

Hostelworld Guide for Florence

Surrounded by the Tuscan Apennines and located on the River Arno, Florence is a classic Italian city. Thanks to an abundance of bustling squares, it is arguably the best of all Italian cities to people-watch. It is also home to the most important collection of Italian and Renaissance art in the world, largely thanks to the world-famous Uffizi Gallery. But as the Tuscan capital attracts over 20,000 overseas students who study there each year, it is also surprisingly lively after dark and is laced with bars and nightclubs.

In this Guide...

Useful Information
After Dark
Places to Eat
Top Attractions
Budget Tips
Where to Shop

The Essentials

Getting There

By plane: Florence's airport is 5km from the city centre but not many airlines fly there. Instead you'll probably fly in to Pisa's Galileo Airport, 80km away. To get to Florence take the train either direct or via Pisa Centrale. The journey costs €9 one-way.

By rail: Florence's Santa Maria Novella train station is in the city centre and well connected to other Italian and European cities.

By bus: If you decide to catch a coach to Florence you'll be dropped off at stops around the train station.

Getting Around

On foot: All of Florence's main sights are within walking distance of each other, making your feet the best mode of transport in the Tuscan capital.

By bus: Florence's bus service is efficient and cheap but the only time you may need to use it is to get to Piazzale Michelangelo (bus #12 from Stazione di Santa Maria Novella).

By taxi: Hailing down a cab isn't as easy in Florence as in other European cities. You'll usually find one near the train station, but when you need to call one dial 055 42 42 and tell them where you are. One will pick you up within a couple of minutes.

Useful phrases

Hello: Ciao / Bonjourno
Goodbye: Ciao / Arrivederci
Please: Per Favore
Thank you: Grazie
You're welcome: Prego
Yes: Si
No: No
Of course: Certamente
Excuse me: Scusa
How are you?: Come stai?
Open: Aperto
Closed: Chiuso
What is your name?: Come ti chiami?
My name is...: Mi chiamo...
How much?: Quanto costa?
The bill please?: Il conto per favore.

Climate

Florence has a typical Mediterranean climate which means piping hot summers and cold and damp winters. July and August are the hottest months of the year where temperatures soar to way past 25°C. October is generally the wettest month. As a result the best time to visit, when taking the weather into consideration, is spring or autumn. Tourist attractions are also quieter at these times of year.

Useful Information

Language: Italian
Currency: Euro
Electricity: 220 Volts AC/50Hz.
Area Code: +39 (Italy), 055 (Florence).
Emergency Codes: Ambulance 118 / Fire 115 / Police 112
Time Zone: Central European Time (GMT +1)
Central Post Office: Via Pellicceria 4
Main Tourist Office: Azienda di Promozione Turistica, Via Cavour 1r

Embassies / Consulates

USA: +39 055 239 8276
Canada: +39 06 445 591*
Australia: +39 06 852 721*
South Africa: +39 055 281 863
UK: +39 055 284 133
Ireland: +39 06 697 9121*
Germany: +39 055 294 722
Spain: +39 06 684 04 01*
New Zealand: +39 06 441 7171*
France: +39 06 68 60 11*

* Embassy in Rome

Cheap Eats

Casa del Vino, Via Dell'Ariento 16/R This traditional wine shop just minutes from the Duomo also does fresh paninis made on the spot in front of you. Choose from a selection of fillings as well as snack on the 'crostinis'. *Open Mon-Sat 9.30am-4.30pm.*

Osteria Antica Mescita, Via San Niccolo 60/r This inexpensive osteria south of the River Arno is a favourite among locals and a great place to dine after catching a sunset at Piazzale Michelangelo. The 'involtini' for €8 is out of this world. *Open Mon-Sat from 12 noon-3pm and 7.30pm-midnight.*

'Gelaterias' (ice-cream parlours) Florence is laced with 'gelaterias' (ice-cream parlours) and some of have quite entertaining names like 'Very Good!' and 'Tutti Frutti'. Three scoops will cost you around €3 and flavours include nutella, moose and kiwi. 'Festival del Gelato' is one of cheaper gelaterias and can be found on Via del Corso in the city centre.

Tripe anyone?

