

**GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY
ROBINSON COLLEGE OF BUSINESS
STUDY ABROAD IN ITALY**

FLORENCE

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Besieged by tourists, students and foreign residents at virtually all times of the year, Florence is one of Italy's most livable and loveable cities thanks to its manageable size, cultural vastness, culinary prowess and dizzying beauty. Florence may be a living museum, but it's also a modern metropolis that offers to its visitors and citizens a huge spectrum of activities and centers of interest. Today a trip to Tuscany's capital goes beyond basking in the city's Renaissance splendor. Contemporary artists and photographers are claiming new ground, while the dramatic arts and music occupy a more prominent place in everyday life. Even food and fashion have soared to new heights with young chefs and designers boldly expressing their desire to move forward and deriving their inspiration from Florence's mythic past. Impossible to list the innumerable reasons why Florence has become one of the world's most beloved cities, suffice it to say that the city's historic glory and persistent lust for life never cease to inspire and to convince us of the greatness that human beings are capable of achieving.

In the unlikely event that breakfast is not included at your hotel, coffee and pastries at Gilli in the Piazza della Repubblica—the largest square in the city—will do nicely. The oldest café in Florence, Gilli is renowned for its confections. It offers both a pristine, turn-of-the-century interior complete with Murano glass chandeliers and a sprawling terrace. Take Via Roma out of the Piazza della Repubblica until you arrive at the Piazza del Duomo. You'll cross paths with the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore (affectionately known as the Duomo) several times during your stay, so you may want to save this visit for later.

The mastodonic marble Duomo was designed by Arnolfo di Cambio and completed in the early 14th century, but the characteristic dome, or "cupola," wasn't finished until 70 years later. The refined red-tiled exterior of the dome quickly became the symbol of Florence's economic power, as it was visible from nearly every village in the surrounding Tuscan hills. Just in front of the Duomo entrance is the Baptistery, believed to be a former pagan temple. This octagonal structure, enveloped in multi-colored marble, harbors two main treasures: the Byzantine mosaic ceiling and the "Gates of Paradise," a gigantic pair of gilded bronze doors sculpted by Lorenzo Ghiberti between 1427 and 1452. Today the splendid dome, together with Giotto's intricate bell tower, exemplifies the city's cultural richness.

What's so special about the Accademia, in addition to its vast collection of Florentine paintings, is the long gallery of Michelangelo's unfinished works that leads to the powerful, lifelike David. The incomplete statue illustrates the pain and frustration that Michelangelo must have experienced when confronted with a "difficult" piece of marble. The young artist was not even 30 years old when he completed this huge statue for the Piazza della Signoria, where it represented for the Florentines the strength of their city and its short-lived victory over the ruling Medici family.

Conveniently located next to the palace, San Lorenzo was the Medici family church. It's also the city's oldest, at around sixteen hundred years of age. The "contemporary" building was designed by Brunelleschi and the strangely staid exterior by Michelangelo. The inside, also by Michelangelo, is sumptuous with its nave of Corinthian columns and artistic treasures (including a diptych by Filippo Lippi and bronze pulpits by Donatello). The separate Medici chapels, again done by Michelangelo, are a unique mix of stone and marble. Within the somber sepulchre, the tombs of the Medici family are decorated with strangely lifelike sculptures.

Photography enthusiasts will be pleased to discover the Museo Nazionale Alinari della Fotografia, or MNAF, opened in October 2006 and located in the Piazza Santa Maria Novella. A refreshingly different way to view art in Florence, the MNAF is dedicated to the history and technological evolution of photography. While a large part of the museum is reserved for fascinating temporary exhibits, the permanent collection focuses on 19th and 20th century masters, as well as contemporary artists. But the most rewarding aspect of a visit to the MNAF is the collection of rare, intriguing images of Italy and Italians since the late 1800s.

