

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

Learning from others' regrets

Florence is remarkably compact and accessible, which sometimes leads visitors to underestimate how much planning it requires or how easily small missteps can diminish the experience. Here are the most common mistakes travelers make — and practical strategies to avoid them.

PLANNING & TIMING

Treating Florence as a one-day stop

Many travelers squeeze Florence into a single day between Rome and Venice — Duomo, rushed Uffizi visit, quick walk across Ponte Vecchio, done. This approach reduces one of Europe's great Renaissance cities to a checklist, missing entirely what makes Florence special: the atmosphere, the rhythm, the details that reveal themselves slowly.

Better approach: Allocate at least two to three nights. This allows time to visit major museums without rushing, explore neighborhoods beyond the tourist center, experience the city in evening hours when it transforms, and have meals that aren't hurried between attractions.

Cramming your itinerary

Attempting to see every museum and landmark in 48 hours leads to exhaustion rather than appreciation. Florence rewards slow travel — sitting in piazzas, enjoying extended meals, wandering quiet side streets without specific destination.

Better approach: Book the most important museums and any special experiences (cooking classes, specific tours) in advance, then leave substantial blocks of unscheduled time. The best memories often emerge from unplanned discoveries — a neighborhood you stumbled into, a conversation with a shopkeeper, an evening aperitivo that extended into dinner.

Over-planning or under-planning

Arriving with a minute-by-minute itinerary creates stress and eliminates spontaneity. Arriving with no plan means missing Florence's essential experiences because you couldn't get tickets or reservations.

Better approach: Strike a balance. Reserve timed tickets for major museums (Uffizi, Accademia, Dome climb) and make dinner reservations at restaurants you particularly want to try. Leave everything else flexible. This gives you structure for the essentials while maintaining freedom for discovery.

Relying on walk-ins

Major museums, popular restaurants, and special experiences like the Dome climb operate primarily on reservations. Tourists who arrive without booking often wait hours or get turned away entirely, especially during high season (April-October).

Better approach: Book Uffizi, Accademia, and Dome climb tickets at least 2-4 weeks ahead (longer for summer). Make dinner reservations for any restaurants you specifically want to try. For everything else, flexibility works fine.

MUSEUMS & ATTRACTIONS

Rushing through the Uffizi Gallery

The Uffizi houses masterpieces like Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, Leonardo's *Annunciation*, and Caravaggio's *Medusa*. Many visitors rush through in under an hour, leaving more exhausted than inspired, having barely registered what they saw.

Better approach: Allocate 2-3 hours minimum. If you feel overwhelmed, focus on specific periods or artists rather than attempting everything. It's better to truly see Botticelli's rooms and the High Renaissance masters than to blur through 45 rooms without retaining anything. Consider booking a small-group tour with an expert guide for context.

Stopping at just seeing the Duomo exterior

The cathedral's exterior is magnificent, but the true highlight is climbing Brunelleschi's Dome. The ascent takes you between the inner and outer shells of the dome, past Vasari's frescoes of the Last Judgment, and finally to a panoramic terrace offering unparalleled views.

Important note: Dome climb tickets are separate from general cathedral entry and must be reserved in advance with a specific time slot. They sell out weeks ahead during high season.

Confusing the replica David for the original

The David standing in Piazza della Signoria is a replica installed in 1910. The original masterpiece by Michelangelo is inside the Accademia Gallery, and seeing it in person is genuinely powerful — the scale, detail, and presence can't be conveyed through photographs.

Book ahead: The Accademia is one of Florence's busiest attractions. Advance tickets are essential.

Missing the Vasari Corridor

After years of restoration, the Vasari Corridor has reopened. This elevated passage, built in 1565, connects the Uffizi to Pitti Palace, crossing above Ponte Vecchio's shops. It houses hundreds of portraits and offers unique views of the city.

Booking note: Tickets are limited and sell out quickly. This is a special experience worth prioritizing if you're interested in Renaissance history or unique architectural perspectives.

Skipping the Boboli Gardens

Behind Pitti Palace, the Boboli Gardens offer a refreshing break from museums — sculptures, fountains, shaded paths, sweeping city views. Many visitors regret skipping them, not realizing how extensive or beautiful they are.

Practical tips: Wear comfortable walking shoes and bring water. The gardens are large and involve hills. Budget at least 90 minutes to explore properly.

Missing sunset at Piazzale Michelangelo

This free viewpoint offers Florence's most iconic panorama — the Arno River and Brunelleschi's Dome glowing in evening light. Skipping it is a common regret once you see other travelers' photos.

Best approach: Go about an hour before sunset. Bring gelato or a drink. The atmosphere as locals and visitors gather to watch the city turn golden is part of the

experience. Early morning is equally beautiful with fewer crowds if you prefer quiet over social atmosphere.

NEIGHBORHOODS & HIDDEN GEMS

Staying only on the Duomo side of the river

Most tourists never cross the Arno, but the Oltrarno district feels entirely different — artisan workshops, small piazzas filled with locals, excellent restaurants operating for neighborhood clientele rather than tourist traffic.

