

HOW TO SPEND 48 HOURS IN FLORENCE

Making the most of limited time

Two days in Florence isn't long, but it's enough to experience the city's essential masterpieces. This itinerary balances major attractions with local experiences, prioritizing advance planning for timed-entry sites while leaving room for spontaneous discoveries.

Critical advance preparation: Book timed tickets for the Accademia (Michelangelo's *David*), Uffizi Gallery, and Brunelleschi's Dome climb as early as possible — these three attractions require advance reservations and sell out weeks ahead during peak season.

DAY ONE: RENAISSANCE MASTERPIECES & FLORENTINE PERSPECTIVES

Morning (8:00am-1:00pm)

Galleria dell'Accademia

Begin your first morning at the Accademia Gallery to see Michelangelo's *David* and the museum's Florentine painting collection from 1300-1600. Arriving right at opening (9:00am) provides the calmest atmosphere — by mid-morning, the gallery fills significantly.

Essential advance preparation:

- Book timed-entry tickets online well ahead of your visit
- Arrive 15-20 minutes before your entry time
- Understand baggage restrictions: large bags, food, drinks, and umbrellas are prohibited
- Bring ID for any discounted tickets (children, students, etc.)
- Note that Florence's street numbering can be confusing — map your route in advance

Allow approximately one hour for the Accademia, though you can spend longer if particularly interested in the unfinished *Prisoners* sculptures or the Gipsoteca Bartolini.

Florence Cathedral Complex (Duomo, Dome Climb, Baptistry)

Next, proceed to the Duomo complex. The highlight is climbing Brunelleschi's Dome for breathtaking panoramic views over Florence's terracotta rooftops. This requires a pre-booked timed ticket and is physically demanding (463 steps through narrow passages) but extraordinarily rewarding.

Essential information for the Dome climb:

- **ID now required:** You must show identification matching the name on your ticket. Verify current requirements when booking.
- **Physical demands:** The climb is strenuous. Wear comfortable, lightweight clothing and appropriate shoes. The narrow, enclosed stairwell is not suitable for those with claustrophobia or significant mobility limitations.
- **Entrance location:** The Dome entrance is at Porta della Mandorla on the north side of the cathedral, not the main cathedral doors.
- **Baggage deposit mandatory:** All bags must be left at the free baggage deposit before entering.
- **Strict time windows:** Your ticket is valid for a specific 45-minute entry window. Late arrivals forfeit entry.

Alternatives within the Duomo complex:

- **Giotto's Campanile (Bell Tower):** Alternative panoramic views with a different perspective of the Dome itself (414 steps)
- **Baptistery:** Famous for Ghiberti's bronze "Gates of Paradise" doors and stunning gold mosaic ceiling
- **Cathedral floor:** Free entry (modest dress required); see Vasari's Last Judgment frescoes

Your combined Duomo Pass (€30) includes all these attractions plus the Duomo Museum. Plan 2-3 hours for the complex depending on whether you climb one or both towers.

Lunch (1:00pm-2:00pm)

Mercato Centrale

The Mercato Centrale provides an ideal lunch location. The ground floor features vendors selling fresh produce and local specialties — this is where Florentines actually shop. The upstairs food hall offers diverse options: fresh pasta, schiacciata (Florentine flatbread), pizza, bistecca alla fiorentina, and more.

Beyond food stalls, you'll find local products perfect for gifts or personal souvenirs: wine, olive oil, honey, truffle products, and other regional specialties. The quality upstairs is genuinely good, making this a practical choice for efficient, quality lunch during a short visit.

Afternoon (2:00pm-6:00pm)

Uffizi Gallery

Dedicate your afternoon to the Uffizi Gallery, home to masterpieces by Botticelli (*Birth of Venus*), Leonardo da Vinci (*Annunciation*), Michelangelo (*Doni Tondo*), Caravaggio, and dozens of other Renaissance masters.

Essential preparation:

- **Pre-book tickets:** Walk-up entry typically means hours-long waits or no admission. Advance timed tickets are essential.
- **Arrive early for your slot:** Be there at least 20-30 minutes before your scheduled entry to account for security lines.
- **Understand baggage rules:** Oversized water bottles (over 500ml), glass bottles, other drinks, and all food (except baby food) are prohibited. Large bags require cloakroom storage.
- **Voucher versus ticket:** If booking through third parties, verify whether your confirmation is an actual entry ticket or a voucher requiring exchange. Check your booking confirmation carefully.
- **Plan your route:** The Uffizi is vast. Study a floor plan beforehand to identify must-see works and avoid wandering aimlessly.

Don't miss:

- Windows overlooking the Arno River and Ponte Vecchio — unique perspectives
- The museum's terrace area, which sometimes offers refreshments and exceptional city views (verify current accessibility)

Allocate 2-3 hours minimum for the Uffizi. You could easily spend longer, but this allows time to see highlights without rushing.