If you happen to be in this neighborhood in the evening, dinner at the friendly *Ciro and Sons* is an excellent choice for Neopolitan pizza in a spacious, frescoed dining room. A beautiful terrace is inviting in warm weather for outdoor dining. Otherwise, wind down with a Negroni, the Florentine-born cocktail of Campari and gin that will prime your palate for dinner. (Come back at teatime for the "panforte," a Sienese sweet made with almonds, honey and candied fruits.) Weather permitting, *Capocaccia*, a classic, outdoor bar on the Arno, is a summer spot favored by locals. Alternatively, the smart *Skylounge* of the *Continente* welcomes those craving cocktails on a comfy rooftop terrace complete with dreamy views of the city. Finish with dinner just steps away at the authentic *Trattoria Sostanza*,

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where the bright, old-fashioned space is as straightforward as the flavorful Tuscan fare. Or, slightly northeast, try the romantic Ristorante Rossini, where a polished brigade of cooks and waitstaff ensure a seamless experience. Young chef Alessandro Mazzoni puts together a formidable tasting menu of non-traditional, not-necessarily Tuscan creations that reflect the recent movement in Italian cuisine towards encouraging freedom of expression.

Ease into your day with breakfast at the elegant Caffè Rivoire, near the Piazza della Signoria, before tackling the Uffizi Galleries. Unless you're a serious Renaissance art aficionado, you don't have to dedicate the entire day to the Uffizi, whose numerous galleries are seldom all open at the same time. The arresting U-shaped palace was commissioned by Cosimo dei Medici in the mid-16th century. Today it houses the world's largest collection of Italian art, including early works by Giotto and Cimabue, masterpieces by Raphael, Caravaggio, Tiepolo and Titian, the wildly popular Birth of Venus by Botticelli, and many other paintings that date from the 13th to the 19th centuries.

You might want to stop in at the nearby Palazzo Strozzi, the epitome of Italian Renaissance architecture with its perfect rectangular shape and flawless symmetry. Commissioned in the late 15th century by one of the wealthiest merchants in Florence, the palace is a symbol of the city's emergence from the dark ages into a more human and culturally aware century. Today it has several functions, including that of a museum hosting exhibits on an array of subjects ranging from the Renaissance to Impressionism to contemporary fashion.

Lunch in the neighborhood on the chic Via Tornabuoni at Procacci, a traditional tea salon and wine bar that dates back to 1885. Or make your way back towards the Uffizi Galleries and seek out Baldovino Enoteca, a favorite of Florentines for a quality lunch near the Basilica of Santa Croce. Florentines also favor the Museo Marino Marini, located in Piazza San Pancrazio just east of Via Tornabuoni and offering a welcome respite from the host of huge, historic art museums that inhabit the small city. The successful mix of old and new architectural elements reminds visitors that Florence also exists outside the stone walls of its world-famous palaces and churches. The city's economic prowess is perpetuated by the young, trend-conscious entrepreneurs responsible for maintaining a modern mentality amid the venerable backdrop.

Not to be missed is a stroll through the extensive Piazza Santa Croce, whose gothic basilica is one of the largest and most important in Florence. It contains many artistic masterpieces, most notably the crucifix and altarpiece by Giotto. The painted wooden beams of the ceilings add a warm, rustic aspect to this veritable mausoleum of historical figures. The monuments to Dante and Michelangelo are especially touching. Be sure and take in the 14th-century stained-glass windows and the numerous chapels located around the church decorated with splendid frescos and paintings.

Plan your night around dining and entertaining by taking Via Ghibellina to reach the acclaimed Enoteca Pinchiorri, where a surprising, inventive twist on Italian cooking is the main draw. East of here, near the Piazza Lorenzo Ghiberti, Cibrè features highly creative Tuscan cuisine. Don't come here if you're in the mood for pasta—there isn't any. Also part of the Cibrè clan, the Teatro del Sale by Fabbio Picchi offers an alternative form of amusement. Act like a Florentine and pay the nominal membership fee in order to access this unusual enclave of entertainment, which entitles members to enjoy a club-like atmosphere in which to be wined, dined and entertained. Worthwhile buffet-style breakfast, lunch and dinner are served everyday except Sunday, and the evening show (ranging from opera and concerts to theater and dance) starts at 9:30 p.m.

For true classical music and opera aficionados who happen to be in Florence in May and June, the high profile music festival, Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, may prove to be a holiday highlight. One of the oldest music festivals in Europe (dating from 1937), the Maggio Musicale celebrates Florence's rich musical heritage and features a different theme each year with an international roster of superstar composers and artists performing in the vast Teatro Comunale. In addition to hosting the Maggio Musicale, this 2,000-seat auditorium boasts an impressive orchestra, choir and dance company that performs throughout the year. During summer months, a special program is held in the spectacular Boboli Gardens.