What you're missing: Piazza Santo Spirito (lively in evenings with local atmosphere), San Frediano (authentic residential neighborhood), smaller churches with remarkable art, craftspeople working in traditional trades.

How to explore: Dedicate at least one afternoon or evening to Oltrarno. Cross Ponte Vecchio, turn away from the crowds, and explore the streets behind Santo Spirito and toward San Frediano.

Ignoring how crowded it gets

Florence's compact size means the same streets and squares fill quickly. Midday in summer around the Duomo and Ponte Vecchio can be genuinely suffocating — shoulder-to-shoulder crowds, long waits, overwhelming noise.

Better timing strategy:

- Visit major museums first thing when they open
 - Explore quieter neighborhoods (Oltrarno, Sant'Ambrogio) during midday peak
 - Return to historic center in evening when day-trippers have departed
 - Have breakfast/lunch early before peak times
 - Visit Ponte Vecchio before 9am or after 8pm for photos without crowds
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DINING & SHOPPING

Believing TikTok/Instagram food hype

Some viral food spots in Florence prioritize social media presence over quality. Long lines often lead to disappointment — you've waited 45 minutes for a sandwich that's fine but not remarkable.

Better approach: The best Florentine food exists in small trattorias, often slightly outside the busiest tourist streets. Ask hotel staff, shop owners, or locals for current

recommendations. Names change over time, but genuine neighborhood restaurants maintain consistent quality because they serve locals regularly.

Reliable traditional options: See the "Where Locals Eat" section of this guide for specific recommendations.

Skipping bistecca alla fiorentina

This thick, rare T-bone steak is a Tuscan tradition — big, bold, meant for sharing. Many tourists avoid it due to size or price, but it's one of the most memorable meals you'll have in Florence when ordered at a proper trattoria.

How to order: Request *bistecca alla fiorentina* for two people (portions are 800g-1.2kg minimum). It arrives very rare — this is traditional. Pair with Chianti wine and simple sides. The price is typically listed per 100g (etto), so a 1kg steak at €5/etto costs €50.

Buying leather from just anywhere

Florence has a reputation for leather goods, but many stalls — particularly around San Lorenzo market — sell cheap imports misrepresented as authentic. If leather smells like plastic or has a chemical odor, it's synthetic or very low quality.

Better approach: See the "Where to Shop Like a Local - Leather" section for specific trusted workshops. For guaranteed quality, the Scuola del Cuoio (Leather School) behind Santa Croce is a reliable option, though prices reflect the quality and tourist-friendly location.

Skipping a cooking class

Many travelers assume cooking classes are "too touristy," but they frequently become trip highlights. Learning to make fresh pasta, Tuscan sauces, or tiramisu with locals is interactive, fun, and creates lasting memories you can recreate at home.

Who benefits most: Solo travelers (easy to meet people), couples looking for interactive experiences, food enthusiasts, anyone who enjoys hands-on activities over passive sightseeing.

TRANSPORTATION

Driving into the historic center

Florence has ZTL (Zona a Traffico Limitato) zones throughout the historic center, monitored by cameras. Drive into one by mistake and you'll receive a fine mailed to your home address — no warnings, no exceptions. Parking is expensive and extremely difficult regardless.

Better approach: Leave your car outside the city center in designated parking areas or at your hotel if they have arrangements. Florence is best explored on foot. If you're renting a car for Tuscany, pick it up when leaving Florence rather than upon arrival.

Dragging large suitcases through the streets

Cobblestone streets, narrow alleys, stairs, and small hotels without elevators make oversized luggage genuinely problematic. Many tourists regret bringing large roller bags that bang against every uneven stone and can't fit through doorways.

Better packing strategy: Pack light if possible. If you must bring larger bags, book accommodation close to Santa Maria Novella station or confirm your hotel has elevator access and easy street access. Consider luggage storage services if you're arriving early or departing late.

Relying solely on Google Maps

Florence's medieval street plan confuses GPS. Maps often route you through impossibly narrow alleys, underestimate walking times on cobblestones and hills, or suggest routes that no longer exist.

Better approach: Download offline maps before exploring. Take screenshots of directions to restaurants or hotels. Ask hotel staff to mark your map with the best walking route to specific destinations. Allow extra time for navigation, especially for timed reservations.

GENERAL WISDOM

Joining generic, rushed tours

Large-group, fast-paced tours can make Florence feel overwhelming rather than illuminating. You're herded through museums barely hearing the guide, then photographing things without understanding what you're seeing.

Better approach: Choose small-group tours (maximum 8-12 people) with expert guides who demonstrate genuine passion for art and history. Alternatively, use high-quality audio guides if you prefer moving at your own pace. The right tour enhances your experience; the wrong one makes you wish you'd explored independently.

Final perspective

These mistakes aren't about perfection — travel naturally involves missteps, and sometimes those create the best stories. The goal is avoiding regrets that diminish your experience: missing essential sights because you didn't book ahead, spending money on fake leather, or feeling rushed through one of Europe's greatest art collections.

Florence is forgiving. Even with imperfect planning, the city's beauty and richness come through. But informed preparation lets you experience it more fully, more comfortably, and with greater appreciation for what makes it extraordinary.