and shop that serves customers a wide variety of products that can then be purchased and shipped worldwide.

The local dishes are fast becoming international successes, with such favorites including *pappardelle* (wide strips of pasta) with hare sauce, wild boar stew, black and white cabbage soup, *fagioli all'uccelletto*, and *panzanella*, a summer salad of soaked bread, basil, onions and tomatoes. You can sink your teeth into various kinds of sheep's cheese and homemade sausages, which are particularly tasty. As for desserts, the *panforte* is the most famous, a nougat-

type delicacy that is also a kind of calorific bomb with several variations. If this isn't enough to satisfy, there is *alcantucci*, biscuits served with the sweet dessert wine known *asvin santo*. This wine was originally made from grapes that were left to wither in large kitchens amongst the fumes and odors of the food, and some connoisseurs took pride in being able to recognize the different wine of every family in the area. In Siena, the *Settimana dei Vini* or Wine Week is one of the cornerstones of Italian wine culture. Wines such as the *Chianti* originate in this area, while *do Rosso*, *Brunello* and *Montalcino* come from an area closer to Florence. It would be difficult to find a better region for red wine, and outside competitors have a hard time living up to their rivals. If you are a fan of *Brunello* wine, *Poggio Antico* will surely leave you satisfied, as the knowledgeable staff will lead you on a wine tasting adventure guaranteed to please the palate.

©

Nightlife Insights

Siena veritably leaks antiquity from its walls and atmosphere but it is hardly behind the times. That's because it retains its youth and verve, thanks to the university and the constant attraction that the area holds for young people from all over the world. As a result, there is no danger of being bored here at night. During the summer, open-air feasts and festivals are held every weekend, often at the same time, providing party goers with a variety of options on the same evening. In addition, there are masses of places for young people to meet up, such as pubs, bars and discos. The difference is in the size, as there are not infinite, huge places where you can lose yourself in Siena. The largest discos are on the outskirts of the city, but due to the small size of the town, this doesn't mean that they are very far away.

Pubs & Bars The pubs and bars are mostly in the center of town. The *osterie*, or inns, offer a chance for guests to sample some of the area's great wines. Here you can recapture some of the old flavors of the city, and has become an activity that is being rediscovered by young people. This is not an incentive for heavy drinking, but a way to enjoy a good wine as it should be served—accompanied by a snack. There is also the opportunity to learn about wine making

Siena Snapshot continued

techniques, and how different wines are made using these traditional methods. For anyone who feels like a beer, there are a number of English and Irish-style pubs that are open until late at night—though this is in comparison to other places in Siena, not to bars in other towns such as Rimini, where a closing time of 3a is more likely to be the norm. The Dublin Post is your typical Irish pub, featuring wood interiors, loud music, and lots of Guinness. Music can be heard almost anywhere, and there is live music of all kinds to be found. If you are in the mood for some fast-paced music and dancing, head to Il Barone Rosso, a popular night-spot for students in the university.

Music & Theatre Of course, drinking and dancing aren't the only ways to spend an evening in Siena. There is also a large choice of cultural activities to keep you from idleness. The university organizes an annual "Parole e Musica" (Words and Music) program, which covers dramatic arts and offers good, inexpensive shows. There are also all the traditional entertainments, with eight cinemas and theatres that have excellent seasons throughout the winter, such as the Teatro dei Rinnovati and the Teatro dei Rozzi. There are also classical music concerts in winter, organized by the Accademia Chigiana, which take place in the halls of the Palazzo Chigi Saracini. Students on a budget need not fear, as there are a variety of discounts to be found. Siena has also become known as a jazz center, as it holds a variety of concerts between the end of July and the first week in August and which feature a host of famous names. In addition, Siena has become renowned for the study of jazz theory that takes place here.

The Palio Palio is the summer's biggest event for residents of the city, and is also of great interest to visitors seeking a thrill. The people of the various districts of Siena follow their ritual of strategies, hopes, prayers, dramas, and more-- all to win a horse race. No visit to Siena is complete without this exciting race to cap off the fun. ©

Things to Do Insights

Visiting Siena is like learning to play the guitar. For the basics, all you need is one afternoon. To become an expert, or at least a good player, a lifetime might just be long enough. Siena is small and intimate(it

doesn't take long to cross) and is built almost in a circle around the main square of the Campo. To really get to know it, study its history and appreciate the city as it deserves, could take years. Of course, the modern traveler doesn't have much time. Therefore, visitors need to make a series of choices, and also take into consideration that the outskirts of the city should also be visited and appreciated.

