



Italy Guidebook

2019







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What to Know

Before You Travel

Passports and Visas

Passports

You must have a valid passport to travel to Europe.

- **Passport signature:** make sure that you have signed your name exactly as it is printed on the passport.
- **Expiration date:** For European travel, **the expiration date must be at least six (6) months beyond the date of your return to the USA.** There are no exceptions here. If you do not meet this qualification you will not be allowed beyond the airline check-in counter.

Obtaining a passport, or even renewing an old one, can take some time. The average delivery time is 4 to 6 weeks. For specific information on applying for passports, see the State Department's website: travel.state.gov

Visas

Travelers holding an American passport do not require a visa to travel to Italy for stays of up to three months. If you hold a non-US passport, you must check your visa requirements prior to departure and obtain all necessary travel documents.

Travel Insurance

David McGuffin's Exploring Europe provides FREE travel insurance for all its tour members. This basic coverage is included in the price of your tour and includes emergency medical expenses, baggage delay and trip delay from the commencement of your tour until your tour ends at its last destination. **This policy does not cover trip cancellation or flight cancellation before your tour begins.**

If you want coverage that includes pre-tour cancellation, pre-existing conditions, or any cancellation, you'll need to look into purchasing a package that insures these aspects of your travel. To take full advantage of the insurance and to cover pre-existing medical conditions, **this type of policy must be**





Before You Travel

purchased within 10 days of making your first payment or deposit toward your trip.

The cost of **Comprehensive Insurance** is determined by a sliding scale based on the traveler's age, the cost of the trip, and the duration of travel. Normally it is about 10%–15% of the tour costs. Be sure to shop around for the best deal that will meet your needs. Visit davidmcguffin.com/resources/travel-insurance for my recommendations on insurance companies and the policies they offer.

Health and Well-being

If you require medical attention in Italy, be aware that non-EU visitors are responsible for paying for treatment. It is therefore important to have comprehensive medical insurance.

Medications

You will not need any special medication or immunizations to travel to Europe. However, be sure to pack your usual medications in your carry-on bag. Refill your prescriptions ahead of time so they will last through the end date of your tour.

Money

Italy's currency is the **Euro**.

The amount of spending money you should budget really depends on your personal spending habits. Your budget should take into account what you would spend on meals, beverages, souvenirs and free-time activities.

Here are some sample prices: coffee (€1), bottled water (€2), soda (€2), beer (€5), wine (€5), lunch (€10-15), dinner (€30-50), bus/subway ticket (€1.50)

Getting money

Debit cards are the best way to get money while traveling. You can get cash in euros from any ATM. If your bank is partnered with an Italian bank, you can avoid local ATM fees at those branches. Ask your bank about overseas transaction fees and daily withdrawal limits. To minimize these charges, you may





What to Know

want to make a few large withdrawals rather than many small ones. Debit cards must have a hologram, a 4-digit PIN code and be linked to a checking account to work properly in Europe.

Credit cards also offer decent exchange rates and often include fraud protection. Visa and MasterCard are the most widely accepted. If you plan to use another kind of card, consider bringing a backup. Contact your credit card company to ask about transaction fees and currency conversion rates.

We do not advise **exchanging money** in Europe or bringing **traveler's checks**. These are time consuming and usually involve unfavorable exchange rates.

Most establishments accept credit and debit cards. Depending on the fees associated with your cards, the best plan may be to withdraw money with a debit card to have cash on hand for smaller purchases and to pay for any large purchases with a credit card.

Be sure to contact your bank and credit card companies to let them know when you will be traveling overseas to avoid any holds for unusual activity. If your cards still don't work, there is usually a number list for overseas calls on the back.

Electronics

These days it's possible to take just about any gadget to Europe without complications. Most modern electronics are made to operate on multiple voltages. Check the power cord; if it has an input range of 100V-240V it can adapt to European voltage. All you will need is an **adapter**. Be sure to purchase an adapter to fit European plugs (not the UK).

If your gadgets are not capable of converting power, you will need to have a **converter**. As the name implies, it converts the power input and prevents your electronics from "self-destructing". Most hair appliances require a converter, though some will have a switch that allows you to manually adjust the voltage. Even with a converter, hair appliances can sometimes malfunction in older buildings with antique wiring.





Getting Around

Cell Phones

Whether you plan to post daily updates on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook or you just want to call home, your cellphone carrier probably has an affordable plan to suit your needs. In any event, it is a good idea to bring your phone with you when you travel.

Contact your carrier

You may already have limited international use as part of your current plan, or you may be able to add an international calling plan for the month in which you travel. Be sure to get information on the cost per minute for calls, texting rates and data limits. Ask for an overseas number in case you have trouble with your phone.

Wi-Fi

Even without an international plan, you can still use your phone abroad. Make sure you put it in airplane mode before you leave the US. Then you can turn the Wi-Fi back on (don't turn off airplane mode) and use your phone anywhere that Wi-Fi is available. This will give you access to the internet. Some phones also allow Wi-Fi calling. Even if yours does not, you can still contact your friends and family back home using apps like Skype, Messenger, or Facetime. And you can "text" them with apps like WhatsApp.

Calling cards

International calling cards are also widely available in Italy and can be used from most phones. Check with the hotel front desk to make sure there are no fees to use the phone in your room.

Getting Around

Air Travel

The main international airports for flights to Italy are Leonardo da Vinci (Fiumicino) in Rome and Malpensa in Milan. European budget airlines fly out of numerous smaller airports and offer affordable travel within Italy and across Europe.





What to Know

Tips for flying:

- Bring **carry-on luggage** only. This forces you to pack lighter, which you will appreciate when you are carrying your bags up the stairs, through subways and across cobbled streets. This also prevents your bag from getting lost. If your checked bag is delayed, it may take several days for it to catch up with you. In addition, most airlines have fees for checked bags. You can always pack (or buy) a duffel that you can check on the way home.
- Be aware of **restrictions** concerning what can be brought on a plane. Liquids must be in containers no larger than 3 oz. and they must all fit comfortably in a one-quart zip top bag. This bag must be removed from your luggage when going through security.
- If you do decide to check a bag, pack all **valuables and medications** in your carry-on. Be sure not to lock your suitcase. It's easy to open a locked suitcase, and TSA employees may have to break the lock to inspect your bag. It is also a good idea to pack a change of clothes in your carry-on, should your bag get lost or delayed.

Train Travel

International Travel

High-speed trains connect to major cities in several European countries. Reservations are required, as they can sell out quickly. You can buy passes for multiple destinations on Eurail (eurail.com) and Interrail (interrail.eu). Make sure that your pass is valid before boarding and that no additional reservation fees are required.

Domestic Travel

Trenitalia (trenitalia.com) and Italo Treno (italotreno.it) operate in Italy. Tickets can be bought online through those websites (also on italiarail.com) and should be booked in advance for better prices.





Getting Around

Tips for Traveling by Train

Here are some tips to make travelling by train relaxing, stress-free, convenient and comfortable.

- It is especially important to **pack light** when travelling by train, as you must tote all your luggage with you and be able to place it on the overhead rack above your seat.
- **Arrive at the station early** to familiarize yourself with the layout. There will be a central area often containing ticket offices, automatic ticket dispensing machines, restaurants, to-go food shops, department stores, specialty shops, and a waiting area.
- Shop for picnic supplies at the train station and plan to “picnic” while riding the train. This is perfectly acceptable, and everyone does it. It’s ok to bring your own food, drinks, wine, and beer.
- Be aware of pickpockets and do not leave your belongings unattended.
- Television monitors or a display board will list arriving and departing trains. Trains tend to appear on the display 30 to 45 minutes before the scheduled departure or arrival time. The information displayed will include departure or arrival time in descending chronological order, track number, train number and type of train, destination and immediate stops.
- Your ticket will list departure city and destination city, departure and arrival time, train number, train car and seat number. Once your train appears on the monitor, take note of the track number and make your way to the track.
- Some train stations have a **security checkpoint** at the boarding platforms. Plan to arrive on the platform earlier to allow ample time to clear security.
- Once you have located the correct track, verify the train number and departure time on the monitor at that track.
- If you purchase a ticket from an automatic machine in the train station, from a travel agent, or from the Trenitalia





What to Know

ticket office, you must **validate** (*convalida*) your ticket in the green and white machine. **You must do this before boarding the train.**

- Identify your train car number and walk alongside the train until you find the door with the corresponding number. Once you locate the correct car, you will climb the steep steps, enter a small vestibule and go through another door into the train cabin. Walk down the aisle to your assigned seat and stow your luggage on the rack above you.
- **Know the name of your destination train station.** Many cities have several train stations. If you get off the train when you hear the city mentioned you may end up out in the boondocks, far from your actual destination.

Making Transfers

Don't panic if your itinerary calls for a change of trains before reaching your final destination. Transfers happen often, and believe it or not, the European train system calculates, to the minute, the amount of time needed by the average traveler to change from one train to another. If your itinerary contains a transfer, try following these rules:

- Review your transfer train number, departure time and destination before entering the transfer station.
- Several minutes before your stop, begin collecting your luggage and moving to the vestibule.
- Get off the train as quickly as possible.
- Once on the platform, begin looking for TV monitors with arrival/departure information.
- If no TV monitor is in sight, look for a 4' x 8' poster or billboard and locate the time, train, and track.
- From the monitor or "Departures" board, determine what track your connecting train is on.
- Do not delay. Proceed immediately to the track and verify with an attendant or the monitor that this is indeed the train to your destination.





Getting Around

- The procedure described above seems simple, but it can be a big point of stress. Keep your head clear, plan your route ahead of time and know what the steps are to get to the next train. Once you do it a couple of times, it will be an adventure.

Other Forms of Transportation

Most cities operate public transportation in the form of buses, trams and subways (and boats in Venice).

