

TUSCANY TOUR FROM ROME PISA LEANING TOWER AND FLORENCE PRIVATE DAY TRIP



TOUR DESCRIPTION

Dear friends, Tuscany is one of the most loved regions by foreign tourists, with a proliferation of exceptional artistic and food and wine inspirations thanks to the dense network of “Strade del Gusto” -Roads of Taste- scattered throughout the territory and masterpieces of strong international appeal, one above all the David by Michelangelo, one of the most famous sculptures in the world. Cradle of the Italian Renaissance, Florence and its historic center, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, would be enough to retrace the history of the entire country. But unique treasures are scattered in the other art cities of the region, from Lucca to Livorno, from Siena to Arezzo, from Pisa to Massa-Carrara, without forgetting the minor villages with medieval charm and the fortified citadels scattered almost everywhere in the territory.

-FLORENCE-

The Florentine plain and the surrounding hills have been inhabited since prehistoric times, as evidenced by archaeological findings in the area.

The first permanent settlement was a village on stilts, built around the 9th century b.C. by the Etruscans in the Villanovan period, near a ford on the Arno River, in the center of a fertile plain.

Around 150 b.C., the Etruscans of nearby **Visul** (today's Fiesole), located high on the hill, founded a "satellite city" near the Arno to take advantage of the presence of the waterway, and built the first wooden bridge.

Already in Etruscan times, the city was given the nickname **Florentia**, in Latin, a language that was emerging in the valley crossed by numerous wayfarers.

Florentia is an auspicious name: "that you are florid", "city of prosperity". Likewise Potentia, Piacentia, Valentia, Pollentia in other regions of the Empire.

Following the wars between Silla and Mario, Roman Generals by two opposing factions, the Etruscan **Visul** became Roman, assuming the Latin

name of **Fæsole** and, in 59 b.C., thanks to the Giulia Law, **Florentia** also became a castrum for Roman veterans, surrounded by walls, with the typical rectangular plan, and with a central square, **Forum**, where the main streets, **Cardo and Decumanus**, crossed: **via Roma and via Climala** resume the route of the ancient **Cardo**, (north-south artery), and **via Strozzi and via del Corso** that of the **Maximum Decuman** (east-west artery); **Piazza della Repubblica**, created at the end of the 19th century, occupies instead the area of the **ancient Forum**, while near Santa Croce Church, the **Via de 'Bentaccordi and the Via Torta** evoke the contours of the **Roman amphitheater**.

Since the time of Emperor Hadrian, Florence was connected to Rome by the Via Cassia. Under the Roman emperor Diocletian, it was elevated to **Corrector Italiae** (capital of Etruria and Umbria) and then experienced periods of Byzantine, Ostrogoth, Lombard, and Frankish rule, during which the population sometimes dropped to a few thousand people.

-Climate-

Florence has a temperate climate characterized by very hot summers that can be quite humid, and moderately cold, humid winters. According to the Köppen climate classification, Florence is classified as having a humid temperate climate.

-Background-

In the Middle Ages, Florence emerged as a significant center for art, culture, commerce, politics, economics, and finance. During the modern era, it served as the capital of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany from 1569 to 1859. Under the leadership of the Medici and Lorraine families, Tuscany became one of the wealthiest and most modern states of its time. The city's various political changes, financial and mercantile power, and cultural influences established it as a crucial crossroads in both Italian and European history. **In 1865, Florence was declared the capital of the Kingdom of Italy, becoming the second capital after Turin, and it retained this status until 1871, which marked the conclusion of the Risorgimento.**

Florence is renowned as a city of art, possessing an invaluable collection of architecture, paintings, sculptures, and both historical and scientific artifacts that shape the city's character, almost like a vibrant, sprawling museum. The earliest known artist associated with Florence is a figure named Rusticus, a "clericus et pictor," who is referenced in two notarial documents from the year 1066 concerning the ancient church of **San Pier Maggiore**.

The heart of Florence is **Piazza della Signoria**, featuring the impressive **Palazzo Vecchio**, the sculpture-filled **Loggia dei Lanzi**, and the nearby **Uffizi Gallery**, one of the most famous art museums in the world. Not far away is the **religious hub of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, the Duomo**, with its magnificent dome—the largest ever built: “at the time of the Grand Duchy, it was said that with its shadow it would cover all of Tuscany.” The enormous cathedral is beautifully complemented by Giotto's bell tower, one of the most stunning in Italy, and the Baptistery of San Giovanni, with its famous bronze doors, including the golden door of Paradise.

The **Arno river**, that flows through the city, occupies a place in florentine history as much as the people who live there.

Historically, the local population has a hate-love relationship with the Arno, which has alternatively brought the benefits of trade and flood disasters. Among the bridges that cross it, the **Ponte Vecchio** is unique in the world, with the characteristic jewelers' shops in the houses built on it. Crossed by the noble **Vasari Corridor**, it is the only bridge in the city to have passed unscathed through the Second World War.

Besides the Uffizi, Florence has other museums that would be the main artistic attractions in any major city worldwide: the Accademia Gallery, the Bargello, and the Pitti Palace, which houses eight museums including the Palatine Gallery. The Florentines proudly claim to have the best examples of beauty in both female (Venus by Botticelli) and male (Michelangelo's David) art.