If you're the sort of person that likes to try local delicacies, then you should get a snack from a 'trippai' (tripe stand). These traditional Florentine stands sell 'lampredottos', or sandwiches with tripe (cow's stomach) for €2.50-€3. It might not sound too appealing, but as the phrase goes 'When in Rome...' (or, in this case, 'When in Florence...'). There's one in Piazza Cimatori, two minutes from Piazza della Signoria.

Vini e Vicchi Saponi, Via dei Magazzini 3/r Given the fact that this traditional osteria is just seconds from Piazza della Signoria, you'd think it would be a lot more expensive. But the menu is very reasonable with pasta dishes costing just €6. The selection of Tuscan meats is a real treat. *Open Tues-Sat noon-3pm and 7pm-9.30pm, Sun noon-3pm.*

After Dark

Red Garter, Via de' Benci 33/r This bar in the vibrant Santa Croce district attracts beer-guzzling backpackers and students on most nights. Many come to down 'shuttles' of beer (sort of like pitchers except with a tap) while others frequent it to catch the various live bands that play frequently. Thursday night, aka Shooter Night, is extremely popular. *Open daily from 5pm-2am.*

Gay / Lesbian Florence

Santa Croce is where most of Florence's gay venues are.

Crisko (Via Sant'Egidio 43/r) is a popular bar frequented by mainly men while **Piccolo Café** (Borgo Santa Croce 23/r) and **Flamingo** (Via dei Pandolfini 26/r) attract both boys and girls. **Tabasco Bar** (Piazza di Santa Cecilia 3/r) is Italy's oldest gay disco.

Central Park, Parco delle Cascine Central Park is an enormous club just west of the city centre that attracts about 4,000 revellers on a good night. Many are locals but hundreds are from further afield. Every type of music from hip-hop to house pumps out of the speakers at the 5 main dance areas. It can be expensive but is worth the visit at least once. *Open Tues-Sun 10pm-6am; admission free for students/€15 after 1am.*

YAB, Via de' Sassetti 5/r YAB is another club that attracts both overseas students and locals. Located under Cinema Odeon close to Piazza Strozzi, it is free to get in on week nights, although there is an annoying drinks card system (as there is in most of Florence's clubs). It is well-known for its hip-hop nights on Mondays. *Open daily from 9pm-4am.*

The Fish Pub, Piazza del Mercato Centrale 44/r This small bar is extremely popular with Florence's studying contingent largely thanks to the student nights and promotions. Monday night is 'Ladies Night' where all ladies get a free drink before midnight, while every Thursday is 'Students Party' with 5 shots for €5. *Open daily from 10am-2am.*

Lochness, Via dei Benci 19/r You may have a spot of trouble finding this bar (you need to look for the green door, then ring the bell), but once you do you'll see it was worth searching for. Attracting those who may have spent an earlier part of the night in one of Santa Croce's other bars, there is a promotion here every night of the week. Their motto is 'Get messy with Nessy'. 'Nuff said. *Open nightly from 10pm-4am.*

Don't Miss

Galleria degli Uffizi, Piazzale degli Uffizi 6 Erected in the late 16th century, the Uffizi Gallery is the oldest art gallery in the world. Home to the world's greatest collection of Florentine and Italian art, it is also Italy's most important art gallery. Botticelli's 'The Birth of Venus' is its most famous painting. *Open Tues-Sun from 8.15am-6.50pm; admission €8.50; to avoid queues pre-book tickets on the web.*

Galleria dell Accademia, Via Ricasoli 60/r Home to Michelangelo's 'Statue of David', the most famous sculpture in the world, Galleria dell Accademia is a real 'must-do'. It took him three years to sculpt it, doing so from one single block of marble. Another highlight in this small gallery is 'The 19th Century Hall - The Gallery of Plaster'. *Open Tues-Sun 8.15am-6.50pm; admission €10 incl temporary exhibitions.*

Il Duomo, Piazza del Duomo Dominating the Florentine skyline, this huge cathedral is breathtaking and unlike any other cathedral in Italy due to its stunning white, green and pink marble façade and its enormous doors. First begun in 1296, it took over 150 years to build. For great views of the city, don't forget to climb to the top of the dome. *Open Mon-Sat 10am-4/5pm, Sun 1.30pm-4.45pm; admission free, €8 for the Dome.*

The Arno's best known crossing

Ponte Vecchio, between Via de'Guicciardini and Via Por Santa Maria Built in 1345, the Ponte Vecchio is the only bridge which survived the Nazi bombings in WWII. Its bright colour means it is distinctive from the rest of the bridges. In summer it's full of street performers.