Begin your day browsing the abundant stalls of the Mercato Centrale, or central market, a two-tiered, late 19th-century structure near the church of San Lorenzo. On the ground floor you'll find delicious prepared food, savory meats and cheeses, while brilliant produce is sold upstairs. Brave the "bollito" for breakfast and enjoy a small glass of wine at Nerbone's food stand, where in addition to the popular boiled beef sandwich you can experience the local tripe sandwich or "trippaio." If you prefer to save the inexpensive Nerbone for lunch, grab a specialty pastry at Sieni—try the "schiacciate con l'uva," an Etruscan grape-filled bread—and a coffee at one of the market's bars. Or

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treat yourself to an organized tour of the market along with a one-day cooking course with Judy Witts Francini, a long-time resident of Florence and owner of Divina Cucina. This popular cooking school offers one, two and three-day cooking classes that focus on Tuscan food and wine. Prices start at 290 euros for a one-day class and tasting tour of the market. Days and hours of operation are Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

South of the Mercato San Lorenzo towards the Arno is the picturesque straw market, Mercato Nuovo, where straw hats and bags, along with leather goods, make inexpensive gifts or souvenirs. If serious shopping is on your agenda today, then consider an excursion to The Mall. Avoid paying full price for luxurious Italian fashions in the city center when just a mere 30 minutes outside Florence you can shop in a dreamlike outlet center. Top designers include Bottega Veneta, Ungaro, Zegna, Gucci, Hogan, La Perla, Loro Piana, Ferragamo, Rossi, Tod's and Valentino. Open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., and on Sunday from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., The Mall is most easily accessible by car but can also be reached via train from Florence's Santa Maria Novella station. Once you arrive at the Rignano sull'Arno station, The Mall is a five-minute taxi ride away.

If you've managed to visit every museum and monument on this side of town, now might be the time to cross the time-honored Arno and venture into Florence's "rive gauche." From the Piazza del Duomo, take the Via Roma, which turns into the Via Calimala. Then take the Via Por Santa Maria, which will allow you to traverse the Ponte Vecchio, or "Old Bridge." Amazingly, the bridge that spans the widest part of the Arno can trace its origins back to the Etruscans. This solid structure survived the centuries despite wars, plague and a massive flood in 1966. The current cluster of sparkling jewelry shops piled on the Ponte Vecchio was installed by the Medici family, who replaced the original Medieval merchants in an effort to embellish the city in 1593.

The left bank of the Arno is home to the city's antiquarian neighborhood, soulful trattorias, friendly wine bars, cozy cafés and intriguing monuments such as the Pitti Palace, the Boboli Gardens and the Church of Santo Spirito. Time should be allotted for a visit to this village-like side of town, where your first stop may be the inviting wine bar Le Volpi e L'Uva. Its tempting appetizers, plates of cheese and thinly sliced meats are perfect for a light lunch before proceeding onto the Pitti Palace.

In 1550 the palace was the residence of the Medici family, but today it's a fascinating amalgam of museums containing eclectic collections belonging to members of the Medici family throughout the ages. The Galleria Palatina showcases not only Italian masters, such as Raphael and Titian, but also Flemish and Spanish painting. A testament to the family whose patronage of the arts is largely responsible for the beauty of Florence, the Pitti apartments are filled with tapestries, furniture, porcelain and other fine works of art. On the other end of the spectrum is the Galleria d'Arte Moderna, located on the second floor of the palace and celebrating 150 years of Italian painting. The Museo degli Argenti displays silver but also jewels that belonged to the Medicis. Also in the Pitti Palace is a small museum of horse-drawn carriages and other period vehicles, which, together with the rest of the palace's galleries, should give visitors a general idea of the luxury that characterized the daily life of a Medici in Renaissance Florence.

Don't even think of leaving the confines of the palace without a stroll through the lush, hauntingly romantic Boboli Gardens. The gardens were purchased by the Medici in 1550 and slowly transformed over the years with the addition of architectural landscaping, statuary, ponds and, most notably, a large grotto designed by Bernardo Buontalenti in 1574. Long lanes of cypress trees and large, limpid basins add to the tranquil magic of this privileged park.

If you can tear yourself away from the breathtaking gardens, head to the nearby Piazza di Santo Spirito. Take time to appreciate the outside of the church of Santo Spirito, a welcome respite from the heavy, ornate façades of the typical Florentine church. The stark exterior gives way to a refined interior with long aisles delineated by a succession of stately Corinthian columns. Look for the famous painting by Filippo Lippi of the Madonna and Child with the Saints. The nearby refectory boasts an impressive Last Supper fresco.