Florence, known as the "**Cradle of the Renaissance**," boasts its masterpieces in the works of **Filippo Brunelleschi** — including the Hospital of the Innocents (formerly the hospital of Santa Maria Nova), which served as a reception site for abandoned children, as well as the Church of San Lorenzo and the Church of Santo Spirito — and by **Leon Battista Alberti**, such as the facade of Santa Maria Novella and Palazzo Rucellai. However, other artistic periods have also left their remarkable masterpieces: from the Romanesque style of San Miniato al Monte, to the Gothic of Santa Croce, where the burials of Italy's great figures are found (including Ugo Foscolo, who was also buried there and described them), to the extravagant Mannerism of Giambologna and Bernardo Buontalenti — exemplified by the Fountain of Neptune and the Boboli Gardens — and up to the masterpieces of Italy's great 20th-century architects, like Giovanni Michelucci's Santa Maria Novella Train Station and Pier Luigi Nervi's Artemio Franchi Stadium.

The center of Florence, bustling with hundreds of commercial activities, is a paradise for shopping and entertainment. It features elegant high-fashion boutiques and historic cafes, along with vibrant outdoor markets. Additionally, the area is home to numerous nightclubs, discos, American bars, lounge bars, and meeting places perfect for enjoying an aperitif.

-Old Bridge- Ponte Vecchio-

The Ponte Vecchio is one of the most iconic symbols of Florence and is renowned as one of the most famous bridges in the world. It spans the Arno River, located approximately 150 meters downstream from the point where the riverbed is narrowest in the city, upstream of the Cascine. This area is known as the Canottieri, situated beneath the Uffizi Gallery. Historically, there was a ford in this location.

The first crossing on the Arno River was planned to be located slightly upstream from today's bridge, extending along the continuation of the *cardo maximus* that corresponds to the current Via Roma-Via Calimala, or possibly in present-day Piazza del Pesce. This bridge dates back to shortly after the city's founding, around the middle of the first century B.C., and was designed with an oblique alignment compared to the current bridge

to better withstand flood pressures. Surveys conducted in the riverbed at the end of the 1950s discovered two large concrete foundations, which are likely remnants of the original Roman bridge.

This walkway needed to be consolidated and expanded around 123 A.D., when the Roman emperor Hadrian promoted the construction of the via Cassia Nuova, which crossed the city and probably aligned with the Via de' Bardi and San Niccolò on the south bank. The bridge likely already had masonry piers, while the truss was probably made of wood, as was typical. The first Roman bridge was probably destroyed around the 6th or 7th century due to neglect, wars of the barbaric era, and likely flood damage. It's hard to estimate how many bridges were overwhelmed by the frequent floods of the Arno and how many were rebuilt. Among the few remaining records, there is one from 972 in which Bishop Sichelmo granted Father Domenico d'Orso the church of Santa Felicita, "not far from the head of the Ponte de fluvio Arno." Giovanni Villani mentioned a bridge built during Charlemagne's time, and it's possible that in the 9th or 10th century, the crossing found its current location.

-The first bridge-

The bridge in its current location was reconstructed following a collapse in 1177. Twentieth-century studies of the remnants in the heads and pylons indicate that it was built upon more ancient foundations, including oak beams from the latter half of the 10th century.

It sustained damage in 1222 and again in 1322, and was ultimately swept away by a violent flood in 1333. After the construction of the "lungarni," the bridge was rebuilt with three crossings in 1345. This reconstruction is attributed either to Taddeo Gaddi, as noted by Italian historian Giorgio Vasari, or to Neri di Fioravante.

In 1442, the city authorities required that butchers (beccai) gather their shops on the Ponte Vecchio. This decision aimed to isolate them from the surrounding buildings and houses in the city center, promoting cleanliness and decorum. The primary goal was to eliminate the unpleasant odors caused by the barroccini (hand-drawn carts) of the butchers, which left foul-smelling waste along the roads leading to the

Arno River during transport. By moving to the bridge, the butchers could dispose of the waste directly into the river, minimizing any damage to the streets.

From that point onward, the Ponte Vecchio became the marketplace for meat, and the butchers later became the owners of the shops. To create more space, they added small rooms that jutted out over the river, propping them up with wooden poles in a somewhat disorganized manner.

-Vasari hallway-

In 1565, the architect Giorgio Vasari constructed the "Vasari Corridor" for Cosimo I. The purpose of this corridor was to connect the political and administrative center at Palazzo Vecchio with the Medici's private residence, Palazzo Pitti. The elevated corridor is approximately one kilometer long and was built in just five months. It begins at Palazzo Vecchio, passes the Uffizi Gallery, runs along the Lungarno Archibusieri, crosses over the shops on the east (left) side of the Ponte Vecchio, bypasses the Mannelli Tower, which is supported by corbels, and continues on the left bank ("Oltrarno") to Palazzo Pitti.

In 1593, Ferdinando I ordered that the butchers' shops along the corridor be replaced by goldsmiths and jewelers, as he disapproved of the less noble trade and the unpleasant odors associated with it.

In 1860, during the celebrations for the arrival of His Majesty, the three central windows of the corridor were modified to their current configuration.

-Recent history-

The Ponte Vecchio was visited by Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, and other Nazi and fascist leaders during the Führer's trip to Italy in May 1938.