Buses and trams

Tickets (*biglietti*) are available at kiosks, stations, bars and news stands. A one-way ticket costs approximately 1.50€. Tickets are usually valid on all forms of public transportation and include transfers for a certain amount of time (usually an hour). Depending on how frequently you plan to use public transportation, you can get a better deal if you buy tickets in bulk (*un blochetto*) or purchase a pass that is valid for a certain number of days. Tickets must be validated at the time of boarding. Look for the validation machines at the entrance to metro stations and aboard buses and trams.

Some seats are reserved for the elderly, disabled people, pregnant women and passengers traveling with small children. Even if you are not sitting in this section, it is customary to offer your seat to those individuals.

Metro

Information on subway lines is provided in the relevant city sections.

Taxis

To take a taxi, go to an official taxi stand or reserve by phone. Be sure to use only licensed, metered taxis. If you reserve by phone, the meter will begin running at the time of your call. Be sure to ask for the name and number of the taxi (for example, “matera 245”).





What to Know

There will be extra charges for luggage, rides between 10 PM and 7 AM, trips on Sundays and public holidays. There are also special rates to and from airports.

Tips are not expected, but you can give a euro or two if your driver is friendly and helpful.

Uber

Uber operates in most major towns and cities in Italy.

Bicycles

Public bike sharing systems are available in many major cities. You can also rent bicycles, motorcycles and scooters. You must have a valid license to rent a scooter or motorcycle. Italian drivers have a bad reputation when it comes to road safety, so take bicycles on the road with caution.

Walking

Most destinations can be reached on foot in compact historic city centers. Be sure to wear comfortable, worn-in shoes.

When crossing roads, stay alert! Where there is a light and the green man indicates that you can walk, some cars may still be allowed to turn onto the road you are crossing. If there are no lights, the crosswalk is indicated by white stripes. You must cross at these “zebra” crossings. Pedestrians have the right of way, but drivers will not stop if you are waiting on the sidewalk. Make sure that drivers have seen you and have ample stopping distance and step into the street with confidence.

Practical Information

Language

Italian is the official language, but many regional dialects are also spoken. Locals may have limited knowledge of English in rural areas. However, they greatly appreciate when tourists make an effort to speak Italian, even if it’s just a few words. See the phrasebook in the back of this guide for a list of useful expressions.





Practical Information

Time Zone

Italy has one time zone: Central European Time (Central European Summer Time when Daylight Savings Time is in force). It is six hours ahead of Eastern Time.

Hours of Operation

Many **churches** and small businesses close for lunch in the afternoon. Some **museums** are closed on Mondays. On Sundays, churches and cathedrals are closed to tourists during mass, and public transportation runs a reduced schedule.

Bars and cafés usually open in the early morning and close around 8pm, although some stay open late into the night.

Restaurants tend to be open from about noon to midnight, but close for about 4 hours between lunch and dinner (usually from 3 pm until 7 pm). Most restaurants close one day a week.

Shops are open from about 9 am to 7 pm or 8 pm and close for 2–3 hours during lunch (typically from 1 pm to 4 pm).

Personal Security

Europe is a safe destination with a low rate of violent crime. Unfortunately, **pickpockets** are prevalent in tourist destinations. With a few precautions, though, you should be fine.

Use a **money belt**. This is a slim pouch that fastens around your waist under your clothing to keep your valuables safe. You should never keep a wallet in your pocket or in an open purse.

Be alert and be aware of your surroundings. In crowded areas and on public transportation, keep your belongings in front of you, especially if you have a backpack with a lot of zippers or a purse with a lot of pockets. Your Exploring Europe drawstring backpack is ideal for traveling because it keeps the one opening tightly closed.

US Embassy and Consulates

In the unlikely event of a serious crime, or if your passport is stolen, you will need to contact the embassy. It is a good idea to





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keep a copy of your passport in your luggage and leave one at home with a friend or family member.

Here is a list of US embassies and consulates in Italy:

U.S. Embassy Rome

via Vittorio Veneto 121

00187 Roma

Tel. +39 06 46741

U.S. Consulate General Florence

Lungarno Vespucci, 38

50123 Firenze

Tel. +39 055.266.951

U.S. Consulate General Milan

via Principe Amedeo, 2/10

20121 Milano

Tel. +39 02.290351

U.S. Consulate General in Naples

Piazza della Repubblica

80122 Napoli

Tel. +39 081.583.8111

Health Services

You can go to a pharmacy (*farmacia*) for over-the-counter medicines and medical advice for minor ailments. Pharmacists in Italy have more leeway than in the US and can issue some prescription medications.

Pharmacies are marked by a **green neon cross**, and all pharmacies will indicate the nearest 24-hour pharmacy. If you know the generic or scientific name of your medications, pharmacists may be able to refill your prescriptions.

Pharmacies do not carry a wide range of non-health related items.

Non-EU visitors are responsible for paying for medical treatment. It is therefore important to have comprehensive medical insurance. If payment is required at the time of treatment, be sure to ask for an itemized bill.





Practical Information

In the event of a medical emergency, dial 118.

Emergency Numbers

Emergency Operator: 113

Police: 112

Ambulance: 118

Firefighters: 115

Churches and Cathedrals

A strict, conservative **dress code** applies. Your upper arms must be covered, so it's a good idea to carry a scarf, light sweater or jacket if you are wearing a sleeveless shirt. Shorts and skirts must be below the knee. Hats and sunglasses must be removed. Sandals are discouraged.

Wi-Fi

Most hotels will provide Wi-Fi free of charge. Cafés and restaurants will generally provide the password for their Wi-Fi if you make a purchase.

The WiFi Italia app allows you to connect to free hotspots throughout Italy. However, it has met with mixed reviews since its launch. Consider signing up for an international plan with your phone carrier if you need consistent Internet access.

Sending Postcards

You can buy stamps (*francobolli*) at newsstands and tobacconists (*tabacchi*)—look for a white T on a blue or black background. To find out if stamps are sold, you can ask: *Si vendono i francobolli qui?* (see ven-doh-no ee fran-ko-bowl-ee kwee)

The Vatican has its own postal system. Only postcards with Vatican stamps can be mailed from Vatican City.

Public Bathroom Facilities

Public toilets are difficult to find in Italian cities and almost non-existent in smaller towns. Always take advantage of the restrooms when you stop at train stations, restaurants, museums and other attractions. Otherwise, your best bet is to go a bar,





What to Know

buy a coffee, and use their toilet. It is rude to walk into a bar or restaurant solely to go to the bathroom. If you need help locating it, ask politely: *Dov'è il bagno?* (dough-veh ill bahn-yo).

Laundry

While many hotels offer laundry service, it can be very expensive. At most laundry facilities (*lavanderia*), you can drop off your clothes and come back to pick them up later. This is more expensive than self-service but also more convenient. I have listed a few laundromats in each city section.

If want your clothes washed, but not dried, ask for: *lavare solo, non asciugare* (lah-var-reh so-low, non ah-shoe-gar-reh)

VAT and Customs

VAT

Value-added tax (abbreviated IVA in Italy) is approximately 22%. Non-European Union citizens can claim a rebate, subject to certain conditions, on purchases of more than €150 for items like souvenirs and clothing. You cannot be reimbursed for IVA on food or accommodations.

This is a long and tedious process, and many people don't bother with it. But if you plan to make a lot of purchases, it may be worth it.

It is easiest to file the claim in the store. You will need to show your passport and complete a form. However, some vendors can't (or prefer not to) deduct the IVA. Either way, you will need to get a special receipt (*fattura*) with your name and the amount of IVA. Keep these receipts in a secure location.

At the airport, you will need to show a customs officer your purchases and receipts. Once your receipts are stamped, you need to return them to the vendors for reimbursement. Some bigger vendors work with companies like Premier Tax Free that have offices in airports where you can take your receipts to receive your refund. Otherwise, you will have to mail the receipts back to the vendor, hope for the best and wait to be reimbursed.



Customs

US residents are allowed to bring back \$800 worth of duty-free goods (not for resale). See the US Customs and Border Protection website for additional information.

Food and Dining

Here are some things you need to know to enjoy your dining experience:

Drinks

Water – It is customary to purchase water in Italy, even in restaurants, so plan on paying for a bottle of water with your meal. There are two kinds of water sold in Europe: still and sparkling. Sparkling water (or carbonated water) is the most common, but it definitely takes some getting used to, so be sure to specify what kind of water you want.

Unless stated otherwise, it is safe to drink tap water. In fact, you can fill up your bottles at water fountains around town.

Still water: *acqua naturale senza gas* (ah-kwah nah-too-rah-leh sehnt-sah gas)

Carbonated water: *acqua gassata* (ah-kwah gah-ssah-tah) or *acqua frizzante* (ah-kwah fret-sahn-the)

Ice – Until recently, adding ice to beverages was a foreign concept in Europe. Even though most waiters understand the idea now, don't be surprised if you only get a few ice cubes in your glass. Americans are used to ice-cold beverages, but Europeans simply prefer their beverages chilled.

Refills – There is no such thing as free refills in Europe. Most restaurants do not have fountain drinks, so they serve soda by the can...and you pay for it by the can (and it's usually not very cold). You might consider drinking water with your meals and buying additional drinks in a supermarket as a cheaper alternative.



What to Know

Reading the menu

When a waiter hands you a menu and there's not an English word in sight, you may feel a little overwhelmed. Try to purchase a language book that includes a dictionary of food words to help you decipher the menu. It may be a good idea to learn the words for foods that you are allergic to or absolutely cannot eat. Be sure to ask the waiter if the meal you've selected contains those ingredients.

Service

Italians live at a much slower pace than Americans. Consequently, your waiter will not check in at your table 15 times throughout the course of the meal and will not bring the check until you ask for it. In fact, you may have trouble flagging them down once you're ready to leave. Keep in mind that you are not being neglected, rather they are trying to be polite by letting you enjoy your meal in peace. If you know you are going to be in a hurry, it is a good idea to mention it when your waiter first comes to greet you. Remember, you can always grab a quick bite at the "take away" counters. Restaurants that have a take-away counter often offer the same food at the counter for a cheaper price.

