

## Piazzale Michelangelo

Florence seen from above is **a singular experience**. Not just a perfect photo opportunity, but a moment of wonder. You are looking at the city that gave birth to incredible artists, amazing scientists and an enthralling history of discovery and power that has filled novels and movie theaters.

No matter what time of day, you will find that Piazzale Michelangelo truly offers a stupendous lookout over Florence. Don't be surprised if you also see it written as Piazzale *Michelangiolo*, this is from the archaic Florentine pronunciation and most definitely the one you see on street signs or the brown and white signs that indicate historic landmarks. In any case, however you spell it, it is one site that should not be missed. It may be a classic tourist stop, but it **never fails to capture the heart and imagination** of those who follow the path to the very top.

If you're in downtown Florence, you can **walk up** to the Piazzale Michelangelo. You can also **take the bus** or if you have a car, **drive up there!**

It can be reached by taking either **bus 12 or 13** from the center or the red two-level sightseeing tour bus. It can also be **reached by foot**, climbing up from *Piazza Poggi* found at the base of the hill upon which Piazzale Michelangelo sits.

You can also follow the shady *via Michelangelo* from **Piazza Ferruccio** for 1km or the 3km hike from Porta Romana/exit of Boboli Gardens along *viale Machiavelli/via Galileo* (both are frequently used by joggers) to get to the Piazzale.

Another panoramic, historic **walking route** is to start at the **Porta San Miniato** near with the infamous icon/bar "*il Rifrullo*", and climb up **via Scalea del Monte alle Croci** and **Scalinata del Monte alle Croci**... it's short and follows the footsteps of Dante.

## Il Duomo

The Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore (known simply as the Duomo) is not only Florence's religious center, it's also the city's most recognizable attraction. Occupying the Piazza del Duomo in the heart of the city, this massive Gothic cathedral was erected during the 14th century on the former site of the Roman church, Santa Reparata. You'll know you're in the right place when you find yourself straining your neck to see the church's massive, iconic dome. The red-tiled cupola was designed by Brunelleschi and is described as a must-see by experts and travelers alike.

Visitors like to joke that the cathedral was designed inside-out: its exterior boasts intricate designs and breathtaking features while the interior is surprisingly plain. For many, the main reason to visit is to climb to the top of the dome (the cupola) where you'll find spectacular views of the city. (Be aware that there is no elevator and some of the narrow walkways require you to stand to the side while people pass in the opposite direction. Some visitors report this is not for the claustrophobic.) However, if you are interested in looking around inside, guided tours are available.

Access to the cathedral changes seasonally, but generally, the church is open daily from 10 a.m. to 4:30 (with shortened hours on Sundays); the dome operates on different hours. If you're mostly there to climb the more than 400 steps, it's best to try and get there as soon as the doors open (usually around 8:30 a.m.) to beat the crowds. Tickets, which cost 18 euros (about \$20), grant you admission to all five monuments in Piazza Duomo, including the cupola climb. They must be reserved in advance [online](#). If you only choose to visit the cathedral, there is no admission fee (though you can expect to wait in a fast-moving line). You are also welcome to attend Mass and other religious ceremonies.

## Uffizi Gallery

Occupying the first and second floors of the U-shaped Palazzo degli Uffizi along the banks of the Arno River, the Uffizi Gallery was Europe's first modern museum, created by the Medici family at the end of the 16th century. Today, the museum is any art lover's dream: it still displays the family's prominent art collection, which includes such masterpieces as Botticelli's "Birth of Venus," Raphael's "Madonna of the Goldfinch" and Titian's "Venus of Urbino."

Because of the many works of art housed here, you're going to need to take your time. One of the best ways to see the highlights and learn about the lesser-known pieces is to take a guided tour from a third-party operator, which many recent visitors highly recommend, or rent an audio guide. Some tour operators also offer "skip-the-line" tours, which reviewers also spoke highly of. Many recent visitors also said that the main problem with this museum isn't art overload, it's the crowds. Before you visit, check out the museum's official [website](#), where you can purchase tickets in advance and acquire additional information about the gallery's extensive art collection, showcased in more than 45 halls.

The Uffizi Gallery – which sits just a few blocks from [Ponte Vecchio](#) in central Florence – is open Tuesday through Sunday from 8:15 a.m. to 6:50 p.m. Admission is 20 euros (around \$23) from March through October and 12 euros (\$13.50) from November through February. To avoid wasting time waiting in line, consider paying an extra 4 euros (about \$4.50) to reserve your entrance time.

## Ponte Vecchio

Much like [London](#)'s Tower Bridge, the Ponte Vecchio was built to replace an earlier bridge. Once dominated by butchers and bakers, the original bridge was washed away during a flood in the early 14th century. When the new Ponte Vecchio was completed, it too was home to local food stores until grand Duke Ferdinand I of the Medici family decided to designate this unadorned bridge the epicenter of the city's gold and jewel trade. It has maintained this identity ever since.

Recent visitors said it is especially beautiful at sunset. If you don't want to overpay for souvenirs, heed the advice of past travelers and avoid shopping along the bridge. Some reviewers also recommend taking a gondola tour of the Arno River to experience sailing beneath the bridge, though they do warn this will cost you.

The Ponte Vecchio traverses the Arno River near central Florence. Throughout its history, it has survived floods and even attacks during World War II, making it one of the oldest bridges in Italy to span the Arno. Today, it is one of the most popular sites in the city, which means you should be prepared for heavy crowds and high prices. If you're looking for river views without fighting the tour groups, try the nearby Ponte Santa Trinita instead.