During the Italian campaign, as German troops retreated, the Ponte Vecchio was the only bridge in Florence that was not destroyed by the Germans in 1944. This preservation can be attributed to the timely

intervention of Gerhard Wolf, the German representative in Florence. In recognition of this and other merits, Wolf was granted honorary citizenship of Florence in the post-war period, and he is commemorated with a plaque placed on the bridge.

A recent hypothesis suggests that the bridge was saved by a group of goldsmiths who sabotaged the enemy devices by cutting their threads. On the night between August 3 and 4, 1944, a goldsmith's assistant named Burgassi (often referred to as Burgasso) was allowed to move freely because the Germans believed he did not pose any threat. Although he was old and physically impaired by polio, his mind remained sharp. During this time, he witnessed the installation of mines and, knowing the locations of the connections, managed to defuse them.

During the chaotic days of liberation, the Vasari Corridor became the sole passage between the northern and southern parts of the city. This is also illustrated in the episode dedicated to Florence in Roberto Rossellini's film "Paisà," where the protagonist incognito traverses a nearly empty Galleria degli Uffizi filled with ancient statues.

-Architecture of Ponte Vecchio-

The Ponte Vecchio consists of three wide, low-arched crossings, with a height-to-width ratio of 1:6. It was the first bridge in the West to surpass the Roman model, which relied solely on rounded arches (semicircular arches). This traditional design required many arches for longer bridges, which posed potential dangers during floods due to the risk of narrow passages becoming obstructed, as well as issues with steep slopes. Examples of such traditional bridges include the Ponte della Maddalena near Borgo a Mozzano and the Ponte Fabricio in Rome.

The Ponte Vecchio served as a model for subsequent bridges, such as the Rialto Bridge, built in the 16th century in Venice, which also features a similar low arch design. Although the Alconétar Bridge in Spain is an older example of low-arched crossings, it faces the same problem of obstructing the riverbed with its arch support piles, as it incorporates multiple small crossings akin to traditional bridges with round arches.

Another typical feature, more noticeable to tourists but less groundbreaking, is the passage lined with two rows of artisan shops. These shops originated from ancient arcades that were later closed, giving the impression of being an extension of the road. The shops on Ponte Vecchio all overlook the central passage, each with a single display case enclosed by thick wooden doors. Many also have a back room built over the river, supported by corbels (or "sporti"). At the four corners of the bridge, there were as many towers controlling access: only the Mannelli tower remains today, while the Rossi-Cerchi tower was rebuilt after the explosions of 1944.

-Monument to Benvenuto Cellini-

At the center of the bridge, the shops conclude with two panoramic terraces. The eastern terrace is topped by the Vasari Corridor, while the western terrace features a monument with a bust of Benvenuto Cellini (Florence, November 1, 1500 - Florence, February 13, 1571). Cellini was an Italian sculptor, goldsmith, writer, and artist, renowned as one of the most significant Mannerist artists. The statue, created by Raffaello Romanelli, was inaugurated on May 26, 1901.

Accompanying the bust is a fountain, established during the celebrations for the fourth centenary of Cellini's birth. Water flows from four masks placed at the corners of the pedestal, cascading into shell-shaped basins designed by Egisto Orlandini. The base of the monument also features typical decorations from Cellini's era, including festoons, masks, lion legs, goat heads (symbols of Cosimo I), and diamond rings that represent various members of the Medici family.

The fence surrounding the Cellini monument has become a popular spot for lovers to hang padlocks adorned with messages written in felt-tip pen. This act symbolizes a desire for an unbreakable bond, and the keys to these padlocks are typically thrown into the Arno River so that the love can be considered permanent. This custom likely began with the military from the Academy of San Giorgio alla Costa and dates back no more than twenty years. It predates the more famous tradition at Ponte Milvio in Rome.

To address the considerable number of padlocks that marred the bridge's decorations, the municipal administration implemented a fine of 50 euros in 2006 for anyone caught attaching a padlock to the Cellini gate.

Consequently, the trend shifted to the railing of the nearby Lungarno degli Archibusieri.

-Piazza della Signoria-

Piazza della Signoria is the central square of Florence, serving as the seat of civil power and the heart of the city's social life. This L-shaped square is located in the central part of medieval Florence, south of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore. Historically, it has been known by various names, including Piazza dei Priori and Piazza del Granduca.

Archaeological findings since 1974 have revealed that the area around the square has been significant since the Neolithic period, dating back to the 10th century BC. During the Roman era, the square was an important site, featuring a thermal complex from the time of Hadrian and a large fullonica (laundry) near the theater. The remains of these structures were discovered beneath Palazzo Vecchio during excavations. However, by the 4th and 5th centuries, the baths and laundry had been abandoned and were replaced by modest buildings and craft activities. During this time, a large paleochristian basilica, measuring approximately 27 by 50 meters, was constructed in the area.

Starting in the 10th century A.D., a process of urban reconstruction began, leading to the establishment of a medieval quarter that was later demolished to make way for the square. Archaeological excavations have uncovered several towers, houses, and the remains of two churches, Santa Cecilia and San Romolo, along with their respective cemetery areas. A plaque located near the corner of Via de' Calzaiuoli commemorates Saint Romolo, bishop and martyr, marking approximately where the church once stood and where the Bombicci Palace stands today.

