

Top Ten Places to Visit in Florence

Florence has been one of those iconic cities that people have dreamed of visiting for hundreds of years. During the Renaissance it was a major center of thought, expression and art of all kinds. Many magnificent churches, opulent palaces and impressive monuments were constructed over the centuries, making it one of the most memorable cities in Italy!



Piazzale Michelangelo

The Piazzale Michelangelo is a relatively modern addition to the ancient city. It was completed in 1869 and is a tribute to Michelangelo himself, with several replicas of his works in bronze throughout the plaza. The piazzale is a popular tourist destination because of the amazing panoramic views of the city from on top of its hill.

Giotto's Campanile

The bell tower of the famous Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore, commonly referred to as the Duomo of Florence, is hard to miss in the city. Towering over the buildings with its multicolored facade, it is truly a site to see. For a small fee, you can climb the tower to get an amazing view of the city and the Duomo itself. The tower is named for the first architect of the Duomo, Giotto di Bondone, though the tower was not completed exactly to his original design. The tower can be quite a climb, but is definitely worth it!

Piazza della Signoria

The Piazza della Signoria is one of the major piazzas in Florence and contains several different must-sees. The piazza is named after the Palazzo della Signoria, originally built to be offices for government officials that was later taken over by the Medicis, who moved the government offices to

the Uffizi. The home of the Medicis was later moved to the Pitti Palace, renaming the Palazzo della Signoria the Palazzo Vecchio or the "Old Palace". The Piazza itself has many statues, originals and replicas alike. David, the Fountain of Neptune, Hercules and Cacus, a bronze statue of Cosimo I and many others are scattered throughout the piazza as well as the open-air sculpture museum of the Loggia dei Lanzi.

San Lorenzo Street Market

The San Lorenzo Street Market is a great place to go shopping for souvenirs, gifts or clothes. You can find just about anything you would want to bring home from your trip to Tuscany. There are plenty of great deals on leather, wine, purses, wallets, cheese (vacuum packed available), dried meat, mushrooms, fresh olive oil, marinated olives, and just about anything else you could want. The market is located outside of the San Lorenzo church on three of the surrounding streets and is held each day from 9:00 to 19:30.



Bargello

The Bargello was built in the thirteenth century and was originally a city official building, and is the oldest public building in Florence. Also known as the Palazzo del Popolo, or Palace of the People, it was first used as barracks and office building for the Capitano del Popolo. Later it was also used as the office of the Podesta, the highest member of the Florentine city council. In the sixteenth century the office of Podesta was removed by the Medicis and the chief of police of Florence (or the Bargello) was moved to the building and it was used as a prison, giving the building its modern name. The building was still used in this manner until 1859 when it was turned into a national museum. Now it houses an impressive collection of Gothic and Renaissance sculptures that makes the Bargello a definite stop for any art lover.

Santa Croce

The Basilica of Santa Croce is the largest Franciscan church in the world. Construction on the church started in 1294 and was finished and consecrated in 1442. Santa Croce has sixteen chapels and is the burial place of many great Italians including Michaelangelo, Galileo, Machiavelli, Guglielmo Marconi, Enrico Fermi, and many others. The housing that was at one time used for the Franciscan Friars is now used as a leather school and visitors can watch the artisans as they work their craft.

Ponte Vecchio

The Ponte Vecchio is a medieval bridge that spans the Arno, connecting the two sides of Florence. It is the only bridge that survived the extensive bombing during World War II. Businesses line the bridge including jewelers, souvenirs, art dealers, gelato, and leatherworkers. The bridge is also well known for the Vasari Corridor, a private hallway built for the Medicis that connects the Palazzo Vecchio to the Pitti Palace without having to walk the streets of Florence.

Palazzo Pitti and the Boboli Gardens

The Palazzo Pitti was originally built by one-time rivals to the Medicis, but after their family lost much of their wealth the Medicis bought the Palazzo Pitti and made it their own. Since then it has passed hands many times, a base of power for Napoleon and at one time serving as the home of the King of Italy. Today the Palazzo Pitti is a museum and has many different collections, not just of art but a silver, porcelain, and carriage museum as well.

The Boboli Gardens that are behind the Pitti Palace were built for the wife of Cosimo I de Medici, Eleonora di Toledo. The gardens set the style for sixteenth century formal Italian gardens. There was no natural water source for the massive gardens, so a conduit was built to divert some water from the nearby Arno to irrigate the area. Statues seem to be everywhere you look in the gardens, and the grottoes are a peaceful and serene place to relax after a day of sightseeing.



The Uffizi

The Uffizi was built by Cosimo de Medici I to serve as offices for the city officials. Slowly, the Medici's many acquisitions of art started to decorate the halls. Some sections became more of a place to display art than a workplace. The last heiress of the Medicis willed the Uffizi and its art to the people of Florence and ever since it has been one of the most visited museums in Italy. It is wise to purchase tickets in advance and to show up early in the day if you plan to visit the Uffizi, as lines are very long in the tourist seasons.

Il Duomo (Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore)

Anyone that visits Florence can't miss the Duomo. Plain and simple. A gorgeous example of renaissance that still holds the title of having the largest masonry dome in the world, and was the largest octagonal dome at the time with no wooden supports. The Duomo stands as a testament to the might and glory of Florence: a marvel of architecture, engineering and art. Next to the Duomo is of course Giotto's bell tower and in front stands the baptistery with Ghiberti's famous "Gates of Paradise" doors in front. The whole Piazza del Duomo is an impressive site; walking through the city with the narrow side streets and coming out into the piazza can be a shock for the first time just taking in the scale of the building.

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