The Baptistry, Piazza di San Giovanni The Baptistry is the oval-shaped building in front of Il Duomo and is best-known for its doors telling the 'Story of Moses'. Dating back to the 12th century, its frescoes and golden mosaics inside will leave you mesmerised. *Open Mon-Sat 12pm to 6.30pm, Sun 8.30am-1.30pm; admission €3.*

Mark Your Calendar

January - Anno Nuovo Each year on New Year's Day the local rowing club, Società Canottieri Firenze, organises a parade of boats along the River Arno.

February - Florence Carnival This annual carnival held just before Lent each year sees people from all over the world dress up in traditional costumes. Those who attend are treated to artists who perform their poetry, music and art.

March - Capodanno Fiorentino As the Florentines always considered the arrival of spring as the beginning of the new year, this annual festival is a celebration of the Florentine New Year. Market stalls are set up around Chiesa di SS Annunziata and processions march through the city.

March/April - Scoppio del Carro Known in English as 'The Explosion of the Cart', this festival on Easter Sunday sees fireworks light up the sky from a cart outside Il Duomo.

May - Festa del Grillo On this festival which translates as 'Festival of the Cricket', thousands of Florentines buy a cricket in a cage and leave it on the doorstep of their lovers to bring them good luck!

May - Fabbrica Europa Since it was founded in 1994, this annual arts festival has become one of the largest in Florence. Magicians, theatre companies and more showcase their talents in the old Stazione Leopolda for over two weeks.

June - Festa di San Giovanni Commemorating the life of St. John, Florence's patron saint, parades, dances, concerts and fireworks displays pulsate the Tuscan capital. Taking place on the 24th, it's one of the biggest festivals of the year.

June to September - Jazz in Piazza Annunziata Every night throughout the summer free jazz concerts are staged in the city's Piazza Annunziata at 10pm for this festival that attracts both national and international acts.

September - Festa delle Rificolone For this festival local children carry lanterns through Florence's streets from Piazza di Santa Croce to Piazza della SS Annunziata. Street performers entertain along the way also.

November - Florence Marathon Recognised as one of the world's top 20 marathons, this annual race around the Florentine streets attracts approximately 6,000 athletes each year.

Get Connected

easyInternetcafé, Via Martelli 22/r easyInternetcafé's Florence branch is one of its smallest with only 30 PCs on offer. It enjoys a very central location, just minutes from Il Duomo. *Open daily from 9am-11pm; minimum purchase €1, hourly rates fluctuate with number of customers.*

Internet Train, Via de Benci 6/r Even though this is one of the larger chains of internet cafes in Italy, computers in its Florentine branch aren't exactly speedy. Or new for that matter. In saying that, there are lots to choose from in this cyber café in the Santa Croce district. *Open daily from 9.30am-1am; €1 per 10 mins, €2.70 per half hour, €3.20 per hour.*

Internet Point, Via Fiesolana 10/r This internet point has new computers and a speedy connection. It isn't the liveliest place in the world so don't worry about getting distracted when mailing your friends. *Open daily 9.30am-1am; €1 for 15 minutes, €2 for 30 minutes, €3 per hour.*

Net Gallery, Via Guelfa 43/r Not far from the train station, Net Gallery is an internet café that doubles up as an art gallery so thanks to paintings on the wall and chill-out tunes, it is one of the most relaxing places to browse the web in the city. *Open from 9.30am-10.30pm; €3.50 per hour.*

Café Ricasoli, Via dei Pucci 8/r Rates in this internet café are a bit more expensive than in other places, but that's just because this is a café in every sense of the word. *Open daily from 7am-8pm; €3 per half hour, €4 per hour.*

www.

www.aboutflorence.com
www.vivifirenze.it
www.firenzeturismo.it
www.polomuseale.firenze.it

Retail Therapy

NineTNine, Via Guelfa In these bargain basement stores (there are others dotted around the city) you can pick up all sorts of bits and pieces for, you guessed it, 99 cents! Picture torches, candles, kitchen utensils, toothbrushes, frames, notepads and a whole lot more. *Open Mon-Sat 9am-6pm.*

Via dei Panzani / Via de' Cerretani These two streets connecting the train station to Il Duomo are where to go when you want decent, yet reasonable clothes. Various shops lining either side specialise in clothes, trainers and more.