The square began to take on its current shape around 1268, when the Ghibelline houses in the area were demolished by the victorious Guelphs following the battle of Benevento. However, this demolition did not

create a cohesive or unified setting, and the square was only paved in 1385. As the **Palazzo della Signoria** was constructed, the square became the center of the city's political life, contrasting with the religious center of Piazza del Duomo and the trade square, which was the Old Market, now known as Piazza della Repubblica. In the 14th century, the Loggia della Signoria was added for public ceremonies, as well as the Merchandise Court, an institution established to resolve civil and commercial disputes.

Seat of civil power, the square was also the seat of public executions, of which the most famous is that of May 23, 1498, when **Girolamo Savonarola** was hanged and burned for heresy (a plaque on the square, in front of the Fountain of Neptune, remember this event) in the same place where, with his disciples, he had operated the so-called Bonfire of the Vanities, setting many books, poems, game tables, clothes, etc. on fire.

-Palazzo Vecchio former Palazzo dei Priori-

The building is located in Piazza della Signoria and serves as the seat of the Municipality. It is recognized as the best example of 14th-century civil architecture in the city and is one of the most famous civic buildings in the world.

Originally named "**Palazzo dei Priori**," after the Priori delle Arti—representatives of the professional corporations that governed the city since 1282—the building was home to these officials who previously resided in the Bargello. In the 15th century, it was renamed "**Palazzo della Signoria**," reflecting the name of the primary governing body of the Republic of Florence. In 1540, it became known as **Palazzo Ducale** when Duke Cosimo I de' Medici made it his residence. The building eventually acquired the name "Vecchio" in 1565, following the relocation of the Ducal court to the "new" Palazzo Pitti.

From 1865 to 1871, it served as the seat of the Parliament of the Kingdom of Italy. Today, it is home to the Mayor of Florence and various municipal offices. Additionally, there is a museum that allows visitors to explore the magnificent rooms where renowned artists such as Agnolo Bronzino,

Ghirlandaio, and Giorgio Vasari worked. The museum also exhibits works by Michelangelo Buonarroti, Donatello, and Verrocchio.

-Loggia della Signoria-

The Loggia della Signoria is a historical monument in Florence, located in Piazza della Signoria, to the right of Palazzo Vecchio and adjacent to the Uffizi, which features a terrace above the loggia. It is also known as the Loggia dei Lanzi, not primarily because the Lanzechinetti camped here in 1527 while passing through Rome, but because the Guardhouse of Grand Duke Cosimo I, which was situated under the Loggia, included members of the Lanzechinetti. Another interpretation is that the name comes from "lanze," meaning spears, which were the weapons used by the Grand Duke's Guard.

Additionally, it is referred to as the Loggia dei Priori or Loggia dell'Orcagna due to a common but incorrect attribution to Andrea di Cione, known as Orcagna. However, historical records indicate that the work was actually carried out by architects Benci and Simone Talenti. Some sources also mention Orcagna as a collaborator on the project.

On either side of the entrance steps stand **two marble lions**: one from the Roman era (on the right) and the other crafted by Flaminio Vacca in 1600 (on the left). Traditionally, lions symbolize guardianship and protection against negative forces, a belief that traces back to Mesopotamian civilizations.

The most significant feature in this area is the **Perseus sculpture by Benvenuto Cellini**, a large bronze statue that measures 3.20 meters in height, including its pedestal, which is decorated with bas-reliefs depicting mythological themes. The well-proportioned figure of Perseus rests on one leg while he lifts the head of Medusa with his left arm. This masterpiece was placed in the loggia in 1554 and, aside from a restoration period in 1999, has remained in its location ever since.

The Ratto delle Sabine, or Rape of the Sabines, is a complex marble masterpiece created by Giambologna in 1583. At the Museum of the

Academy, you can see the life-size plaster model made by Giambologna himself as a preparatory step for the execution of the marble statue.

Also by Giambologna is the Hercules and the centaur Nessus, with the sensational effect of movement expressed by the body in tension of the centaur subjugated by the Greek hero (1599).

Sculptures from the Roman era include "**Patroclus and Menelaus**," a copy from the Flavian period based on a Greek original dating from 230-240 BC. This piece was a gift from Pope Pius V to Cosimo I. Additionally, there are six female figures positioned near the back wall, believed to have originated from Trajan's Forum in Rome. These figures were discovered in the mid-sixteenth century and, after being displayed at Villa Medici for an extended period, arrived in Florence in 1789. Among the female figures, the first two have not been identified, while the third from the left is Thusnelda, a barbarian captive and the wife of Arminius. The last three figures represent Roman matrons of imperial rank, which are more finely carved and made from higher-quality marble.

The **Ratto di Polissena** by the sculptor Pio Fedi (1865) is instead a nineteenth-century work, which takes up the style of the nearby Menelaus.

-The statues of Piazza della Signoria-

The statues in Piazza della Signoria are not just an impressive decorative arrangement; they also form a unique secular allegorical cycle that is unparalleled in the world. This cycle was likely intended to inspire the city's rulers who resided in Palazzo Vecchio.

Directly in front of the palace, on the so-called "arengario," are the oldest sculptures that once faced the square: **the Marzocco and Giuditta and Holofernes, both created by Donatello around 1455-60**. Due to their value, these original sculptures have been replaced by copies; the Marzocco is now housed in the Bargello Museum, while the original Giuditta and Holofernes can be found inside Palazzo Vecchio.

The Marzocco, made of pietra serena, is a mighty lion resting a paw on the emblem with the Florentine lily, and has now become a symbol of the city.