Il Campo is the reverse of Venice, where there is only one piazza and the other squares are referred to as campi. Here, there is one campo, or field and the others are the piazza. Anyone wanting to be fussy, can refer to it as the Piazza del Campo. The Campo slants and has a shell shape with a very simple, central, layout that is more of a decoration than a symbol, in nine sections that represent the Council of Nine that once ruled the city. The square faces the Torre del Mangia, the 14th-century tower and the Palazzo Pubblico, the town hall that is full of interest. Nearby is the Palazzo Piccolomini and the Palazzo Sansedoni as well as the Loggia della Mercanzia.

Behind the Loggia is the true heart of the city, which leads into the Via di Città, Banchi di Sopra and the Banchi di Sotto, which is the center of action. Walking up Via di Città, visitors will reach the extraordinary point from where, in a space of a few meters the Duomo, the Spedale Santa Maria Della Scala, the Palazzo del Magnifico and the Museum dell'Opera Metropolitana can all be seen. Not far from here is the Pinacoteca Nazionale, the National Art Gallery. This is the value of Siena, rich in architecture, art and alternative attractions.

Chianti No one could come here and not dedicate at least one day to the Chianti region, in order to taste wine at its source, in season. The same motives, with even more cultural motivation, will lead visitors southwards, towards Montalcino, westwards and eastwards to Montepulciano. A visit to Pienza should also not be missed and Cetona, a medieval, tranquil village, or Turrina Siena, on the border of Umbria. **Pienza** The town of Pienza was commissioned by Pio II Piccolomini and designed by Bernardino Rossellino. Corsignano transformed Pienza into an ideal Renaissance city in the middle of the fifteenth century the incarnation of a utopia that stretched beyond architecture. Montepulciano is partly set in the Val di

Chiana and partly in Val d'Orcia, and is home to monuments and buildings of renaissance interest. It gives the name to the vineyard that produces the Nobile di Montepulciano, which is an experience in itself.

Chiusi The town of Chiusi is of Etruscan origin, with probable earlier Osco-Umbrina settlements. Its height of power was when the Etruscans dominated Rome. The cathedral and the Etruscan museum should both be visited.

Montalcino Montalcino can be reached by taking the Cassia road. This village was the last to give into Cateau Cambresis and to enter the orbit Cosimo I de Medici. It had even rebuilt the Siennese Republic in exile. Nowadays the Civic Museum and the Diocesano and Archaeological Museums are well worth visiting as are the local wine cellars which produce Brunello di Montalcino, one of the best red wines in existence.

San Gimignano San Gimignano is the city of towers and is found on the road leading to Florence. The turreted horizon must be seen at least once, just to understand what it felt like to live in the dark ages. The cathedral, Civic Museum and art gallery, are all worth visiting.

©

Travel Tips

Getting There:

By Air: Because Siena doesn't have an airport, international flights to the Tuscan region come into Rome or Milan, and then connect to either the Aeroporto Galileo Galilei (PSA) in Pisa or the Amerigo Vespucci Airport (FLR) in Florence.

Major airlines for Pisa Airport include:

Air France (+1 800 871 1366/http://www.airfrance.com/)

Alitalia (+1 800 223 5730/http://www.alitalia.com/)

British Airways (+1 800 247 9297/http://www.british-airways.com/)

Continental (+1 800 525 0280/http://www.continental.com/)

Delta (+1 800 221 1212/http://www.delta.com/)

Siena Snapshot continued

Iberia(+1 800 772 4642/http://www.iberia.com/)

Lufthansa(+1 800 645 3880/http://www.lufthansa.com/)

Northwest(+1 800 225 2525/http://www.nwa.com/)

United(+1 800 241 6522/http://www.ual.com/)

US Airways(+1 800 428 4322/http://www.usairways.com/)

Florence's Amerigo Vespucci Airport(+39 055 373 3498/http://www.aeroporto.firenze.it/) stands just six miles northwest of downtown Florence, but handles a limited number of airlines, such as:

Air France(+1 800 871 1366/http://www.airfrance.com/)

Alitalia(+1 800 223 5730/http://www.alitalia.com/)

Lufthansa(+1 800 645 3880/http://www.lufthansa.com/)

Swissair(+1 800 221 4750/http://www.swiss.com/)

By Train: Trains are available from Florence to Siena through Trenitalia(+39

89 20 21/http://www.trenitalia.com/), a railway system that provide system throughout Italy and the rest of Europe. The train station at Siena is located at the bottom of the hill and you need to take a bus or be prepared for a steep walk up to the historic center.