With dinner on your mind, you may choose simply to stay in the area. On Via Santo Spirito, Olio & Convivium is both an ultra-fine food shop specializing in olive oil and an upscale restaurant favored by high Florentine society. In the Piazza Santo Spirito, Borgo Antico is a moderately priced pizzeria and restaurant serving up authentic ambience on the generous outdoor terrace. Take a taxi east of the Boboli Gardens and dine off the beaten path with savvy locals at Enoteca Fuori Porta, offering excellent wines, appetizers and simple, quality pastas.

- Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore is the cathedral church (Duomo) of Florence, Italy, begun in 1296 in the Gothic style to the design of Arnolfo di Cambio and completed structurally in 1436 with the dome

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engineered by Filippo Brunelleschi. The exterior of the basilica is faced with polychrome marble panels in various shades of green and pink bordered by white and has an elaborate 19th century Gothic Revival facade by Emilio De Fabris. The cathedral complex includes the Baptistery and Giotto's Campanile. The three buildings are part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site covering the Historic Centre of Florence and are a major attraction to tourists visiting the region of Tuscany. The basilica is one of Italy's largest churches, and until the modern era, the dome was one of the largest in the world, being surpassed in width only by that of the Pantheon in Rome. It remains the largest brick dome ever constructed

- Piazza della Signoria is an L-shaped square in front of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, Italy. It was named after the Palazzo della Signoria, also called Palazzo Vecchio. It is the focal point of the origin and of the history of the Florentine Republic and still maintains its reputation as the political hub of the city. It is the meeting place of Florentines as well as the numerous tourists. The impressive 14th century Palazzo Vecchio is still preeminent with its crenellated tower. The square is also shared with the Loggia della Signoria, the Uffizi Gallery, the Palace of the Tribunale della Mercanzia (1359) (now the Bureau of Agriculture), and the Uguccioni Palace (16th Century, with a facade probably by Raphael). Located in front of the Palazzo Vecchio is the Palace of the Assicurazioni Generali (1871, built in Renaissance style)
- Uffizi Gallery – one of the oldest and most famous art museums in the world, is housed in the Palazzo degli Uffizi, a palazzo in Florence, Italy. The building of the palace was begun by Giorgio Vasari in 1560 for Cosimo I de' Medici as the offices for the Florentine magistrates — hence the name "uffizi" ("offices"). Construction was continued to Vasari's design by Alfonso Parigi and Bernardo Buontalenti and ended in 1581.
- Ponte Vecchio – is a Medieval bridge over the Arno River, in Florence, Italy, noted for still having shops built along it, as was once common. Butchers initially occupied the shops; the present tenants are jewelers, art dealers and souvenir sellers. It has been described as Europe's oldest wholly-stone, closed-spandrel segmental arch bridge, but there are far older segmental arch bridges such as Alconétar Bridge. The Ponte Vecchio's two neighbouring bridges are the Ponte Santa Trinità and the Ponte alle Grazie.
- Basilica di San Lorenzo (Basilica of St Lawrence) is one of the largest churches of Florence, Italy, situated at the centre of the city's main market district, and the burial place of all the principal members of the Medici family from Cosimo il Vecchio to Cosimo III. It is one of several churches that claim to be the oldest in Florence; when it was consecrated in 393 it stood outside the city walls.
- Palazzo Pitti – in English sometimes called the Pitti Palace, is a vast mainly Renaissance palace in Florence, Italy. It is situated on the south side of the River Arno, a short distance from the Ponte Vecchio. The core of the present palazzo dates from 1458 and was originally the town residence of Luca Pitti, an ambitious Florentine banker. Today, it houses several minor collections in addition to those of the Medici family, and is fully open to the public.
- Street Market - One of the liveliest markets is the **San Lorenzo** market that stretches over a labyrinth of medieval streets that encircle San Lorenzo church. The street market runs daily except Sundays, from 0730 - 1900. You'll find leather goods, clothes, and souvenirs. As part of this market, you'll find the fruit and vegetable market in the nearby piazza del mercato centrale.
 - In Santa Croce, at Piazza Ghiberti you'll find the freshest and cheapest of produce of the best farmers market in town. The market is open from 0700 - 1400, Monday to Saturday. For organic foods visit the Fierucola market which is located in Piazza Santo Spirito and operates every third Sunday in the month.