The bronze statue of Giuditta serves as a symbol of the political autonomy of the Florentine Republic. It was removed from the Medici Palace after the first expulsion of the Medici family in 1495, where it had adorned a garden fountain. This act symbolizes the victory of the people over tyrants. When the Medici family returned, they repurchased much of their heritage, reuniting many works in their collection; however, Giuditta remained in the Piazza to avoid offending the sentiments of the populace.

A further chapter in this ongoing dispute between the Medici and the republic is represented by **Michelangelo's David**. The original statue has since been replaced by a copy that stands in the same spot as the famous sculpture. Michelangelo carved David around 1500 during the tumultuous period of Savonarola, and it embodies the spirit of the people—symbolized by David—who, with divine assistance, triumphs over the tyrant Goliath. The grandeur of Michelangelo's sculpture is even more striking when compared to works by Donatello, and this sense of "gigantism" inspired the creation of other statues that were later placed in the square.

"Hercules and Cacus," created by Baccio Bandinelli in 1533, is located next to Michelangelo's "David." This sculpture illustrates the hero's victory over evil through strength and cunning, using symbolism derived from the Twelve Labors of Hercules. Although the piece was originally intended to be crafted by Michelangelo, his numerous commitments led to the task being assigned to Bandinelli. Unfortunately, Bandinelli's attempt to replicate the powerful style of "David" was met with criticism, damaging his reputation as envious and resulting in harsh reviews that have persisted through history.

On either side of the main entrance of Palazzo Vecchio, you can find two marble statues. The male statue was created by Vincenzo de' Rossi, while the female statue was sculpted by Baccio Bandinelli. These works

represent the classical genre of statuary and depict the couple Philemon and Baucis, who, according to legend, were transformed by Jupiter into an oak and a lime tree as a testament to their mutual love. Originally, these statues supported a chain meant to block the entrance.

The Fountain of Neptune by Bartolomeo Ammannati (1563-1565) and some of his pupils, including Giambologna, is the first public fountain in Florence. The great Neptune in white marble is not much loved by the Florentines who call it *Biancone* (the epitome-summary of a work-expressed by the people at the inauguration of the statue in 1565 "Ammannato Ammannato, what a beautiful marble you ruined!").

Finally, in a central position to the left of Palazzo Vecchio is the grandiose **equestrian statue of Cosimo I**, a bronze work by Giambologna (1594).

-Duomo Santa Maria del Fiore-

The metropolitan cathedral of **Santa Maria del Fiore**, commonly known as the Florence Cathedral, is the main church in Florence and a symbol of the city, as well as one of the most famous churches in Italy. When it was completed in the fifteenth century, it was the largest church in the world; today, it is considered the third largest in Europe, after St. Peter's in Rome and St. Paul's in London. The cathedral stands on the foundations of the ancient church of Santa Reparata, in an area of the city that has been home to religious buildings since Roman times.

Construction of the Duomo, commissioned by the Florentine Lordship, began in 1296 and was structurally completed in 1436. The initial work was led by the architect Arnolfo di Cambio, but the project faced numerous interruptions and was resumed multiple times over the decades by Giotto, Francesco Talenti, and Giovanni di Lapo Ghini. After Filippo Brunelleschi completed the dome, it was consecrated by Pope Eugene IV on March 24, 1436. The dedication to Santa Maria del Fiore occurred during construction in 1412.

The floor plan of the Duomo is composed of a three-nave basilica body welded to a huge triconic rotunda that supports the immense

Brunelleschi dome, the largest masonry dome ever built with a diameter of 45.50m. Inside it is visible the largest surface ever decorated with fresco: 3600 m², executed between 1572-1579 by Giorgio Vasari and Federico Zuccari. At the base of the marble lantern, there is a panoramic terrace overlooking the city 91 meters from the ground. The facade of the Cathedral in polychrome marble is from the modern era, dates back to 1887 by Emilio de Fabris and is an important example of neo-Gothic style in Italy. It is the cathedral of the Archdiocese of Florence and can hold up to thirty thousand people. It has the dignity of a minor basilica.

-Basilica di Santa Croce-

The Basilica of Santa Croce, located in the square of the same name in Florence, is among the largest Franciscan churches and is considered one of the greatest examples of Gothic architecture in Italy. It holds the designation of minor basilica.

Santa Croce is a prestigious symbol of Florence and has served as a meeting place for some of the greatest artists, theologians, religious figures, writers, humanists, and politicians who have shaped the city's identity during the late medieval and Renaissance periods, both in times of prosperity and struggle. The basilica is the final resting place of many notable figures from the history of the Church, including Saint Bonaventura, Pietro di Giovanni Olivi, Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint Bernardino of Siena, and Saint Ludovico of Angiò. It has also welcomed popes such as Sixtus IV, Eugene IV, Leo X, and Clement XIV.

Michelangelo's Tomb, created by Giorgio Vasari in 1570, is situated at the beginning of the right nave of the Basilica, just inside the main entrance. Above the tomb, surmounted by the bust of Michelangelo (work by Battista Lorenzi), are three sculptures representing the personifications Architecture (work by Giovanni dell'Opera), Sculpture (work by Valerio Cioli), Painting (work by Battista Lorenzi) and frescoes work of G.B. Naldini. These figures appear sorrowful over the loss of the great master. The entire design of the tomb is a harmonious blend of painting, sculpture, and architecture.