Tipping

Tipping is not expected. You can round up to the next euro or two in restaurants for good service. It is customary to leave some change in bars and cafés.





Rome

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Overview and Orientation

Rome, the Eternal City, is a must-see destination for any European tour. There is no way to pack all the sights into just one visit. However, with a little planning you can get an enjoyable overview of this world-class city.

For many, touring Rome can be a grueling process, especially in the hot and humid summer months. The city is overloaded with cars, motorbikes, buses and millions of people. All this commotion seems to put a certain amount of stress and fatigue on every tourist venture around the city.

Neighborhoods

In order to get a handle on the whole Roman touring process, you need to think of the city as three very different tourist destinations. I like to divide the sprawling city into three historical regions: ancient Rome, Vatican City and the Baroque city center. Each destination has its own historical and cultural significance as well as a unique character.

Ancient Rome—The major tourist sites in this area are the Roman Forum, the Colosseum, Palatine Hill, the Arch of Titus, the Arch of Constantine and the Circo Massimo. Nearby are several important churches dating from the post-Roman era: San Clemente, San Pietro in Chains, San Giovanni in Laterno.

Vatican City—Sights here are all related to the Holy See and include Saint Peter's Basilica, the Sistine Chapel and the Vatican Museum and gardens.

Baroque City Center—Fanning out from either side of the via del Corso are Rome's historic neighborhoods and monuments, dating from the Renaissance to the present. Major landmarks include the Trevi Fountain, the Spanish Steps, Piazza Navona, the Pantheon, the Vittorio Emanuele Monument, many Bernini landmarks, Campo de' Fiore, Villa Borghese and several important churches.



Practical Information

Getting to and from Rome

By Plane

There are two airports in Rome. The major airport Fiumicino and the secondary airport Ciampino.

Fiumicino (FCO) Airport

The airport is connected to the central train station (Termini) by a dedicated train known as the *Leonardo Express*, which takes only 31 minutes to make the non-stop trip. Trains depart about every 30 minutes.

The **first departure** from **Roma Termini** is at **5.52** and from **Fiumicino** at **6.36**. The **last departure** from the **airport** is at **23.36** and from **Roma Termini** at **22.52**. Only first-class service is offered at a fare of €15 euro. Tickets can be purchased at the Trenitalia desk near the departure platform or at the ticket machines in the station. Tickets can be purchased online for €14.

The Leonardo Express leaves the Termini station from **platforms 23 and 24**. This service is also **guaranteed** in the event of a **strike** (if necessary, the trains will be replaced by buses). Additional information can be found on the web at: trenitalia.com/en/services/fiumicino_airport.html

Ciampino (CIA) Airport

From the airport to downtown, take the LILA/Cotral bus to the Anagnina metro stop, where you can connect by metro to Termini station or to a metro stop near your hotel.

Taxi to the Airports—Rome has imposed a flat rate of €48 for a taxi ride from central Rome to either Fiumicino or Ciampino airports. The fare may be slightly higher for more than three people, but not significantly.

By Train

If you are arriving in Rome by train, you will likely end your journey at Termini train station. From here, you can take a bus



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or the metro to your destination. It is about a 30-minute walk to several major tourist sights.

By Bus

Most buses to Rome will end at the **Tiburtina bus station**. From here, you can take the metro to your final destination.

By Car

The city center is a traffic-restricted zone. If your hotel is within the zone, you should contact them first and have them send your license number to the police in order to avoid being ticketed. You should leave your car parked at the hotel or in a parking garage. There are several located around the city.

By Cruise Ship

Cruise ships dock at the port in Civitavecchia, approximately 50 miles northwest of Rome. A shuttle bus will take you from the quay to the entrance of the port. A 10-minute walk down Viale Garibaldi will take you to the train station. From here, board a train to San Pietro Station, near Vatican City.

It is a good idea to buy a one-day travel pass at the station (approximately €10). It includes travel to and from Rome and bus or metro travel within the city.

Getting around Rome

Public Transportation

Tickets are valid on all buses, trams, metro and some trains within Rome's urban area. Once you use a ticket, it is valid for 100 minutes, so you can switch bus and metro lines if necessary.

Be sure to validate your ticket, which will print a date and time stamp on it. This will be automatically done when entering the metro. However, on buses and trams, you will need to validate your ticket at the machine on the bus or tram. If you are traveling without a validated ticket, you will receive a heavy fine from a ticket inspector.



Practical Information

You can purchase tickets from tobacconists, bars or ticket machines at the metro stations and major bus stops.

A single ticket costs €1.50. A 24-hour ticket is €7, 48 hours is €12.50, 72 hours is €18. A 7-day ticket is €24. Be sure to validate your ticket the first time you use it.

Rome Metro (*Metropolitana di Roma*)

There are only two metro lines which makes mapping out a journey quite simple. The two lines are known as **A (RED)** and **B (BLUE)**. Trains run approximately every 7-10 minutes from 5:30

am to 11:30 pm every day. On Saturdays, the trains run one hour later until 12:30 am Sunday morning. The metro is notorious for closing early due to construction and labor strikes. Ask for the metro hours at your hotel and be sure to ask about early closure for construction, especially on the RED LINE.

Buses

There are hundreds of buses linking together all areas of the city. Typically, buses run from 5:30 am until midnight. **Bus #64** connects many of the tourist sights between Termini and the Vatican. Stops at Piazza Repubblica, Via Nazionale, Piazza Venezia, Largo Argentina, St. Peter's Basilica, and San Pietro Station. #64 is crowded and a haven for pickpockets. **Bus H** is an express linking Termini and Piazza Repubblica with Trastevere (get off the first stop beyond

the river). **Tram #8** connects Piazza Venezia with Largo Argentina (near the Pantheon) and Trastevere (get off at Piazza Mastai). **Electro Bus #116** runs through the medieval center of Rome connecting Campo de' Fiore, Pantheon and Piazza Barberini. **Electro Bus #117** connects San Giovanni in Laterano, the Colosseum, via dei Serpenti, the Trevi Fountain, Piazza Spagna and Piazza del Popolo.

Walking

Rome's historic city center is fairly small and is best traversed on foot. It is only about 2.5 km (1.5 miles) from the Colosseum



Rome

to the Spanish Steps and most of the tourist sights are between these two points.

Hop-On-Hop-Off Buses

There are a number of sightseeing bus options for Rome. They all cover the main attractions, although their routes may vary. Some offer a ticket to complete a loop around the city without the hop-on-hop-off feature at a lower price. Be sure to check out their websites to see which is right for you. The five operators are Big Bus, City Sightseeing, I Love Rome, Panoramic and Roma Cristiana. The latter is operated by a Vatican organization and has a religious focus.

Taxi

Taxis are a good transportation option, especially if you have two people splitting the tab. You must go to a taxi stand to hail a cab. Taxi stands are located near most major locations. If in doubt, ask a local or shopkeeper. Always use metered taxis. These “legal” cabs usually have phone numbers printed on their exterior and are either yellow or white. Insist that the meter runs!

Tourist Information

Roma Pass

The Roma Pass provides free admission to one or two museums (see below), reduced tickets to all other museums in the network (45 in total), unlimited free travel on public transportation and discounts for other exhibitions and events. Reservations are still required at the Colosseum.

Consider using the Roma Pass for the more expensive sites (such as the Colosseum or Capitoline Museums) to get the most out of it.

48-hour Roma pass: €28, free entry to one museum. 72-hour Roma pass: €38.50, free entry to two museums. See romapass.it for more information.





Practical Information

Church Attire

Respectful attire is required to enter churches. Shoulders and knees must be covered. Hats and sunglasses must be removed.

Museum Reservations

Rome is a major tourist destination and many museums and sights have long lines. Your best bet is to reserve tickets online. There is usually a booking fee (approximately €4), but this will be well worth it once you see the lines.

Other Useful Information

Hospitals

There are several hospitals in Rome. San Giovanni Addolorata Hospital is near the Colosseum. Address: Via dell'Amba Aradam, 9

Pharmacy

There are a number of pharmacies in the city center. There is also one in the Termini train station. It is open daily, 7:30 AM to 10 PM.

Laundry

Wash Point

Via Santa Maria Maggiore, 119

+39 320 743 7827

Open daily 08:30-19:00

Drop off early and pick up later

Near Termini and Santa Maria Maggiore

Bathroom Facilities

The train stations in Rome have nice, clean toilet facilities that will cost about €1.50. Museums have public toilets as well.

Look for the universal icons pointing you there.





Sights in Rome

Ancient Rome

The Colosseum

This massive arena is the first image that comes to mind when I think of Rome. Constructed by the Emperor Vespasian (the first of several “Flavian” emperors) it was inaugurated in AD 80 as the Flavian Amphitheatre. The Romans were always seeking ways to take a Greek idea and put a new Roman twist on it. The Flavian Amphitheatre is no exception. In essence, the Romans took the plans for a Classical Greek theatre and built two of them end to end, coming up with the design for a huge freestanding “amphi” theatre.

Nero, Emperor Vespasian’s predecessor, had constructed a lavish palace just over the hill, behind the modern-day metro station. The site where the Colosseum sits today was once a large man-made lake surrounded by porticos, balconies and grand walkways. This palace complex, known as the Domus Aurea (Golden House), contained a colossal 33-meter-tall (100 feet) bronze statue of the Emperor Nero. After the Flavian Amphitheatre was constructed, Vespasian had Nero’s colossal statue placed out in front of his new colossal amphitheatre. The combination of the colossal statue of Nero and the colossal amphitheatre seemed to stick and the amphitheatre took on the nickname of the Colossal-seum, or Colosseum. Nero’s statue has perished, but you can see the site where it once stood on the grassy area between the Colosseum and the wrought iron fence flanking the forum area.

The Romans were known as great builders and pioneered many construction techniques still in use today. One such idea was that of the “rounded arch” and concrete. Essentially, the Romans would construct a shell of bricks and mortar and then pour concrete in the void making for a super strong and sturdy structure. This concrete-filled shell was then covered with gleaming white travertine marble for a finishing touch of gran-





Sights in Rome

deur. Once inside the Colosseum be sure to notice the many examples of this shell and concrete construction method.