For current opening hours and detailed visitor information, consult the official Uffizi website: www.uffizi.it/en

Evening (6:00pm onwards)

Aperitivo with Views

As afternoon transitions to evening, experience the Florentine tradition of aperitivo. For exceptional views without premium pricing, consider rooftop locations in the Oltrarno district. The Loggia Roof Bar at Hotel Palazzo Guadagni (Piazza Santo Spirito, 9) has been a popular option, offering panoramic views of Florence and the charming Oltrarno neighborhood bathed in sunset light.

Note: Business names and operations can change. Verify current options before visiting, or ask your hotel for current rooftop aperitivo recommendations.

Dinner in Oltrarno

For dinner, explore the Oltrarno neighborhood, known for authentic trattorias and artisan workshops offering genuine Florentine atmosphere. This is where you'll find restaurants serving locals rather than primarily tourists.

Be sure to try local specialties like bistecca alla fiorentina if you haven't already — the massive T-bone steak, served rare, is a Tuscan tradition best experienced at traditional trattorias in neighborhoods like Oltrarno.

See the "Where Florentines Actually Eat" section of this guide for specific restaurant recommendations.

DAY TWO: MEDICI GRANDEUR & HIDDEN CORNERS

Morning (9:00am-1:00pm)

Palazzo Pitti

Visit Palazzo Pitti, one of Florence's largest architectural monuments. The former Medici grand ducal palace houses multiple museums:

- **Palatine Gallery:** Renaissance and Baroque masterpieces by Raphael, Titian, Rubens, displayed in opulent rooms
- **Gallery of Modern Art:** Italian art from the 18th-20th centuries
- **Museum of Costume and Fashion:** Historic fashion and textiles
- **Silver Museum:** Medici treasures and decorative arts

Choose which museums interest you most, or focus on the Palatine Gallery if time is limited — it's the most impressive collection.

Boboli Gardens

Behind Palazzo Pitti extend the Boboli Gardens, a vast 16th-century landscape of manicured avenues, fountains, grottoes, and sculptures. This is Italian garden design emphasizing grand perspectives and controlled nature.

Practical considerations:

- The gardens are extensive — allow at least 90 minutes to explore properly
- Wear comfortable shoes; paths are gravel and there are hills
- Bring water, especially in summer when shade is limited
- Spring (April-May) and autumn offer the most comfortable temperatures and beautiful foliage

Don't miss Buontalenti's fantastical grotto near the entrance — strange, theatrical, quintessentially Renaissance.

Combined tickets (approximately €16) cover both Palazzo Pitti museums and Boboli Gardens.

Lunch (1:00pm-2:00pm)

Find a trattoria in the Oltrarno district for leisurely lunch. After morning explorations, regional pasta dishes or lighter options work well. The streets around Santo Spirito and San Frediano offer numerous choices — see the dining section of this guide for recommendations.

Afternoon (2:00pm-6:00pm)

Wine Windows (Buchette del Vino) Hunt

After Palazzo Pitti and Boboli, embark on a delightful stroll discovering Florence's unique "wine windows" (buchette del vino). These historical hatches, once used to sell wine directly to passersby during plague times, are scattered throughout Florence, offering fascinating glimpses into the city's past.

Wine windows to look for:

Some historically significant and occasionally active wine windows include:

- **Babae:** Via Santo Spirito, 21r (sometimes serving wine and cocktails)
- **Osteria Belle Donne:** Via delle Belle Donne, 16r
- **Cantina de' Pucci:** Via de' Pucci, 4a
- **Il Latini:** Via dei Palchetti, 6r
- **Osteria San Fiorenzo:** Borgo Santa Croce, 11r

Note: Wine window locations and active status can change. These addresses were current at publication but should be verified before visiting.

Where to find concentrations of wine windows:

- Santo Spirito neighborhood in Oltrarno
- Borgo degli Albizi (particularly numbers 11 and 27)
- Via delle Belle Donne

Look for small, arched or rectangular openings at approximately waist height on older building facades.

Mercato Nuovo & Ponte Vecchio

Make your way to Mercato Nuovo (Porcellino Market). This is an excellent opportunity to try authentic Florentine street food, particularly lampredotto (cow stomach slow-cooked in broth, served on crusty bread with salsa verde) from market vendors. While at the market, rub the bronze boar's (Porcellino's) nose for good luck — a Florence tradition.

The market area also offers souvenir shopping opportunities and local goods browsing.

Cross Ponte Vecchio, Florence's famous medieval bridge lined with jewelry shops. It's the only Florentine bridge the Germans spared from destruction during World War II. The bridge is crowded midday; if possible, return early morning or evening for better photos and atmosphere.