Ponte Vecchio Florence's best known bridge is full of jewellery shops. There aren't too many bargains to be found but if you're looking for something to decorate yourself with this is where to go.

Mercato Centrale, Piazza del Mercato Centrale While Florence's best-known market is the 'San Lorenzo Market', it mainly sells leather. Instead you should have this market on your 'to-do list'. It is primarily a food market and one of the most colourful places in the city.

La Rinascente, Piazza della Repubblica 1 The Florentine branch of this large chain of department stores has six floors. Here you'll find everything from clothes to perfume to houseware (if you need it) to traditional Tuscan handicrafts.

Cows - Steer clear of Florence

If it wasn't bad enough that Florence is one of the only places in the world where cow's stomach is a local delicacy, it is also teeming with shops that sell nothing but leather goods. Whether it's belts, bags or jackets, you can find it here. Prices are quite high but so is the quality.

Ricordi Mediastore, Via Brunelleschi 8r If you've been listening to the same tunes over and over since packing your bags and need some new CDs, visit this large music store.

Budget Tips

People Watch in Florence's Squares Florence has large, classic Italian squares in abundance and they are great places to people watch. Piazza della Repubblica and Piazza di San Giovanni in the centre of the city are constantly buzzing, but the best place to sit down with an ice-cream and watch Florentine life go by is Piazza della Signoria.

Visit Florence's churches Most of Florence's churches are free to visit. The best known of these is Il Duomo but there are others. Chiesa di Santo Spirito in Piazza Santo Spirito is one of the city's most beautiful examples of Renaissance architecture while Chiesa Santa Maria dei Ricci off Via Calzaiuoli is small but extremely beautiful.

The best view in Florence

Located just 20 minutes walk from the Ponte Vecchio, Piazzale Michelangelo affords visitors the best views of Tuscany's capital. Every day hundreds converge on this large square to take in the vistas. The sunsets are unforgettable.

See the statue of David for free The heading here is slightly misleading. You can't see the *real* statue of David free, but you can save yourself €8 by just making your way to Piazza della Signoria or Piazzale Michelangelo. There are replicas in both. The statue in the former is similar to the original but the one in the latter is green.

Take a stroll up the River Arno There is always something going on either along or on the River Arno. Rowers row, footballers play football just under the Uffizi and, if you're into wildlife, you'll really enjoy watching the otters swim up and down the banks.

Have that coffee standing up! If you stop in a café for a quick latté or espresso, make sure to drink it at the counter where it shouldn't cost more than €1. Take it outside to a table and you can add another €2 on top of that, just for sitting down!

A Day in Florence...

Visit Florence's most instantly recognisable landmark, Il Duomo. After exploring the inside, climb to the top of the dome.

Upon leaving the dome, visit the 'Baptistry', the oval building across from Il Duomo. The mosaics within are breathtaking.

There are kebab shops and sandwich bars dotted around the city centre, but if you want to have lunch on the go 'Florence-style' grab a lampredotto (boiled tripe in a bun).

Visit either Galleria dell'Accademia or the Uffizi Gallery. These are two of the city's most popular attractions so you couldn't do both in the one day!

People watch for an hour in Piazza della Signoria. One of Florence's liveliest squares, one of the fake Davids is here.

Grab a 'gelato' and make your way down to the River Arno and Ponte Vecchio. Go for a leisurely stroll along the river in the direction of Piazzale Michelangelo.

Take in the view at Piazzale Michelangelo. It affords visitors the best views of the city and attracts thousands every day. If you're lucky enough you'll catch a sunset.

Get something to eat over this side of the Arno. Fuori Porta on Via Monte alle Croci and Osteria Antica Mescita on Via San Nicolo are two good, reasonable eateries.

Visit the city's Santa Croce district where most of the bars can be found. After a few sociables finish the night off in Central Park, one of the city's best nightclubs.