



HISTORIC CENTRE OF FLORENCE

“Even if, instead of following the dim daybreak, our imagination pauses on a certain historical spot and awaits the fuller morning, we may see a world-famous city, which has hardly changed its outline since the days of Columbus, seeming to stand as an almost unviolated symbol, amidst the flux of human things, to remind us that we still resemble the men of the past more than differing from them [...]”

Romola, George Eliot

There are many cities capable of enchanting, stirring up emotions, and leaving a permanent trace in the soul of the most passionate traveller. But very few are the cities which convey the feeling of being in a place that has changed the world's destiny. Florence is one of them: with its prodigious development in the Renaissance period, it has left an indelible mark on the artistic, social and philosophical history not only of our culture, but of the whole of mankind. The Florentine propensity for beauty did not stop once that unrepeatable season came to an end, because the city offers also mannerist masterpieces and outstanding baroque frescoes, up to contemporary art expressions.



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CRITERIA FOR SELECTION: From an architectural, sculptural and pictorial point of view, the historic centre of Florence is a concentration of incomparable masterpieces dating back to the Middle Ages, when the city played an extremely significant political and economic role all over Europe. Subsequently, in the 15th century, figures like Masaccio, Donatello and Brunelleschi completely transformed the history of human expressiveness, indissolubly linking the concept of “Renaissance” with the city artistic flourishing.





“It was pleasant to wake up in Florence, to open the eyes upon a bright bare room, with a floor of red tiles which look clean though they are not; with a painted ceiling whereon pink griffins and blue amorini sport in a forest of yellow violins and bassoons. It was pleasant, too, to fling wide the windows, pinching the fingers in unfamiliar fastenings, to lean out into sunshine with beautiful hills and trees and marble churches opposite, and close below, the Arno, gurgling against the embankment of the road.”

Edward Morgan Forster wrote *A Room with a View* over 100 years ago, but his words perfectly describe the experience awaiting also today's visitors.

Visiting **1 Uffizi Galleries** in the early morning is a wonderful way to start the day, and it gives the opportunity to admire some of the rooms before the rush of visitors. And it could not be otherwise, as it is one of the most outstanding, amazing and astonishing museums in the world. You will soon realise that, standing before the masterpieces by Botticelli and the great masters of the Renaissance, walking along the corridors shining with beauty, your mind will be packed with superlatives and emphatic comments during the entire visit. Right after, take a few steps to see another extraordinary icon of the city: **2 Piazza della Signoria**, since the

Middle Ages the symbol of Florence's political power, the place where people gathered, death sentences were executed and the city celebrations were held.

Today the square leaves visitors stunned for being a perfect synthesis between its majestic monumentality and sinuous lines, its asymmetrical profiles and regular geometries; for the sculptural plurality of **Loggia dei Lanzi** and the solemn uniqueness of **Neptune's Fountain**; and for the need to vigorously jostle in the attempt to proceed and admire a beauty that is almost ideal.

3 Palazzo Vecchio overlooks the square with the superb medieval

profile of its facade, the cyclopean **Salone dei Cinquecento**, the private **apartments** of the Medici family and the several pictorial masterpieces to be found inside. At this point, a diversion from the traditional artworks fits perfectly, especially because, inside the sublime frame of **4 Palazzo Strozzi**, the exhibitions of some of the most important contemporary artists are regularly staged. The tour ends wonderfully with a visit to **5 Basilica of Santa Maria Novella**: from Giotto to Brunelleschi, from Masaccio to Paolo Uccello, from Filippino Lippi to Ghirlandaio, this is the right place for another full immersion in Renaissance heroes.



SAN FREDIANO

“And if between Piazza Signoria and the tombs in Santa Croce, the shadows of the Great ones wander relentlessly to kindle of sacred fire the icy spirits of modernity, in San Frediano alleyways, the people who were contemporary of those Fathers, walk, flesh and bones, close to them.”

The Girls of Sanfrediano, Vasco Pratolini

Once you cross river Arno leaving behind the splendour of Palazzo Pitti and the frenzy of Piazza Santo Spirito, you will find San Frediano, that in people's mind is inextricably linked to its description in Vasco Pratolini's evocative works. After the publication of *The Girls of Sanfrediano* and *Metello*, this neighbourhood became famous for its authenticity, for its passionate and shrewd inhabitants, and for the popular atmosphere permeating its roads and animated alleys. Although things have changed a little today and the rents are no longer low-priced as in the second post-war period, San Frediano still maintains a special charm. Here you will find a concentration of lovely places where you can spend the night, as well as cheap trattorias, theatres and small squares where the children play football. Anyway, to remind you that this is the city of the Renaissance, this neighbourhood too is no exception in terms of artistic wonders: in San Frediano you can find the Brancacci Chapel, with frescoes by Masaccio and Masolino, where in the 1420s the history of art changed its course.