The body transported hidden in Florence

Michelangelo Buonarroti (March 6, 1475 – February 18, 1564) died in Rome at the age of nearly 89 on February 18, 1564. On February 20, 1564, his body was placed in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Rome.

Lionardo, Michelangelo's grandson, organized the transport of the body to Florence. Fearing that this might be impeded, he concealed Michelangelo's body in a roll of cloth and loaded it onto a cart with other merchandise. The artist's remains arrived in Florence three weeks later, on March 10, 1564.

The body was initially deposited behind San Pier Maggiore, in the company of the Assumption (Assunta). Two days later, during the night, it was transported to the Basilica of Santa Croce by artists from the Academy, amidst a large crowd illuminated by torches.

After numerous delays, Michelangelo's funeral took place on July 14, 1564, at the Church of San Lorenzo. Following the ceremony, his body was finally laid to rest in his tomb inside the renowned Basilica of Santa Croce in Florence, where he continues to rest to this day.

-Republic square-

Piazza della Repubblica has served as the city's center since Roman times. This square is located exactly where the Column of Abundance stands, marking the intersection of the cardo and the decumanus maximi, which opened up to the Forum. The cardo corresponds to Via Roma, Via Calimala, and Via Por Santa Maria, while the decumanus includes Via del Corso, Via degli Speziale, and Via degli Strozzi.

During the demolitions of the nineteenth century, archaeological traces were uncovered, including remains of structures, a bath complex facing south, and remnants of religious buildings. For instance, Via del Campidoglio and Via delle Terme are named after their respective archaeological finds. An entrance arch was located on the south side, and the north side was bordered by a fence wall. Public buildings were situated to the east and south, with the Capitoline temple to the west.

In a later phase, likely during the Hadrian era, the area was further monumentalized, extending and elevating the square and creating a new Lunense marble flooring that is roughly one and a half meters higher than before. There were some doors with steps and a small portico with statues of magistrates and emperors.

The Capitolium, dating from the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD, was located roughly where the porticoes stand today. It was situated on a quadrangular podium about three meters high, which was accessible by stairs; the foundations of this structure still remain.

Dante mentions an oral tradition stating that there was a temple dedicated to Mars in this area, which was believed to watch over the city. According to the poet, this connection contributed to the city's bellicose character. Other sources suggest that a statue of Mars—or possibly another equestrian deity—once existed and was placed near the Ponte Vecchio during the Middle Ages. However, this statue was swept away during the flood of 1333.

Colonna della Abbondanza, also called the Dovizia column.

The Abbondanza column is situated in Piazza della Repubblica. In ancient Roman Florentia, this location marked the intersection of the cardo and the decumanus, making it the center, or "navel," of the city. It is believed that there was originally a Roman column here, likely topped with a statue from that era, although any traces of it have since been lost.

The current column was erected in 1431 and features a statue of Dovizia, created by Donatello, which is made from pietra serena. Two iron fittings were attached to the granite shaft: one at the top, designed to hold a small bell that rang to signal the opening and closing times of market activities, and another at the bottom. This lower bell, connected to two chains with a collar, was used to expose dishonest traders, fraudsters, and insolvent debtors as part of a "pillory" system.

-Republic Square in the Middle Ages-

In the early Middle Ages, the area was densely built, with chroniclers noting that there were no longer any gardens or spaces for grazing within the city. The tower houses rose vertically due to the lack of space. Over time, however, this area retained its function as a meeting place and began hosting the market, which became institutionalized after the year 1000. Compared to other Italian cities, the public space designated for commerce was clearly defined. This contrasted with the Piazza del Duomo, which was dedicated to political affairs, and the Piazza del Comune (Piazza della Signoria), which was meant for political and civil matters.

In the sixteenth century, the market acquired the designation of “Old Market” due to the construction of the Loggia del Mercato Nuovo near the Ponte Vecchio. The Old Market was a low, elongated building with a prominent canopy that provided shelter for buyers and stalls, which were arranged on both sides. Additional shops and stalls filled the surrounding square.

The area also included the Jewish Ghetto, where Cosimo I had mandated that the Jewish community reside within the city. Within the ghetto, there were both an Italian synagogue and a Spanish or Levantine synagogue.

-Piazzale Michelangelo-

It is the most famous viewpoint of the city's skyline, featured in countless postcards and a must-see for tourists visiting the city. It was built in 1869 based on a design by architect Giuseppe Poggi on a hill just south of the historic center, to complete the redevelopment projects on the left bank of the Arno. At that time, Florence was the capital of Italy, and the entire city was undergoing an urban renewal known as the Renovation or the bourgeois rebirth. The lungarni (broad riverside roads) were created; on the right bank, instead of the fourteenth-century walls, ring roads were opened up in the style of boulevards; on the left bank, Viale dei Colli, an eight-kilometer-long panoramic tree-lined road, was constructed along the hill of San Miniato, where the square was built at its highest point, serving as a privileged panoramic terrace overlooking the city. The story of the rapid construction of this project has been detailed by the Italian

journalist Pietro Cocoluto Ferrigni, who is known by the pseudonym Yorick. He reports that some Florentines were sorry about 'the excessive expenditure' of the construction.

Between 1890 and 1935, the area hosted the tracks of the Chianti tramway, which connected Florence with San Casciano in Val di Pesa and Greve in Chianti.