Notice the exterior of the Colosseum; see all those potholes in the walls? The huge stones flanking the exterior were originally held together with iron pegs, buried into the stone. Then, as mentioned before, the whole thing was covered in travertine marble. The Colosseum became a relic after the fall of Rome and its ready-cut stones were cannibalized for easy building material in the Middle Ages and Renaissance period. Later, when iron was at a shortage, the Colosseum's iron pegs were chiseled out to make weapons for war, as well as hinges, railing, and the like.

Look again at the exterior; do you see a resemblance to our modern-day soccer and football stadiums? In Roman times, the citizens attending an event at the amphitheatre had a ticket noting their seating assignment and which doorway to enter to get to their seats. Now look above the rounded arched "doorways" on the ground level and you'll find "Roman numerals" etched into the marble noting the doorway's number. Just like our stadiums today, the wide walkways and stairs were designed to get people into and out of the amphitheatre very quickly. Inside, along the walkways, were a multitude of kiosks in which vendors would sell official team merchandise, bowls of spaghetti, pizza and even Bud Light.

Still outside, notice the upper levels of the Colosseum. It's not Roman at all... it's all Greek: Corinthian columns on the top level, Ionic on the middle and Doric on the ground floor. Originally, each arch on the top levels contained a copy of Greek statues further contributing to the artistic beauty of the Colosseum.

Only a third of the original Colosseum still stands today. Some of it was destroyed in earthquakes but most was deconstructed after the fall of Rome and used as stonework for newer buildings.

Once inside the Colosseum it may be difficult to imagine just how the exposed skeleton/foundation which remains fit in with the colossal arena of Roman times. I suggest going directly





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to the arena/ground level as soon as you enter the ticket gate. Exiting from the tunnel into the arena is much like doing the same thing in our modern stadiums. The difference here is that you are looking at the tunneling and foundations which once supported the floor of the playing field. These skeletal pillars and passageways were once covered with wooden planks on which sand was spread to make the playing field. Arena in Latin means sand, thus the origin of our modern-day term for an oval-shaped stadium. The Colosseum's arena was 86 by 50 meters, slightly smaller than our present-day football field. With some imagination, you can visualize the rings of seating circling the arena. Notice the buttresses and supports for the tunnels leading to the second level. Even higher up, you can still see the remains of dual stairs leading up to the cheap seats on level three. At the very top, wooden beams stuck out of the stone walls to support huge canvas tarps designed to be drawn to shade the spectators from the mid-day sun.

The Colosseum was constructed for the enjoyment and entertainment of the citizens of Rome. Admission was always free, and events were often sponsored by politicians. The Colosseum opened in AD 80 with a 100-day festival of events in which 2,000 men and 9,000 animals were killed in one sort of competition or the other.

The Arch of Constantine

Exiting the Colosseum, work your way around to the right and find this massive triumphal arch known as the Arch of Constantine. It was erected here in 315 to commemorate Emperor Constantine's victory over Maxentius in the mighty battle of Ponte Milvio and the subsequent proclamation "legalizing" Christianity. If you are a Christian, it is a very important date! Three centuries after Christ began spreading the Gospel to a lowly group of twelve disciples, his message had spread to the "utmost" parts of the world using the Roman Empire as its broadcast beacon. Higher up on the arch are some scenes carved to depict the epic battle in 313. Don't dwell too much on the lower panels, as they have no meaning or relation to





Sights in Rome

Constantine. It seems that by the time the 4th century rolled around artists were beginning to pillage older monuments to decorate the new ones.

The Roman Forum

With the Arch of Constantine to your back, walk up the street (via San Gregorio) about 200 meters and find the entrance gate/ticket booth for the Forum and Palatine Hill. (By the way, this is a good location to purchase your entry ticket for the Colosseum, no long lines and you can walk right into the Colosseum without the wait). The forum was the political, religious and commercial center of Rome. Citizens would mingle here on a daily basis to catch up on the gossip, purchase food, worship their gods, elect political leaders, and generally participate in Roman life.

From the entrance gate, wander around the right side of the Palatine Hill, making your way past present-day excavations to another triumphal arch dedicated to Titus. The rocky road leading from the Colosseum, through the arch and into the forum valley, is known as the via Sacra. This was the “Main Street” of Rome stretching from here to the distant Arch of Septimius Severus at the foot of Capitoline Hill (800 meters in front of you).

Roman Ruins

1. Arch of Titus— Commemorates the Roman victory over Judea in AD 70. Notice the bas-relief depicting the Jews in chains with their menorah.
2. Just beyond the Arch of Titus a path leads off to the left (uphill) to **Palatine Hill**, the site of ruined palaces of the Roman emperors. Taking this walk uphill provides a cool breeze, fewer crowds, and a fantastic aerial view of the Forum and surroundings.
3. The Forum’s Main Square — In its heyday, this flat spot was covered with shiny white buildings with bronze roofs.
4. Temple of Julius Caesar — Julius Caesar’s body was burned on this spot (under the tin roof) after his assassination.





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5. The Curia— The Senate House was the most important political building in the forum.
6. The Rostrum—A raised platform, 3 meters high and 25 meters in length, from which political speeches and opinions were voiced.
7. Basilica Aemilia—In Roman times, a *basilica* was a hall of justice. Notice the floor plan, a long rectangular hall flanked by an aisle on either side. In the Middle Ages, the Christian church adopted this floor plan as the basis for many of its churches.
8. The Temple of Vesta — The most sacred of all places in Rome. Here you see the remains of a circular temple representing the circular huts that housed the original founders of Rome. Inside, a fire burned, just like in Roman homes. This eternal flame was tended to by a group of priestesses known as the Vestal Virgins. Their duty was to never let the fire go out, for as long as it burned, Rome would stand.
9. The House of the Vestal Virgins— The six Vestal Virgins lived here and were chosen from noble families at the age of ten. They served here for a term of 30 years. They were honored and held in high esteem by all Romans.
10. Temple of Antoninus and Faustina — 17-meter-tall Corinthian columns
11. Basilica of Constantine— Now, only a portion of the massive “flying buttress” type arches are standing.

The Fall of Rome

Basically, Rome could not patrol its borders and invaders from the North attacked the weakened city. The year 476 marks the date when the last emperor pulled the plug and left Rome in the dark. All of Europe wasted away for a thousand years in the Dark Ages, a time of weak government, poverty and ignorance. HOWEVER, Rome lived on in the Church! The term “Emperor” now translates to “Pope,” senators became cardinals, territorial governors became bishops, orators became priests and basilicas became churches.





Sights in Rome

Baroque City Center

Piazza Venezia

This busy piazza in the center of Rome is lined with several palaces, the most important being the Palazzo Venezia. It was constructed by Pope Paul II (1464-71) and is one of the first buildings in Rome constructed in the Renaissance style. The huge white building to the south is the Monument to Vittorio Emanuele II, the first king to unite Italy. It dates only from 1885 and houses the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier as well as a fantastic view for those who climb the steps.

The Trevi Fountain

This famous fountain was commissioned from Nicola Salvi in 1762 by Pope Clement XIII. It is a colossal masterpiece dating from the Baroque era. The central figure, the Ocean, rides a chariot drawn by two seahorses and two tritons. It is a famous gathering spot for tourists since the 1954 film “Three Coins in the Fountain” which was filmed in Italy and ran in the United States. However, local Roman legend has it that throwing one coin in the fountain will bring good luck and assure a return trip to Rome. It seems that the “three coin” theme arises from the movie’s title. The movie details the romantic adventures of three different young women falling in love with three different men while on holiday in Italy. It is said that over €3,000 a day is collected from the fountain and used to supply the local food bank.

Pantheon

A perfectly preserved ancient building founded by Agrippa in 27 BC. It was later rebuilt by Hadrian (117-25) as a temple to all gods. The 7th century saw it change from a pagan temple of worship to a Christian church. The portico is supported by 16 solid granite columns (all original except for the three on the left). The humongous doors are the originals and still open and close on their original hinges. Most important is the DOME, equal in width and height. This was a grand architectural achievement for its time... in fact it wasn’t until the age of the





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Renaissance that another such dome was constructed for the cathedral in Florence. The interior contains the tombs of some kings and, most notably, that of the artist Raphael, on the left from the entrance.

Piazza Navona

A lively square filled with artists, musicians, cafés and street performers. It sits on the site of the former Roman-period Domitian stadium, a chariot and horse racing track. In the center of the oval-shaped square sits Bernini's Fountain of the Four Rivers, a Baroque masterpiece completed in 1851. Newly cleaned, its statues represent four rivers symbolizing the four corners of the earth... the Danube, the Ganges, Rio de la Plata and the Nile.

Vatican City

The Vatican Museums

The Vatican Museums house one of the greatest collections of Classical and Renaissance art in the world. They also contain many great archaeological discoveries from Italy. The buildings were originally palaces built for the wealthy popes of the Renaissance. It is thanks to their commissions and patronages that many of these works exist.

Tips for Visiting the Museums

Getting There

By metro: Metro Line A – stop: Ottaviano

By bus: line 49 stops in front of the museum entrance

32, 81, 982 stop at Piazza del Risorgimento

By tram: 19 stops at Piazza del Risorgimento

By taxi: taxi station – Viale Vaticano in front of the museum entrance

Hours

Open Monday-Saturday from 9 AM to 6 PM, the last Sunday of every month from 9 AM to 2 PM. Ticket office closes 2 hours before the museums. Not open on religious holidays.



Prices

€16 full price, €8 for students 6-18, free for children under 6.

