

la dolce vita

FLORENCE, ITALY

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The capital of Italy's Tuscany region, Florence (Firenze) is home to many masterpieces of Renaissance art and architecture, but also the best of today's culinary creations. If you desire a dose of culture, history, and edible works of art, Florence is an ideal vacation locale—and the dream of many. Although you could do Florence in a weekend, you would only scratch the surface. We suggest a week, spending the majority of the time in the city and a day or two touring the Tuscan countryside for wine tastings and the postcard-worthy cities of San Gimignano and Siena. Get ready to embark on an Italian adventure of food, art, architecture, shopping, and beautiful vistas—all in one spot. *Andiamo!*



OPENING SPREAD: Exploring the narrow streets of Florence is like strolling through pages of a history book. **THESE PAGES, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** Il Duomo is the focal point for navigating Florence and a highlight of most visits; its terra-cotta-tiled dome is spectacular, but don't forget to tour inside to witness the Renaissance masterpiece on the ceiling. Enjoy *la dolce vita* by sampling local cured meats and artisanal cheeses paired with a Tuscan vino. Florence is best discovered via a small moped, bicycle, or on foot.

City Center.

Without a doubt, the top destination in Florence is the Santa Maria del Fiore or il Duomo; the cathedral is located in the city center—an UNESCO World Heritage Site. This terra-cotta-tiled dome cathedral is one of the largest in the world, bowing to St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City. The construction of il Duomo lasted from 1420 to 1436, and today the engineering feat is admired by visitors and locals alike. The cathedral's creation included valuable contributions from the Renaissance's most prominent artists—Michelangelo, Donatello, and others.

Entrance into the cathedral is free, but if you want to tour Brunelleschi's Dome, Giotto's Bell Tower, the Baptistry of San Giovanni, and the Opera del Duomo Museum, you'll need tickets. For the adventurous, il Duomo presents a challenge: climbing to the top. It is a tight spiral staircase, but the views are worth every step. Plus, you can reward yourself with tasty Tuscan delights when you return streetside.

Fine Dining.


If Italy is known for one thing, it's food. Some traditional dishes not to skip are *ribollita* (a hearty bread, bean, and greens soup); *bistecca alla Fiorentina* (typically served rare); and *lampredotto* (offal, yet delicious, sandwich). You can pair all of these with the local, bold red wine, Brunello di Montalcino. A great stop for any foodie and even the pickiest eater is the Mercato Centrale. This market is a combination of food stands with local cheeses, olives,

oils, and breads as well as restaurants with plenty of room to sit and enjoy multiple courses. Save room for exceptional desserts, such as Florentine chocolate or *zuccotto* (a chilled, dome-shaped dessert similar to tiramisu).

Jewel of the Renaissance.

Florence is an art lover's paradisaical visit. Although there are masterpieces of art around every corner and in every piazza, it would be a shame to miss Botticelli's "Birth of Venus" and da Vinci's "Annunciation" at the Uffizi Gallery. Those, along with Michelangelo's "David" in the Galleria dell'Accademia are the classics trifecta in the city of lilies.

Other must-sees, particularly for shutterbugs, are il Porcellino—a bronze wild boar statue that promises good luck for those who rub its snout—and Piazzale Michelangelo for the best panoramic view of it all: il Duomo, Ponte Vecchio (medieval covered bridge), and the Arno River. If you love to shop or just want to pick up a few souvenirs for you or someone special, Florence is famous for its leather craftsmanship (think gloves, jackets, handbags), gold jewelry, and pottery. Head to Mercato Nuovo/Mercato del Porcellino (an open-air market where you can also find the bronze boar) for one-stop souvenir shopping.

Florence has a way of captivating your senses. From the aroma and taste of a glass of Tuscan Brunello to the intricate details of "Birth of Venus," Florence rekindles an appreciation of natural and manmade beauty. Experience *la dolce vita*—the sweet life—with a trip to *Firenze*. 

travel tips.

When to Go:

May through September are popular, but also busy. Some savvy travelers suggest shoulder season (April or October) when there are fewer tourists and mild temperatures.

How to Get There:

Fly into Rome (FCO) and take the fast train (for 1.5 hours), or fly into Pisa (PSA) and drive (for approximately 1 hour).

What to Try:

Take an authentic Tuscan cooking class
Climb to the top of Il Duomo
Touch the snout of Il Porcellino
Book a wine tasting in Tuscany
Visit neighboring towns such as Siena and San Gimignano