By Bus: There are frequent buses(local, regional, or express) that connect Siena with the numerous smaller hill towns in Tuscany as well as major hubs like Florence, Pisa, Arezzo and other cities.

Getting Around: Siena is best seen traveling by car or bus. Some bus lines that provide service include:

Compagnia Pisana Trasporti(+39 800 012 773/http://www.cpt.pisa.it/)

Lazzi Eurolines(+39 055 363 041/http://www.lazzi.it/)

Tra-In(+39 0577 204 111)

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Fun Facts

Siena

Country: Italy

Siena by the Numbers:

Population: 54,500

Elevation: 1194 feet

Average Annual Rainfall: 29.5 inches

Average January Temperature: 41° F

Average July Temperature: 71° F

Quick Facts:

Major Industries: Tourism

Electricity: 220 volts AC, 50Hz, standard two or three pin plugs

Time Zone: GMT+1

Country Dialing Code: 39

City Code: 0577

Did You Know?

No auto traffic is allowed within the walls of the old city. There are various car-parks outside the city, and pedestrians rule the cobblestone streets within.

Siena is home to the world's oldest bank, Monte dei Paschi, which has been in business since 1472.

Orientation:

Siena is located in the Tuscany region of Italy.

©

Florence Snapshot

Local Info

Its art and architecture is what sets Florence apart from other cities in Italy. From the Duomo to the Ponte Vecchio to San Miniato, there is so much to see and explore. Each neighborhood has something to show off. Santa Croce's trademark is its leather shops, while San Frediano has a ton of unique artisan shops that have been operating for centuries. Campo di Marte, meanwhile, is all about viola, the color of the Fiorentina football (soccer) team. But it is the city's marketplaces that really showcase the hustle and bustle of daily life. There are markets all over the city in every neighborhood. Each having their own personality and locals that have been coming for many years. The one thing that is great about Florence is that you can easily get lost and end up finding a treasure. There are always little streets that nobody ever sees and shops that are kept a secret. Explore the city because there is so much more to see than the Ponte Vecchio.

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

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

smaller buildings as well. You will notice some of the windows that are missing. The whole frame of the window is there but the window is missing. Italians were taxed higher when they had so many windows.

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

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

San Giovanni (Duomo)

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

and the Tribunale di Firenze (which is housed in the Complesso di San Filippo Neri) are also in this district.

Santa Maria Novella

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

Santa Croce

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

Santo Spirito (Oltrarno)

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

Florence Snapshot continued

around the Belvedere that was spared from demolition in the 19th Century. Included in this is the lovely medieval gate of the Porta Romana.

Campo di Marte & Fiesole

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

Gavinana & Galluzzo

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

Isolotto & Legnaia

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

Rifredi

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

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History

The history of Florence stretches back as far as the 8th Century BCE when a primitive settlement lived in the valley, close to the Arno. "Florentia" is recorded

as an official Roman colony in 59 BCE and was designed according to the typical Roman road system, which can be seen in many Italian cities today. There are two principal roads: the *cardo* descends from the Baptistery to Via Roma and continues on to Via Calimala, while the *decumanus* stretches from via del Corso to via degli Speziali until it reaches via degli Strozzi. The Forum (public meeting place and market) was built at the point where the roads meet, on what is now the Piazza della Repubblica. During Roman rule, Florence was the most important city in Roman Tuscany.

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

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

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

construction of the third and final set of city walls.

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

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

World War Two had a devastating effect on Florence. The city sustained many

Florence Snapshot continued

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

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Hotel Insights

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

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

Santa Maria Novella

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

of the long list of hotels that will welcome you and treat you well, as you enjoy your trip to this beautiful city.