Reserving tickets

The line to get into that Vatican Museums is often incredibly long, but you can skip it by reserving tickets on the Vatican Museums website for a fee of € 4/ticket. Print the voucher or pull it up on your smartphone and show it at the ticket office. biglietteriamusei.vatican.va/

Entry Procedure

When you enter the museum, you will pass through a security checkpoint with airport-style scanning. There is a coatroom on the right-hand side of the entrance hall. You will need to leave food and drinks, umbrellas, and any bags, backpacks or purses measuring more than 15in x 14in x 6in. Bags that stick out beyond 6 inches from your body will also need to be checked. If do not have reserved tickets, head upstairs to the ticket office. If you do have reserved tickets, proceed to the window marked reservations.

Restrooms

Restrooms are located at the far left-hand side of the entrance hall, down a flight of stairs. There are a few other restrooms in the museum, but plan to use these before you begin your visit. Restrooms are also located at the following locations: near the cafeteria, in the area by the Cortile della Pigna, in the Raphael Rooms, near the entrance of the Sistine Chapel and by the post office at the museum exit.

Photography

Photos may be taken in the museums **without flash**. Selfie sticks are **not** permitted. **No photography or filming** of any kind is allowed in the Sistine Chapel and the guards are authorized to collect any photographs or videos. The use of cell-phones is permitted, except in the

Sistine Chapel.

Appropriate Attire



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Visitors to the Vatican Museums, Sistine Chapel and St. Peter's Basilica must be dressed appropriately: no sleeveless shirts, short skirts, shorts or hats allowed.

The Grounds

The gardens on the Vatican grounds make up half of the 44 hectares of Vatican City and can be seen from the western side of the museum. On the grounds you will see lawns, woods, gardens, grottoes and fountains. Highlights of a visit to the gardens include: many rare trees, which were donated as gifts to the Vatican from countries around the world; a papal coat of arms made of flowers; a helipad, used by visiting bishops; the head gardener's house, one of the few residential buildings in Vatican City; and a radio tower at the Marconi broadcast center, named for the scientist who set up the first Vatican broadcast for Pope Pius XI in 1931. You can purchase tickets for a guided tour of the Gardens.

The Courtyards

There are three courtyards enclosed by the Vatican museums. You will see nice views of them from the windows of the various galleries. The **Cortile del Belvedere** is on the southern end of the museum. It was designed by Bramante in 1503 to connect the two palaces at the north and south ends of what are now the Vatican Museums. The **Cortile della Biblioteca** is in the center of the museum and was created when Pope Sixtus V built the library across the courtyard. The **Cortile della Pigna** is at the northern end of the museum. It was also originally part of the Cortile del Belvedere. It is named after the large pinecone (**la pigna**) at the northern end. It is 13 feet tall and was cast out of bronze in the 1st or 2nd century AD. The pinecone was originally part of a fountain, then moved to the medieval St. Peter's Basilica, and finally placed at its current location in 1608 when the church was rebuilt.

In the center of the courtyard is the **Sfera con Sfera**, or Sphere within a Sphere, created in 1990. The sphere has been a feature of Arnaldo Pomodoro's work since the 1960s, and similar works can be found at the United Nations plaza in New York,





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the University of California at Berkeley, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tehran, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, and Trinity College in Dublin. The spheres have inspired many conspiracy theories, but most believe they are meant to symbolize the fragility and complexity of the world. From the courtyard you also have an excellent view of the dome of St. Peter's Basilica.

Pio Clementino Museum

You will start your visit in the Pio Clementino Museum, which is named after the two popes who oversaw its foundation in the 18th century, Clement XIV and Pius VI. The original collection, belonging to Pope Julius II (1503-1513), was expanded and opened to the public. This is the heart of the classical sculpture collection housed in the Vatican Museums.

Pass through the Square Vestibule and enter the **Octagonal Courtyard**. The two major sculptures here, the Laocoön and the Belvedere Apollo, have been standing in the same locations since the 1500s. The **Laocoön** dates from around 40 BC. Laocoön was a priest of Apollo. During the Trojan War he warned his fellow Trojans about the Greek wooden horse so Athena and Poseidon, who were supporting the Greeks, sent two giant sea-serpents to kill Laocoön and his two sons. The **Belvedere Apollo** belonged to Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere before he was elected Pope as Julius II, and he brought it with him from his villa. The god Apollo seems to have just released an arrow from the bow which he originally carried in his left hand. The statue dates from the 2nd century AD and is considered to be a copy of an original bronze statue by Leochares dating from 300 BC.

Wind your way through the museum until you reach the **Hall of the Muses**. The statues in this room were greatly altered by 18th century restorers. Some of the statues did not originally depict muses and were modified to complete the nine personifications of the arts. The frescoes on the ceiling also depict Apollo and the Muses. The walls behind the statues originally provided landscape backgrounds for the statues, but they





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were painted over with the red paint in the 1800s. The **Belvedere Torso** dates from the 1st century BC and is signed by the Athenian sculptor Apollonius. Though there is much speculation as to the identity of the sculpture, the current theory is that it is the Greek hero Ajax contemplating suicide. During the Trojan War, Ajax was so upset when Achilles' armor was given to Odysseus instead of him that he killed himself. The theory of the statue's identity is based on the fact that his head is leant sadly toward his right hand which was gripping the sword. Can you see it? There is also a statue of **Bacchus**, the god of wine, and a statue of **Pan** playing the flute.

Next you will enter the **Round Hall**. The architecture is reminiscent of the Pantheon, with niches to display the Roman-era statues. It is dominated by the huge oval bath at the center of the room, with a circumference of over 42 feet. It was likely used in a large public space in imperial Rome. The floor was artfully reassembled in the 18th century with mosaics dating from the 3rd century AD that were found in two different locations and moved here. The gilded bronze statue of **Heracles** (or Hercules) was discovered in 1864 beneath the courtyard of a palazzo. It was found buried in a trench and covered with a travertine slab. According to Roman custom, the statue was given a ritual burial with a sacrificial lamb because it had been struck by lightning. The statue shows Heracles leaning on his club with the skin of the Nemean lion draped over his arm. It is dated somewhere between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD.

Move on to the **Greek Cross Hall**. In the center of the floor there is a mosaic depicting a bust of Athena. The hall is dominated by the two sarcophagi. The **Sarcophagus of St. Helena** is believed to have held the remains of Helena, mother of Constantine, who died around 335 AD. It was brought to the Vatican in 1777. The sarcophagus is carved with military scenes of Roman soldiers on horseback and barbarian prisoners. The lid of the sarcophagus depicts cupids and victories holding garlands, with two lions at the very top. Scholars believe that the sarcophagus was originally made for a





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male family member, perhaps Helena's husband or Constantine himself, given the military decoration. The **Sarcophagus of Constantia** was made to hold the remains of one of Emperor Constantine's daughters, most likely Constantia who died in 354 AD. It is decorated on all four sides with garlands and grape vines, and cupids with grapes. Below there are two peacocks, a ram and a cupid with a garland. The lid is decorated with greenery as well.

As you continue upstairs you will enter the **Gallery of the Candelabra**, named for its massive marble candelabra. The statue of **Artemis of Ephesus** here is rather unique. The city of Ephesus was founded in what is now modern-day Turkey. The Ionian colonists substituted their Artemis for a local goddess, and the two eventually intertwined to create this version of Artemis. She is often depicted in a sarcophagus-like stance with outstretched arms and a tapered body, and always with the cluster of globules. Some say they represent breasts (as virgin Artemis was the symbol of fertility), but some argue that they represent bull testicles (as the local Ephesian goddess Cybele was associated with bull sacrifices). Be sure to look out the western windows for an impressive view of the Vatican Gardens.

From here you will move to the **Gallery of Tapestries**. This is a collection of 16th- and 17th-century tapestries. The Flemish tapestries were woven in Brussels by Pieter van Aelst's school and based on drawings by Raphael's students. On the other wall hang tapestries depicting the life of Pope Urban VIII.

Next is the **Gallery of Maps**. The gallery was commissioned by Pope Gregory XIII in 1580. The maps in this room were based on drawing by Ignazio Danti and it took him three years to complete the project. There are 40 panels which run the length of the gallery and map the entirety of the Italian peninsula, including Sardinia and Corsica. Italy was not unified at the time, so each panel features a different region.





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The Raphael Rooms

Follow the building around to the southern edge and the **Raphael Rooms**. These rooms were used by Pope Julius II as his residence, and he commissioned Raphael and his school to do the paintings.

The first room is the Room of Constantine, which was designed to be used for receptions and official ceremonies. The walls depict pivotal scenes from Constantine's life. Raphael died before the room was completed.

That is followed by the **Room of Heliodorus**. This room was used for private audiences with the pope. The paintings depict historical moments when faith was threatened to show God's protection of the Church. The four scenes from the Old Testament on the ceiling were also painted by Raphael.

Next is the **Room of the Segnatura**. These are Raphael's most famous frescoes and the first works he completed in the Vatican. The room is named after the highest court of the Holy See, the "Segnatura Gratiae et Iustitiae," which met in this room around the middle of the 16th century. Pope Julius II used it as a library and private office. The frescoes represent the three greatest aspects of the human spirit: truth (both theological and philosophical), goodness and beauty. The frescoes on the ceiling depict the allegorical figures of Theology, Philosophy, Justice and Poetry.

In the **School of Athens**, the greatest philosophers of ancient times are gathered together to share their ideas. In the center, Plato is pointing up and Aristotle is to the right holding the book *Ethics*. Pythagoras is in the lower left. Diogenes is lying on the stairs. Euclid is on the right teaching geometry to his pupils. Zoroaster is holding the heavenly sphere and Ptolemy is holding the earthly sphere (he has his back to us). To their right is a man wearing a black hat – this is Raphael's self-portrait.

Last is the **Room of the Fire in the Borgo**. The frescoes were commissioned later by Pope Leo X and depict scenes from the lives of Popes Leo III and IV.