The square, dedicated to the great Renaissance artist Michelangelo, features copies of some of his famous works preserved in Florence: the David and the four allegories of the Medici Chapels of San Lorenzo. These copies are made of bronze, while the originals are all in white marble. The monument was drawn by nine pairs of oxen on June 25, 1873.

Mr. Poggi also designed the neoclassical loggia that dominates the terrace, which now houses a panoramic restaurant. It was originally intended to hold a museum of Michelangelo's works, which was never built. On the wall of the balcony beneath the loggia, there is a large inscribed plaque that commemorates his work: Giuseppe Poggi, Florentine architect. Turn around here is his monument MCMXI.

The panorama includes the heart of Florence, from Forte Belvedere to Santa Croce, passing through the lungarni and bridges, especially the Ponte Vecchio. The Duomo, Palazzo Vecchio, Bargello, and the octagonal bell tower of the Badia Fiorentina stand out, not to mention the hills north of the city with Fiesole and Settignano in the center. It rises 104 meters above sea level.

After an amazing tour of Florence, we head toward the countryside to a winery of striking beauty for a very interesting wine tasting!

The “WINE TASTING,” if reserved, will take place just outside Florence, in the countryside, at the beautiful winery “Fattoria San Michele a Torri,” featuring three types of local wines, bruschetta, salami, and cheese. It is also possible to turn the wine tasting into a light lunch with advanced notice. The wine tasting is not included in the tour fee.

PISA

-Cathedral of Pisa-

The Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta, located in the center of the Piazza dei Miracoli, is the medieval cathedral of Pisa. This Romanesque masterpiece, particularly noted for its Pisan Romanesque style, serves as a tangible testament to the prestige and wealth attained by the Maritime Republic of Pisa during its peak.

Construction began in 1063 (or 1064, according to the Pisan calendar) under the direction of the architect Buscheto. The project was funded by a tenth of the spoils gained from the Pisan expedition in Sicily against the Muslims in the port of Palermo, which was led by Giovanni Orlandi, a member of the Orlandi family.

Different stylistic elements come together: classic, Lombard-Emilian, Byzantine, and especially Islamic, reflecting the international presence of Pisa's merchants at that time. In the same year, work also began on reconstructing the basilica of San Marco in Venice, suggesting there might have been a rivalry between the two maritime republics to create the most beautiful and lavish place of worship. The church was built outside the early medieval walls to symbolize Pisa's strength, which did not need protection. The site was previously used as a necropolis during the Lombard period, and by the early 11th century, an incomplete church named Santa Maria was already under construction. The new large church, known initially as Santa Maria Maggiore, was later definitively named Santa Maria Assunta. The cathedral was consecrated in 1118 by Pope Gelasius II, a member of the Pisan branch of the Gaetani (or Caetani), counts of Terriccio and Oriseo.

The end of the works would date to 1180, as documented by the date affixed on the bronze doors of Bonanno Pisano on the main door.

The current appearance of the building complex is the result of several restoration campaigns conducted over various periods. The first major interventions occurred after the devastating fire of 1595, which led to the

reconstruction of the roof and the creation of three bronze doors on the facade. These doors were crafted by sculptors from Giambologna's workshop, including Gasparo Mola and Pietro Tacca.

Beginning in the eighteenth century, a movement emerged to decorate the internal walls with large canvas paintings known as "squares." These artworks depicted Stories of Blessed Individuals and Saints from Pisa and were created by prominent artists of the time. This initiative was made possible by a group of citizens who contributed their own funds to establish a special venture for this purpose.

The plundering of the Cathedral of Pisa and the Opera del Duomo during the Napoleonic era had significant consequences. Many works of art were taken to the Louvre, where they are currently displayed. Notable pieces include "The Triumph of Saint Thomas Aquinas among the Doctors of the Church" by Benozzo Gozzoli, which was originally located in the Primatial Cathedral of Pisa. Other important works include "Death of Saint Bernard" by Andrea Orcagna and "Saint Benedict" by Andrea del Castagno.

During this period, one significant intervention was the dismantling of the "Organ" by Giovanni Pisano. This artwork was reassembled in 1926 at a different location, but it is missing several parts, including the staircase. Additionally, the Monument to Arrigo VII, created by Lupo di Francesco, was relocated from its original position in front of the Saint Ranieri gate and replaced with a simplified, symbolic version.

The building was originally designed with a Greek cross floor plan and featured a large dome at the intersection of its arms. However, it has since been transformed into a Latin cross layout that resembles the shape of a "T." The structure includes five naves and an apse, which is an extension of the main nave, along with a three-naved transept.

Inside, the space evokes the grandeur of great Islamic mosques, achieved through the use of raised arches, alternating bands of white and green marble, and a distinctive elliptical dome inspired by Moorish architecture.

There are also two raised matroneums within the naves, supported by solid monolithic granite columns, which clearly reflect Byzantine design influences. Architect Buscheto incorporated elements from the Islamic Levant into his work.

The Pulpit, also known as the Ambo or Pergamo, located in the Cathedral of Pisa, was carved by Giovanni Pisano between 1301 and 1310 and is considered one of his masterpieces. This pulpit was commissioned to replace a previous one made by Guglielmo between 1157 and 1162, which had been relocated to the Cathedral of Cagliari, then under the archbishopric of Pisa.