San Giovanni(Duomo)& San Marco

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

Santo Spirito(Oltrarno)

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

Campo di Marte& Fiesole

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

Novoli

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

Gavinana& Galluzzo

If you want to lose yourself in the midst of the city and be immersed in the green of Viale dei Colli, then the Grand Hotel Villa Cora is ideal, you can take a dip in the pleasant pool, or you can try the four star hotel, Relais Certosa in Certosa del Galluzzo, with its own splendid tennis courts (should you fancy a little exercise). On the outskirts of the south the Holiday Inn Garden Court and the Sheraton beckon. If

looking for a view of the Arno, then the Park Palace is for you.

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Restaurants Insights

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

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

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

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

The soups and minestre are well worth trying and they are derived from peasant traditions. The most delicious, famous Florentine soup is ribollita, made with a mixture of stale bread, beans, cavolo nero (a black cabbage grown in Tuscany,

Florence Snapshot continued

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

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

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

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

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

Pizza Italy is famous for its pizza and pizzerias can be found in almost every nook and cranny of Florence, although getting a typical Neapolitan-style pizza might be

a bit of a challenge: Florentine crusts tend to be thin and crispy, cooked in a wood-fueled oven. If you prefer the "traditional" Neapolitan pizza, it is almost always possible to ask for a pizza with doppia pasta (double crust), which means you'll get a softer, thicker crust. Try *Ciro & Sons* for a slice of Naples in Florence.

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

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

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

Cinema

Going to the cinema has become an increasingly popular pastime since the mid-1990s, and the number of cinemas has increased to meet the needs of the people in Florence; many of the city's multiplexes have been renovated and reopened. This change in the amount of cinemas that exist has created a climate of "non-stop cinematography" and fewer cinemas close down during the summer months. Florentine cinemas are very varied; there are modern one-screen halls, massive multiplexes and small independent cinemas. The Cecchi Gori Group owns the most cinemas in the city and the majority show general releases and (dubbed) American blockbusters, although the Atelier group makes sure that Art house theatre is kept alive. Atelier have six cinemas that show good quality independent films and directors and actors will often attend previews and answer

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

Theatre

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

Caf s, Bars & Pubs

In Florence (and everywhere else) most people want to go out and stay out until late at the weekend; this city has a large number of bars and discos, which people can enjoy any day of the week. For a quiet evening, drinking and chatting late into the night, why not try *Caff  Pitti* in Piazza Pitti, or *Hemingway* close to Santa Maria del Carmine. At *il Genius* you can relax with friends and play board/card games. *Zoe*, *Dolce Vita* and *Porfirio Rubirosa* are a little more crowded and lively, while *Caf  Caracol* has a Latina vibe. If you are more of a wine lover, then try *Pitti Gola* or *Cantina*. Maybe you fancy a pint? Both *The William* and *Chequers* are British in style, (perhaps to meet the needs of the many ex-pats who make their home here!) They sell an infinite number of beers, and snacks accompanied by good music and

Florence Snapshot continued

are populated by Florentine beer lovers and foreigners alike. **Clubs**

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

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

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Things to Do Insights

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

In front of the Baptistery is Santa Maria del Fiore, which was built by Arnolfo di Cambio in 1296 to replace the old Santa Reparata cathedral. The archaeological remains of this cathedral are in the basement of the present church. Di Cambio's building was only completed 150 years later with the addition of the enormous cupola (dome) that sits above the church's transept. Filippo

Brunelleschi, a truly gifted Renaissance architect designed the dome. It is possible to reach the top of the cupola (access is on the right hand side of the church), which is 107m from ground level but there is no lift so you will have to climb over 450 steps. It is definitely worth climbing the steps, not just for the beautiful view that awaits you at the top, but also so that you can begin to appreciate the mastery of Brunelleschi, as the cupola is truly an extraordinary feat of architecture.