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The Sistine Chapel

Back downstairs you will enter the **Sistine Chapel**. The Chapel was named after Pope Sixtus IV, who had the building restored. The frescoes on the walls were painted by some of the greatest painters of the time, including Signorelli, Botticelli, Roselli, Ghirlandaio and Perugino. The 12 frescoes on the side walls follow the lives of Jesus and Moses. Between 1508 and 1512, Michelangelo painted the ceiling. The central stories in the middle of the ceiling depict the creation of the world and the fall of man. They are surrounded by other biblical figures and stories. Michelangelo also painted *The Last Judgement* on the altar wall, between 1536 and 1541. It shows the souls of the dead rising up to face God and those who are condemned being hurtled into Hell.

From the Sistine Chapel, you can exit to the left to head back to the museum entrance with the spiral staircase or you can exit to the right to enter St. Peter's Basilica.

St. Peter's Basilica

This is the heart of the Catholic Church, though it isn't the official seat of the pope. A shrine was first erected here, at the site of St. Peter's tomb, in the 2nd century. The first basilica was completed in 349 AD and commissioned by Constantine. In 1506, construction for the current basilica began under Pope Julius II, but it would take more than a century for the building to be completed. Many of the greatest architects from the Roman Renaissance and the Baroque periods played a part in its design. Bernini was most influential in the design of the interior and Michelangelo designed the dome.

The Interior

After much back and forth between the architects over the shorter Greek cross plan and the longer Latin cross plan, the basilica was eventually built on a Latin cross plan. The **nave**, or long part of the cross, is richly decorated with Baroque stuccos, mosaics, statues and marble columns. The basilica is 615 feet long. As you walk down the nave you will see markings on the





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floor that compare the length of St. Peter's to other churches. The niches contain 39 statues of saints who were founders of various religious orders. The vaulted ceiling is decorated with gold stucco. The "paintings" that line the walls are actually **mosaics**. The pieces of glass are so small that they only appear to be paintings, and some are replicas of actual works.

The nave is lined with chapels, featuring many important religious works. In the first chapel on the right stands Michelangelo's **Pietà**. He was only 24 when he completed this work, in 1499. It is the only work that he signed; his name appears on the belt. Most striking about this sculpture is Mary's youthful, sweet face and Michelangelo's gift for making stone look like flesh and capturing the folds in drapery. It has been protected by thick glass since an attack in 1972.

At the end of the line of chapels on the right is a **statue of St. Peter** in the nave. There is some controversy over the date of the statue, but most believe that it was made by Arnolfo di Cambio in the 13th century. The foot of the statue has been worn thin by the millions who have come to the Vatican on pilgrimages over the centuries to touch or kiss St. Peter's foot.

There are four huge pilasters where the **transept** (or shorter part of the cross) meets the nave. The four statues represent important moments of the passion of Christ. The four Evangelists: Mark, Luke, John and Matthew are depicted on the four spaces between the arches. The **papal altar**, a plain slab of marble, stands in the middle of the church. It is located directly above the tomb of St. Peter in the **grottoes** below the basilica, where many other popes are buried. Only the pope is allowed to say mass here. Bernini's **Baldacchino**, an extravagant Baroque canopy, stands above the altar at nearly 100 feet tall and weighing over 100,000 pounds. It was commissioned by Pope Urban VIII in 1624 to fill the empty space between the altar and the dome.

The 448-foot **dome** was designed by Michelangelo, but it was not completed until 1590. He worked on it until his death in 1564, when his pupil, Giacomo Della Porta, took over the work.





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The gold inscription at the base of the dome reads “You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church, and I will give you the keys to heaven.” The drum of the dome alternates double columns with gabled windows. It is possible to climb to the top of the dome and out onto the rooftop for some stunning views of both the interior of the basilica and panoramas of Rome. In the transept, to the right of the altar is the **monument to Pope Clement XIII**, built in 1784 by Antonio Canova. To the left is the **monument to Pope Alexander VII**, Bernini’s last work in St. Peter’s completed in 1678.

In the **apse** behind the altar, is the chair (or throne) of St. Peter, or the **Cathedra Petri** in Latin. The wooden chair is placed inside a bronze casing designed by Bernini. The upholstery on the casing depicts Christ giving St. Peter the keys to heaven. The window above the chair portrays the Holy Spirit as a dove and is surrounded by a cloud of angels and cherubs.

The Exterior

The **façade** dates to 1614 and was designed by Carlo Maderno, who lengthened the basilica to create the Latin cross plan. The central window is known as the **Benediction Loggia**. It is from this balcony that the pope blesses the people gathered in the square on Easter and Christmas. The center bronze door is the **Filarete Door**, which dates to the 15th century and the old St. Peter’s. The entrance to the dome is on the far right.

St. Peter’s Square

St. Peter’s Square is partially enclosed by two **colonnades** designed by Bernini. The colonnades are made of four rows of columns, each 5 feet in diameter and 65 feet high. The 140 statues atop the colonnades depict former popes, martyrs, evangelists and other Christian figures and were added over a span of 40 years. Bernini constructed the colonnades between 1656 and 1667.

The **marble disks** on the ground mark the geometric foci of the square. Standing here, the rows of columns line up perfectly and only one row is visible. This is a testament to





Rome

Bernini's architectural genius. There are two fountains in the square. When facing the basilica, the **Maderno Fountain** is on the left. Pope Paul V commissioned Maderno to replace an older fountain at the site in 1612. He left the lower stone of the old fountain but redesigned the rest. The basin is decorated with steps and small columns and the pedestal on top with four scrolls of stone. The **Bernini Fountain** was commissioned by Pope Clement X. It took Bernini 10 years to complete it, from 1667 to 1677. To maintain the symmetry of the square, this fountain is an exact replica of the Maderno Fountain.

In the center of the square is an 84-foot ancient Egyptian **obelisk**. It was brought to Rome from Alexandria by Caligula in 37 AD. The obelisk was removed from the "Circus of Nero" in Rome and placed at the center of the square under Pope Sixtus V in 1586. Moving the obelisk required a workforce of about 900 men and almost 100 horses and took over a year to complete.

Brief History of Rome

Rome's Founders: Romulus and Remus

Rome's history spans at least 3,000 years and is riddled with fact, legend and lore. I think there is no place on earth where you can walk through "history" and still see and feel the long-ago pulse of a distant society. It seems that everything from the Roman ruins to the grand palaces and ornate churches still has a story to share.

One of Rome's most famous legends is the story of Romulus and Remus, the mythical twins who are said to have founded Rome on April 21, 753 BC. While this story is generally accepted as folklore, most historians will agree that Rome was founded in the 8th century BC by a mixture of Etruscan, Latin and Sabine tribes who settled the peninsula a century or two earlier. Rome's first settlements were upon three of the "seven famous hills" in the region, *Palatino*, *Esquilino* and *Quirinale*.

Romulus and Remus are said to have been born to the vestal virgin Rhea Silva, after she had been seduced and raped by





Brief History of Rome

Mars. After their birth they were immediately sentenced to death because they were considered to be in line for the throne of Alba. A royal servant took pity on the baby boys and hid them in a basket by the River Tiber. A flood came along and washed the basket up on the Palatino hill where it came to rest under a fig tree. Here the twins were found and suckled by a she-wolf until discovered by a shepherd named Faustulus who, along with his wife, reared them. Some years later, Remus got into trouble with the law and was arrested. Faustulus was very upset and decided to tell Romulus about the circumstances of his birth. Hearing this, Romulus headed off to town to rescue his jailed brother. Through a series of events, Romulus rescued Remus, killed the king and reinstated his grandfather Numitor to the throne.

In celebration, the two youths decided to found a city on the site where they had been rescued by the shewolf. However, they didn't know exactly where this place was, so they each went to one of the nearby hills to consult the omens. Remus ended up on Aventino hill and, as a result of his consultation, saw six buzzards. On the other hand, Romulus went to Palatino hill and he saw twelve buzzards. So, there was no doubt about it...the hill with the most buzzards became

Roma!

Romulus got to work straight away building a city wall while Remus became very upset at the rejection of his site. Soon, in a fit of rage, Remus came bounding over the half-completed city walls of Roma yelling at his brother, "If your silly walls can't keep me out, how are they ever going to keep out invaders?" Romulus was fit to be tied and picked up the nearest hammer and killed Remus, right then and there!

In a few years the city was complete, but there were no inhabitants. So, Romulus created a refuge on the other five hills in the area and invited a dangerous cocktail of misfits, criminals, outlaws and escaped slaves to set up camp. The only problem was that they were all men. Not a woman in sight!





Rome

Romulus cooked up a devious plan to remedy the dismal situation. He decided to throw a party to celebrate the Festival of Consus and invite all the neighbors from the surrounding countryside. August 21st was the big celebration day and there were thousands eating, drinking, watching football and even Nascar races. While all visiting men were preoccupied with watching the sporting events, Romulus and his gang of misfits kidnapped all the women. One of the visiting kings, from the community of Sabine, figured out they had been fooled and went into attack mode. But alas, Fate was against King Titus Tatius, the Sabine. The gods Juno and Jupiter alerted Romulus who in turn was prepared for the attacking Sabines. A war waged on for some time until finally the captured Sabine women, who had now decided they kind of liked it there in Rome, had had enough. The women convinced Titus and Romulus to stop the fighting and make peace. For a while both Romulus and Titus ruled Rome, but then Titus died.

Romulus lived on until the age of 54. It is reported he died, or mysteriously disappeared, in Rome during the year 717 BC. Some say the gods took him away in a thunderstorm while others say the senators killed him. Nevertheless, without the she-wolf, there would be no Rome!

NOTE: If traveling to Florence, look for the statue known as “The Rape of the Sabine Women” in the Loggia situated on the Piazza Signoria, next to the Medici Palace.

The She-Wolf Connection in Siena

All over Siena you will find images of the she-wolf suckling Romulus and Remus. Just take a look... Il Campo, the Duomo, public squares, drain pipes, and more. I think there might be more images of the suckling she-wolf in Siena than in Rome! So, what’s the connection? Legend has it that Remus’s son called **Senius**, fled Rome, wandered north and founded Siena. The folklore seemed to stick and now you’ll find the she-wolf woven into every neighborhood. Look around and see how many you can find.