Giovanni Pisano completed his pulpit by 1310, and it notably survived the great fire that affected the Duomo on October 25, 1596. With its intricate architectural structure and complex sculptural decoration, the pulpit serves as one of the largest narrative examples from the fourteenth century, reflecting the renewal and religious fervor of the time.

The panels, which are slightly curved, depict episodes from the Life of Christ, rendered in an expressive style. The pulpit's structure is polygonal, similar to earlier examples found in the Baptistery of Pisa, the Cathedral of Siena, and the Church of Sant'Andrea in Pistoia. However, for the first time, the panels are slightly curved, introducing a new sense of circularity in this type of artwork.

Equally original are:

- The presence of real caryatids and telamons, that are figures carved in place of simple columns, with various symbolic meanings
- The adoption of volute shelves instead of arches to support the mezzanine floor
- The extraordinary sense of movement, given by the numerous figures that fill every empty space.

This work presents reliefs with a slightly more compassionate language than the disruptive dynamism of the Pistoia pulpit, while the architectural innovations are more relevant.

One of the caryatids symbolizes **Ecclesia**, and has at its base the series of the four personified **cardinal virtues (justice, fortitude, temperance and prudence)**, among which the naked **Temperance** stands out, which takes up the pose of Venus pudica. But these virtues, as the inscription of John himself says, have a wider meaning, such as four parts of the world, four rivers of Paradise and four ages of women. Giovanni then created a summa of the encyclopedic universe of the time.

-Selected works of art-

The church also preserves the relics of **Saint Ranieri, patron of Pisa**, and the fragmentary **tomb of Henry VII of Luxembourg, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire**, who died in Buonconvento while besieging Florence in vain. The tomb, also dismantled and reassembled (was sculpted by Tino da Camaino in 1313-1315) is now located in the right transept, while it was originally placed in the center of the apse, as a sign of the city's Ghibelline faith. Necessarily moved several times for political reasons, it was also separated into several parts (some inside the church, some on the facade, some in the Campo Santo, now in the Museo dell'Opera).

The 27 paintings that cover the grandstand behind the high altar, depicting episodes from the Old Testament and Christological stories, were painted between the 16th and 17th centuries by the greatest Tuscan painters, including **Andrea del Sarto** (three paintings, **Santa Agnese, le Sante Catherine and Margaret and Saints Peter and John the Baptist**) Sodoma and Dominico Beccafumi (**Stories of Moses and Evangelists**).

Numerous and precious are the sacred furnishings, including **the bronze Crucifix, on the high altar**, and the **Angel Candlestick Beares** at the end of the rich **Marble Transenna**, by Giambologna, in addition to the large silver **Ciborium** designed by Giovan Battista Foggini (**1678-86**) **on the altar of the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament**.

Particularly venerated is the image of the thirteenth-century Madonna and Child, called "Madonna di sotto gli organi", attributed to the Volterrano Berlinghiero Berlinghieri.

The building, like the bell tower, is perceptibly sunk into the ground, and some instabilities in the construction are clearly visible, such as the differences in level between the nave of Buscheto and the extension by Rainaldo (the spans to the west and the facade) .

-THE PISA'S TOWER-

The tower of Pisa (popularly leaning tower and, in Pisa, the Tower) is the bell tower of the cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta, in the famous Piazza del Duomo, later on nicknamed Piazza dei Miracoli, of which it is the most famous monument due to the characteristic slope, symbol of Pisa and among the iconic symbols of Italy. It is a bell tower in its own right, 57 meters high (58.36 meters considering the foundation plan) built over two centuries, between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. With a mass of 14,453 tons, the curved line predominates, with rounds of blind arches and six floors of loggias. The slope is due to a subsidence of the underlying land that occurred already in the early stages of construction. The inclination of the building measures 3.9 ° with respect to the vertical axis.

The tower is managed by the Opera della Primaziale Pisana, a company that manages all the monuments in the Piazza del Duomo in Pisa. **It has been proposed as one of the seven wonders of the modern world.**

The works began on August 9, 1173. As usual with the lighthouses and with the buildings adjacent to the sea in general, the foundations were left to rest for a whole year. Some studies attribute the authorship of the project to the Pisan architect Diotisalvi, who was building the baptistery in the same period. According to Vasari, the works were started by Bonanno Pisano. Vasari's thesis, believed to be without foundation, was instead considered valid especially after the discovery in the vicinity of the bell tower of a tombstone with the name of Bonanno, walled in the atrium of the building.

The first phase of the works was interrupted in the middle of the third floor, due to the subsidence of the land on which the base of the bell

tower stands. The compliance of the ground, caused by soft clay, is the cause of the slope of the tower and, although to a lesser extent, of all the buildings in the square. The works resumed in 1275 under the guidance of Giovanni di Simone and Giovanni Pisano who added three more floors to the previous building. In an attempt to straighten the tower, the three added floors tend to curve in the opposite direction to the slope. The bell tower was completed in the middle of the following century, adding the bell cell. Since its construction, the overhang has substantially increased, but over the centuries there have also been long periods of stability or even a reduction in the slope. During the nineteenth century the bell tower was affected by major renovations, which led, for example, to the isolation of the base of the tower. The works, carried out under the direction of Alessandro Gherardesca, contributed to definitively debunk the theory, supported by some scholars of the time, according to which the bell tower was thought to have been leaning since its origin.

THANK YOU!

Alessandro Vagnoni