"GALEAZZO MARIA WAS SO FASCINATED BY THE CITY THAT HE WROTE TO HIS PARENTS. 'I WILL TELL YOU JUST ONE THING - THAT FLORENCE IS LIKE PARADISE.'"

In spring 1459, 16-year-old Galeazzo Maria Sforza, son of Francesco Sforza, lord of the Duchy of Milan, was sent to Florence by his father. His stay in the city is related in the book *La congiura. Potere e vendetta nella Firenze dei Medici*.

Then as now, the impact of Florence on visitors, even the younger ones, is impressive. A Renaissance artwork that also children are irresistibly drawn to is the *Procession of the Magi* (1459) that Benozzo Gozzoli painted as a fresco on the walls of **1 Palazzo Medici-Riccardi**. The setting is that of fairy-tales, whose abundance of details, from the sumptuous clothes to the hunting scenes, from the botanical variety to the triumph of exotic animals, draws the children's attention like a cartoon. Moreover you can have a good time at **2 Leonardo da Vinci Museum** thanks

to around fifty wooden reproductions of the most eccentric, ingenious and futuristic inventions by the prolific scientist, in many cases also perfectly functioning: from the forerunner of the helicopter to the catapult, enjoy the visit through an itinerary which is exciting. What comes next requires a certain physical effort because to reach the **3 Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore** it is necessary to go up 400 steps, but the sensation is that of living a great adventure. Moreover, the top view of Florence ignites enthusiasm and is a reward for any effort. Once you go down, head to **4 Piazza della Repubblica**, a square that has always played a crucial role in the city and that, until 1865, bustled with a thousand activities and was home to the market and the Jewish ghetto. But when, later on, Florence was proclaimed capital of the Kingdom of Italy, this area was completely wiped out to create an elegant, spacious and quite aseptic space where still nowadays very prestigious cafes and institutional buildings stand out. However, the children will certainly appreciate the merry-go-round in the middle of the square. Children will also be very keen on visiting the next place: the **5 HZERO Museum** containing a 280 sqm model, where toy trains run at different speeds, in a very accurate and detailed setting. And finally, a classical Florentine spot **6 La Specola**: in this extraordinary natural museum named after the astronomic observatory (from Latin "*specula*") based inside the Torrino, you can admire plenty of embalmed animals, the largest collection in the world of 18th-century anatomical waxes and giant mammal skeletons.



FLORENCE in books

Reading suggestions to fathom the most hidden parts of the city.

• **Romola**, George Eliot (1862-63). Rumour has it that writer Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot was a pseudonym), member of the sizeable community of English intellectuals that lived in Florence in the 19th century, knew every single corner of Florence. Indeed, the detailed representation of the power struggles in the late 15th century described in this historical novel, where real figures such as Savonarola and Piero di Cosimo appear, convinces us it was not just a rumour.

• **Mornings in Florence**, John Ruskin (1875). Few authors like the great English scholar can transform art criticism into high literature. And although many of the attributions of the frescoes in Florence churches were disproved in the following decades, the hypnotic beauty of the pages dedicated to Giotto and the other protagonists of local painting is unquestionable.

• **A Room with a View**, Edward Morgan Forster (1908). In this classic of the early 20th-century literature, the story is initially set in Florence, where Lucy's love for George blossoms. Among the several reasons for reading this book, there is the description of a city with an overwhelming crowd of visitors, in an age when mass tourism was still not a significant phenomenon.

• **The Girls of Sanfrediano**, Vasco Pratolini (1949). Among the 20th-century books about Florence, this is the most unconventional and informal, as it offers the portrait of a bustling and vibrant city, distant from the refinements of noble palaces, the intrigues of the court and its artistic opulence. Pratolini teaches the reader that it is not advisable to upset the girls in the neighbourhood...

• **La favola Pitagorica. Luoghi italiani**, Giorgio Manganelli (1984). Among the several travellers that paid homage to Florence, Giorgio Manganelli stands out for his capacity to extract original meanings and visions from the usually glorified city masterpieces. A highly recommended reading, especially before visiting the most iconic monuments.

• **Inferno**, Dan Brown (2013). For centuries, Florence has been inspiring the same wonder in artists and writers. Dan Brown set here the first part of one of his most known thriller stories, one of the 21st century's global bestsellers.

Children's books:

• **La congiura. Potere e vendetta nella Firenze dei Medici**, Franco Cardini, Barbara Frale (2017). The powerful Medici family – bankers that, at a certain time in their history, became lords of Florence – has always been involved in conspiracies and plots. But the most scenic was the one organised by the Pazzi family against the young brothers Lorenzo and Giuliano.

• **Vai all'inferno, Dante!**, Luigi Garlando (2020). Vasco is a rich boy from Florence: 14 years old, a bully at school, bad marks but top skills when playing Fortnite. However, one day he finds a hard opponent to beat, that speaks in rhymes and hides behind a hood similar to Dante's. The challenge against this mysterious player will become the challenge of his life.