Brief History of Rome

Roman History: 3rd to 1st Century BC

Rome became a force to be reckoned with early in the 3rd century BC. But before it could become a superpower, its two rivals, Greece and Carthage, had to be crushed. The Greeks came first and by 272 BC, the Greek colonies in southern Italy were vacated by the fleeing Greeks heading back home. Carthage was a little more trouble, but by the mid-2nd century BC Rome had subdued the Carthaginians and conquered all of northern Africa. With the defeat of the Greeks and Carthaginians, Rome had full control of the Mediterranean world.

When the early 1st century BC rolled around, Rome had a strong hold on what is now known as Europe. It was at this time that its trouble began to come from within. Rome had been ruled by a series of military leaders with great success. Now it seemed everyone wanted a “piece of the Empire” and it became every general for himself.

By 87 BC, the ruler of Rome was the general with the strongest armies. This carried on for several decades until a general named Julius Caesar came along in 48 BC and was appointed to supreme power. By 44 BC, he was named emperor for life. Unfortunately, the “power” went directly to his head and he alienated even his most avid supporters. Finally, his former friends had had enough of him and on the Ides of March (March 15) 44 BC, Julius Caesar was assassinated.

Roman History: 44 BC to the “Fall”

Mark Anthony took control after Caesar’s death, but peace was shaky when Octavian, Caesar’s 18-year-old grandnephew was nominated as heir to the throne. Eventually, Octavian and Anthony made peace and ruled jointly.

Anthony’s love affair with Queen Cleopatra VII of Egypt caused much strife between the two leaders. It came to a head when Anthony started handing out pieces of the Roman Empire to Queen Cleopatra. Octavian attacked Anthony’s troops in the naval battle of Actium in 31 BC and that was the end of Anthony.





Rome

Octavian was left the sole ruler of Rome, but he remembered what had happened to Julius Caesar. Consequently, he handed over all power to the Senate in 27 BC. The Senate promptly gave all the power back to Octavian and made him the first emperor of Rome with the title of Augustus.

Caesar Augustus was a well-liked Emperor whose leadership style led to a rare time of peace and tranquility. Later this era would be referred to as the Golden Ages. He built new monuments (like the “Alter of Peace”), repaired old decayed ones, and was proud of his artistic achievement.

Augustus’s successors once again sent Rome into depravity. Emperors Tiberius and Caligula were noted for being insanely cruel. Caligula was so obtuse he sarcastically named his horse “senator” and ordered his armies to go out to the seashore and gather seashells! He was assassinated in AD 41.

A simple man, Claudius (41-54) became emperor and established a new era of peace and calm. During his reign, the port facilities were established in Ostia, just outside of Rome. He constructed a new aqueduct to bring fresh water into the city and Rome’s hold on Britannia was firmly established. Alas, he married a beautiful woman named Agrippina. Most likely, it was she who murdered Emperor Claudius in AD 54. After his death, madness returned to the city!

Claudius’s successor was Nero, Agrippina’s 17-year-old son from a previous marriage. A supposed musician, all Nero became famous for was the massacre of Christians and serial rape. His downfall came in AD 64 when a massive fire broke out and much of the city was destroyed. His reign (54-68) ended in suicide when the Senate proclaimed him a public enemy.

In the course of one year, Rome fell under the rule of four Emperors. The city fell further into chaos and mayhem. Finally, Vespasian, a respected military man, took control in AD 69. He brought honor back to the crown and peace to the empire. Vespasian is famous for constructing the Colosseum on the demolished remains of Nero’s *Domus Aurea*, or Golden House. He ruled until AD 79.





Brief History of Rome

The 2nd century is known as Rome's Golden Age. Under the leadership of Trajan and then Hadrian (117-38) the

Roman Empire flourished and expanded. Hadrian became famous for restoring the Pantheon and building "Hadrian's Wall" in northern England to keep the Scots out of the Empire.

Alas, all good things come to an end, so the Golden Age went into decline during the 3rd century. Civil war and anarchy once again became the norm for the empire. Diocletian (284-305) divided the empire in half. He took the rich eastern half and gave Maximian the shaky western half.

In 305, both Diocletian and Maximian abdicated at the same moment. The thrones were left to Constantius in the west and Galarius in the east. This did little to calm the renewed growing chaos. Eventually war broke out between Constantine and Maxentius (the sons of the previous emperors).

In 312, on the night before Constantine was to go into battle with Maxentius, he saw a vision of a cross in the night sky accompanied by the message, "With this sign, you will conquer." The next day, at what has become known as the Battle of Ponte Milvio, he defeated his rivals, won the battle, and eventually reunited the Empire.

In 313, Constantine issued the "Edict of Milan" which officially legalized Christianity. Christianity became the new "in thing" and many joined the followers of Christ all over the Empire. It was during this time that the (Old) Basilica of Saint Peter was constructed in Rome.

In 330, Constantine moved the seat of the Empire eastward to Constantinople. This was devastating to the city of Rome and it once again fell into decay. The 5th century brought invasions from the Germanic tribes in the North, who saw the once glorious city as an easy target.

The sack of Rome in 410 by the Visigoths marked the beginning of the end. In 440, the dreaded Attila the Hun was on the attack and was persuaded by a last-minute plea from Pope Leo





Rome

I not to attack the city. Unfortunately, that did not stop the Vandals from sacking the city in 455.

The year 476 is regarded as the final end of the western Empire when the last emperor, Romulus Augustus was deposed.

Tours and Tour Guides

River Cruises

Consider taking a cruise on the Tiber. There are several sight-seeing, dinner and aperitivo cruises available. See viator.com to choose one that's right for you.

Shopping

You can find designer labels on Via dei Condotti and the area between Piazza di Spagna and Via del Corso. There are mid-range clothing stores on Via Nazionale, Via del Corso, Via dei Giubbonari and Via Cola di Rienzo. There are small fashion boutiques and vintage clothes shops on Via del Governo Vecchio and around Campo de' Fiori. High quality antiques can be found on Via dei Coronari and Via Margutta.

Markets

Rome's most famous market is **Porta Portese**, held every Sunday morning from 6 AM to 2 PM near Trastevere (Pizza Porta Portese). You can find antiques, clothing, furniture and more.

The **Via Sannio market**, near Porta San Giovanni (Via Sannio) sells new and secondhand clothes. It is open Monday through Saturday 9 AM to 1:30 PM.

Entertainment and Outdoor Activities

Teatro dell'Opera also houses the city's ballet company. Rome's opera season runs from December to June. In the summer, operas are performed outdoors at the Terme di Caracalla Roman baths. Visit operaroma.it to purchase tickets. Address: Piazza Beniamino Gigli, 7





Cinque Terre

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Overview of The Cinque Terre

The rugged coastline of Liguria is peppered with small fishing villages, terraced vineyards, olive groves, and breathtaking vistas. Although the area has become quite a tourist destination in recent years, you'll find the local folks still attached to their age-old customs and traditions. When in the Cinque Terre it is hard not to throw your sightseeing itinerary to the wind, kick back your heels, and enjoy a real vacation in Italy's Cinque Terre region.

The Cinque Terre—or “five lands” in English—is a loose-knit group of villages on Italy's northern Ligurian Sea. For centuries the people here have etched out a living from the land and the sea.

Castles built in the Middle Ages were erected to protect the local land baron and his serfs. It was not uncommon during this era for raiders and pirates to kidnap locals and sell them into slavery or hold them for ransom. Later, during the Renaissance and beyond, the villagers became more independent and began to forge out a living centered around fishing, vines, and olives.

These steep and rocky mountains were certainly not ideal for planting and harvesting crops, but the locals were stuck here and isolated from the rest of the world, so they made do with what they had. They constructed hundreds of miles of terraced gardening spots, all held in place by free-standing stone walls.

The five villages are connected by a series of trails which wander through the vineyards, gardens, lemon and olive groves. Originally these trails were constructed to give access to the terraced gardens and to provide a transportation route between villages.

Today, this entire area has been designated a national park by the Italian government in order to preserve the delicate balance between tourism and conservation. It is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. To help finance some of the national park's conservation efforts, a permit is required to use the area's trails.





Cinque Terre

Upon arrival in a Cinque Terre village, I suggest you get to know it! After settling into your accommodation, get out and explore your “home” village. Drop into a café or enoteca for a glass of wine. Visit the local grocer and stock up on your picnic supplies. Relax and enjoy the afternoon. Then about two hours before dark, find a bar and order an aperitivo (before dinner drink) such as an Aperol or Campari Spritz or a glass of the local white wine. After dinner, cap off the day with a digestif or glass of wine while enjoying the moonlight glimmering off the rippling Mediterranean waters.

Coastal Villages of Liguria Overview

The five villages known as the Cinque Terre have been spilling into the sea for centuries. It wasn't until the unification of Italy in 1870 that the railroad brought commerce and people to these remote villages. By the 1960's, the automobile road winding down from the mountains was completed and connecting all the villages. In the 1970's travel writers began raving about these five villages and tourism really took off. The five villages were designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1997. Then in 1999, the Italian government proclaimed the villages and the surrounding mountains as the Cinque Terre National Park.

From north to south the Liguria Sea stretches for about six miles touching all the villages. Monterosso is the northern-most village, followed by Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola, and finally Riomaggiore to the south. There are a few other villages that lie just outside the Cinque Terre boundaries that sport the same look, feel, and relaxing attitude. These are Levanto, Sestri Levante, Santa Margherita Ligure, and Portofino to the north and Porto Venere to the south. To the south, just beyond Porto Venere is La Spezia, the road, rail, and sea transportation hub to the area.

Itinerary Suggestions and When to Visit

The Cinque Terre deserves at least 1.5 days and 2 nights. With this plan, you can ride the train in by midday. Check into your





The Cinque Terre Villages at a Glance

hotel, B&B, room, or apartment for 2 nights. Then, explore your home village in the afternoon and evening. The next day, purchase a Cinque Terre Train and Trail Pass and hike, take a boat, or ride the rails from one village to the next. In the summer, be sure to reserve some time for swimming and relaxing on one of the rocky beaches. With three or more days I'd add in more beach time, taking a boat to Porto Venere, slowing down to experience a village, not just blowing through it.