San Lorenzo Market Area & Medici Chapels

Continue to the San Lorenzo Market area for leather goods, souvenirs, and local crafts. However, see the "Where to Shop Like a Local - Leather" section for guidance on finding quality leather rather than cheap imports.

Visit the **Medici Chapels** for opulent Medici family mausoleums featuring Michelangelo's sculptures (*Dawn*, *Dusk*, *Night*, *Day*) in the New Sacristy and the astonishingly ornate Chapel of the Princes.

Entry: Approximately €9, open daily 8:15am-1:50pm (closed 1st and 3rd Monday of each month)

Alternative afternoon options (if Medici Chapels don't appeal):

- **Bargello Museum:** Exceptional sculpture collection including Donatello's *David*, Verrocchio's *David*, and Michelangelo's early *Bacchus*
- **Museo di San Marco:** Dominican monastery with Fra Angelico's remarkable frescoes in monks' cells

Choose based on your specific interests in sculpture versus religious art.

Evening (6:00pm onwards)

Piazzale Michelangelo for Sunset

Head to Piazzale Michelangelo for spectacular panoramic views of Florence, particularly stunning at sunset. You can walk up (15-20 minutes, steep) or take buses 12 or 13.

Timing suggestion: Arrive about an hour before sunset to secure a good viewing spot and watch the changing light over the city.

Dinner in San Niccolò

Enjoy dinner in the San Niccolò neighborhood below Piazzale Michelangelo, known for lively atmosphere and diverse restaurants. This residential area offers authentic options away from tourist-heavy zones.

For authentic gelato: Seek out gelaterias known for quality ingredients rather than towering, artificially colored displays designed for tourist photos. La Strega Nocciola has been a local favorite, though specific shop recommendations can change. Look for natural colors (pale green pistachio, not neon), ingredients listed prominently, and gelato stored in covered metal containers rather than piled high in display cases.

Note: Specific business recommendations may change. Ask locals or your hotel for current gelato favorites.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS FOR 48 HOURS IN FLORENCE

The Firenze Card: Is it worth it?

If planning to visit multiple museums during your 48 hours, the Firenze Card offers access to numerous sites and can allow you to skip ticket purchase lines. However, critical points to understand:

Reservations still required: Even with the Firenze Card, you must make advance reservations for the Uffizi Gallery and Accademia Gallery. Additional museums may also require reservations. Check the official Firenze Card website (www.firenzecard.it) for the current complete list of sites requiring advance booking and specific reservation procedures.

Coverage: The card covers numerous museums and attractions (check the official website for the complete current list, as included sites can change).

Cost analysis: Calculate whether the sites you plan to visit justify the card cost versus purchasing individual tickets. For a focused 48-hour visit hitting only major highlights, individual tickets might be more economical.

Validity period: Understand the card's validity period and whether it fits your schedule.

Additional practical advice for 48 hours:

Advance booking timeline: Book Uffizi, Accademia, and Dome climb tickets 2-4 weeks ahead minimum. Summer visits require even longer lead times.

Walking distance: Florence's historic center is remarkably compact. Nearly everything in this itinerary is walkable, though the Piazzale Michelangelo climb is steep.

Modest dress: Several churches and religious sites require covered shoulders and knees. Bring a light scarf or shawl for easy coverage.

Dining reservations: For specific restaurants you want to try, make reservations ahead, especially for dinner.

Flexibility: This itinerary is comprehensive but adjust based on your pace and interests. It's better to truly experience fewer things than to rush through everything.

Museum fatigue: Two full days of museums and monuments can be exhausting. Build in breaks — sit in piazzas, have extended meals, allow time to simply absorb atmosphere.

Beyond Florence:

If you have additional days, Florence serves as an excellent base for Tuscany day trips. San Gimignano, Siena, Chianti wine region, and Tuscan hill towns are all accessible and offer different perspectives on the region.

See the "Day Trips from Florence" section of this guide for detailed information on these excursions.

Final perspective on 48 hours:

Two days provides a solid introduction to Florence's essential experiences and begins to reveal the city's character. You'll see world-famous masterpieces, taste Florentine cuisine, and explore beyond the immediate tourist radius.

However, 48 hours also means you'll leave wanting more — which is perhaps the best outcome. Florence rewards extended visits and repeat trips. If this is your first visit, use these two days to identify what you'd explore more deeply next time: Renaissance art, Medici history, Tuscan cuisine, artisan crafts, or simply the pleasure of sitting in piazzas watching Florentine life unfold.

Approach these 48 hours with realistic expectations: you'll experience highlights and get a genuine sense of the city, but you won't see everything or fully understand Florence's layers. That takes time. Florence has been accumulating stories for centuries, and two days barely scratches the surface. But it's an excellent beginning.