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

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

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

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

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

Medici Residences You can begin your visit with what was the residence of the Medici family, from Cosimo il Vecchio until the Grand Duke Cosimo I: Palazzo Medici-Riccardi in Via Larga, now known as Via Cavour. The palace was commissioned by Cosimo il Vecchio, designed by famed architect Michelozzo in 1444 and finally enlarged by the Riccardi family when they took over ownership of the palace. Today it is seat of Florence's Prefettura and official offices of the province of Florence. From the interior courtyard, it is possible to visit the Cappella dei Magi (Chapel of the Magi), frescoed by Benozzo Gozzoli and magnificently restored for the 1992 anniversary of the death of Lorenzo de' Medici. Throughout the fresco there are numerous portraits of major Florentine figures of the time as well as members of the Medici family. Some of the famous faces include leaders of the Eastern Orthodox church and John VII Palaiologos, Byzantine Emperor, both figures present in the city during the Council of 1439. In the palace there is also the Biblioteca Riccardiana, with an entrance on via dei Ginori 10, which features one of the greatest library collections in the city with manuscripts purchased from Riccardo Riccardi and it has been open to the public since the early 18th Century. The library is adorned with sculpted interiors of the 1700s.

Around the corner from the Palazzo Medici is the Chiesa di San Lorenzo, one of

Florence Snapshot continued

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

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

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

While at the church, you simply can't miss the Museum of San Marco that includes part of the Dominican monastery where Fra' Giovanni da Fiesole (perhaps better known as Fra' Angelico, Antonino Pierozzi (bishop and Florentine saint), Girolamo Savonarola, and in most recent times Giorgio La Pira, the unforgettable mayor of Florence.

A suggested starting point on the tour of the church museum is the Cloister of Sant'Antonino, and then from the Sala Capitolare where Fra' Angelico frescoed one of his masterpieces, the *Crucifixion*. On the first floor of the monastery, spread out through three corridors that open onto the monks' cells, all decorated with frescoes with religious scenes entirely done by Fra' Angelo and his workshop. This is, without

a doubt, one of the most interesting and emotional parts of the complex.

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

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

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

Oltrarno Towards the Ponte Vecchio, characterized by the numerous jewelry shops, which originally butcher and leather makers that lined the river, and in crossing this famous bridge you arrive in an area known as the Oltrarno. The area is more formally known as Santo Spirito and today has unique artistic characteristics that distinct it from other parts of the city. During the summer, it is not difficult to find locals sitting on chairs in front of their apartment buildings, chatting and discussing the day's events. This has always been an area where many artists have lived and

worked, something that is still quite visible today with the numerous restoration and art studios that line the streets.

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

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

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

By this point, if you aren't already exhausted, you can take the main street back towards the Chiesa di Santa Maria del Carmine, even if it's just to see the chapel of Felice Brancacci that he commissioned from Masaccio in the 1420s. The frescoes are truly a masterpiece of

Florence Snapshot continued

Early Renaissance art, works not to miss. The entrance to the chapel. The entrance to the chapel is from the piazza, on the right side of the church.

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Travel Tips

Getting There

By Air

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

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

From the Airport

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

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

Rental Cars: There are several rental dealers at the airport with offices in the downtown area near Santa Maria Novella train station.

Avis(+1 800 831 2847/ <http://www.avis.com/>) Hertz(+1 800 654 3131/ <http://www.hertz.com/>) Europcar(+39 041

541 5654/ <http://www.europcar.com/>) National(+1 800 227 7368/ <http://www.nationalcar.com/>)

By Train

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

By Bus

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

By Car

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

Getting Around

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

Taxi

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

Cars

Cars are not recommended. Most of Florence's narrow streets are limited to locals with properly marked vehicles and filled with locals zooming around on scooters. And if you dare to drive you will

quickly learn that the Renaissance never gave thought to parking.

Walking

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

Motorini

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

Flying Into Pisa(PSA)

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

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

Trains& Coaches from Pisa to Florence

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

A new coach service from Pisa to Florence is offered by Terravision(http://www.terravision.eu/florence_pisa.html/), with trips taking just 70-80 minutes and costs EUR 8 one-way.

Rental Cars: Avis(+1 800 831 2847/ <http://www.avis.com/>) Hertz(+1 800

Florence Snapshot continued

654 3131/ <http://www.hertz.com/>)
Europcar(+39 041 541 5654/ <http://www.europcar.com/>) Thrifty(+1 800 367 2277/ <http://www.thrifty.com/>)

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

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Fun Facts

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

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

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

4. Weird Fact: Fiasco is an Italian word referring to a glass bottle or flask with

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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