Nowadays, the Cinque Terre is loaded with tourists from mid-April until the end of October. In the winter (November through March), the place is dead. Many restaurants and hotels close for the season and the locals leave to take their vacations elsewhere in the world. April to mid-June and September through mid-October are pretty busy. July and August are a bit less crowded and you'll find many Europeans vacationing in the area.

The Cinque Terre Villages at a Glance

Monterosso is the northernmost village and the only real resort town. There are lots of wine shops, artisan shops, hotels, and restaurants. The new town, built in the mid-1800's, features a long seaside promenade with pebble and sand beaches, rental umbrellas and chairs, and seaside bars and restaurants. A tunnel, through San Cristoforo hill, leads to the old medieval-era town with narrow lanes, laundry flapping in the breeze, a popular town "square", and lots of restaurants, bars, and gathering places. Of course, the local church dominates the main square and its bell tolls with each passing hour.

Vernazza is perhaps the most photogenic village and consequently the most crowded. Day-trippers can ruin this town, so visit early (before 10:00 a.m.) or later (after 5:00 p.m.) to avoid disappointment. Its "main street" winds down to the harbor from the train station and is flanked by a bar, a pizzeria, wine shops, gelato vendors, and tourist shops selling beach gear, t-shirts, and trinkets. The harbor is flanked by the local church and bell tower, the pier, and an ancient castle on the hilltop.





Cinque Terre

Corniglia is perched 100 meters above the seaside and is the smallest and quietest village. From the train station, there are nearly 400 steps to reach the town. Don't worry; you can also take the bus, which is usually waiting outside the station with the arrival of each train. You'll not find too many tourists up here in this cool and shady village. There are some very good restaurants, bars, and wine shops scattered around the main church square.

Manarola is delightful but try to visit early or late in the day. Don't be fooled by the train station! You'll have to walk through the tunnel to reach the old town square. To the left is the harbor with cliff diving and swimming, restaurants, artisan shops, and a scenic trail circling through the town's vineyards. To the right, the street leads steadily uphill to the top of town where the church square opens up to wonderful views of the sea and mountains.

Riomaggiore is the southernmost village. Trains arrive at the station in the small square, which contains a shop, a bar, the park service office and a fountain. Head to the right, through the tunnel, to arrive in the old town. At the end of the tunnel, the main "street" continues uphill to the left (turning right and going down the stairs leads to the harbor and beach).

Walking to the left, up the ancient cobbled street, will bring you past shops selling food, wine and beach stuff. The street is lined with bars serving local wine and good food. There are several pizzerias as well. This entire town sits in a valley surrounded by terraced gardens, vineyards, and groves seeming to fall off the hillside.

Practical Information

Getting to and from the Cinque Terre Region

Arrival is easiest by train and with a little more effort, it can be reached by automobile.



By Plane

The nearest airport is Pisa (PSA). There are a few seasonal flights from the USA that arrive here and many flights from Europe. The convenient PISAMOVER trams (pisa-mover.com) link the airport and the Pisa Centrale train station with connection to the Cinque Terre (1 hour to La Spezia Centrale).

By Train

Passenger trains run about every 30-45 minutes through the Cinque Terre villages. Some trains stop at all five villages, other stop only at Monterosso and Riomaggiore. The main jumping off points for the Cinque Terre villages are La Spezia, to the south, and Genoa to the north. The train tracks are mostly under the mountains in tunnels dug more than a century ago and are on the main railroad line between Rome and Genoa. High-speed passenger trains and freight trains also use these rails, but they do not stop in any of the villages, they just barrel through at 80 mph. As a tourist, you will most likely have to make a transfer at some larger train station before arriving in a Cinque Terre village. From the south, that will most likely be La Spezia Centrale or Pisa Centrale. For the north, it's Genoa Piazza Principe, Levanto, or possibly Sestri Levante.

By Car

I'd skip driving if at all possible. The narrow and winding roads leading down from the Autostrada to the villages are hectic for drivers and will eat up at least an hour of your time once you leave the main highway. If you must drive in, consider parking at Monterosso, there are two parking lots, one on the hill above town and one on the harbor. Also, some hotels located in Monterosso's new town have parking available for their guests. Do not park on the streets and never leave anything of value in your vehicle.

If you are heading to Monterosso, leave the Autostrada A-12 at the Carrodano-Levanto exit. You'll have to pay a highway toll here, often at an unattended machine that "speaks" to you in Italian. Take your time, have some coins and cash handy,



Cinque Terre

pay your toll, and drive the narrow road (1 hour) through the mountains to the sea. If you are arriving in Riomaggiore, Corniglia or Manarola, leave the Autostrada at La Spezia and follow the signs to the road that travels along the coast. Don't even try to drive into Vernazza, there is limited parking and the road is in terrible condition.

By Cruise Ship

Cruise ships arrive at the docks in La Spezia several times a week in spring, summer and fall. You can find their schedules and docking timetables at crew-center.com.

Getting around the Cinque Terre

You have several options for getting around in the Cinque Terre: train, boat, national park shuttle bus, taxi, and on foot. One is not better than the other and I often use all choices when I visit the Cinque Terre. The villages are connected by trail, train, and boat. I'll discuss connecting the villages and follow that by addressing transportation options in the villages.

Train Travel

The railroad here is built to go through the mountains instead of over and around them. The short rides between villages consist of dark tunnels followed by quick, breathtaking views of the Ligurian Sea and surrounding countryside. Trains run from La Spezia (just south of the "official" Cinque Terre villages), through Riomaggiore, Manarola, Corniglia, Vernazza, and Monterosso, and end in Levanto.

Single Train Tickets

Train tickets can be purchased at the Italian rail ticket office at each village. Point-to-point tickets are €4 per ride regardless of how far you ride the train within the Cinque Terre boundary. This is pretty expensive, especially considering there are cheaper alternatives. The tickets can be purchased from an English-speaking attendant at the train station ticket window in each village or from electronic ticket machines at the train stations. Keep in mind there could be long lines at the ticket





Getting around the Cinque Terre

window and often the electronic ticket machines are out of order or have long lines of people queued to purchase their ticket. If you are handy with computers, visit trenitalia.com to purchase tickets online or download the Trenitalia app for your mobile device. Be sure to validate your ticket if purchased from an attendant or kiosk. If purchased online, print the ticket or snap a photo to show the conductor. If using the handy app, just show it to the conductor on the train, if asked to present your ticket.

Combination Train and Hiking/Trekking Card

The Cinque Terre Treno Multi-Service (MS) Card is available for both train and trail use. The Cinque Terre Treno Multi-Service Card is the best option because it allows you to hop on or hop off the train anywhere at any time within the validation period. Additionally, it is convenient in that it frees you up from standing in line to purchase train tickets and allows for catching a train at the last minute without worrying about buying a ticket. Typically, if you use the train four times during a day, the Cinque Terre Treno MS Card pays for itself. But really, I suggest purchasing the Cinque Terre Treno MS Card strictly for the convenience of hop-on-hop-off train travel.

The Cinque Terre Treno MS Card can be purchased online, in person at each village's National Park Office, or from the Trenitalia ticket office. Cards purchased online or at the National Park Office must be purchased for the date of use. They are validated on the spot. Purchasing the Card from the Trenitalia ticket window will get you an unvalidated Card to use whenever you wish. This is especially convenient if you'd like to purchase your Card on the day you arrive, but not use it until the next day. Regardless of where you purchase your Card, it must be validated in the green-and-white ticket machines at a train station. Train conductors make it their quest to find tourists with unstamped tickets and then levy a hefty €50 fine on the spot.



Cinque Terre

One-Day Card	€16 adults (13-69) €13 seniors (70+) €10 juniors (4-12) €42 Family (2 adults and 2 juniors)
Two-Day Card	€29 all ages
Three-Day Card	€41 all ages

A validated Cinque Terre Treno MS Card has several nice additional benefits. You will have access to WIFI Hotspots at train stations and other designated locations within the park; free use of the toilet facilities in Monterosso, Vernazza, and train stations (although the toilets are nothing to write home about); and ATC Mini Bus service (locally known as “pulmino”) connecting the train station with the towns (see each town for a detailed description).

Train Travel Hints

The “station” and platform for a village may be located inside a tunnel. Don’t be fooled if there is no indication that there is actually a village beyond the dark tunnel. Be aware of the stops your train will make and keep a mental tally.

Don’t get too concerned about missing your stop. Trains run frequently and all stop at the two outermost villages of Levanto and La Spezia. The worst thing that can happen is you’ll miss your stop and get to explore another village. You can always hop on the next train traveling in the opposite direction and reach your destination.

Any train stopping in Vernazza, Corniglia, or Manarola (the inner villages) will make stops at all five villages.

Trains are rarely on time. Keep this in mind when planning connections.

Keep your map and train schedule handy and learn how to read them.

Train tracks on the “sea side” travel north (from La Spezia) toward Monterosso and Levanto.

Getting around the Cinque Terre

Train tracks on the “land side” travel south (from Levanto) toward Riomaggiore and La Spezia.

There are monitors at most train stations that display the departure times of all trains stopping at the given station. Trains going north are marked “per” Levanto, Genoa, Sestri Levante. Trains heading south are noted “per” La Spezia. All trains have a number and that may help if you have a printed ticket. You may also see “in ritardo” followed by a number meaning it is late by the noted number of minutes. Hope you do not see “SOPP” which means the train has been cancelled.

Validate your Cinque Terre Treno MS Card or train ticket the first time you use it by punching it in one of the green-and-white machines at the train stations. This is very important!

Sign your Cinque Terre Treno MS Card and add your ID or passport information if required.

Train doors may not open automatically. If the door does not open look around and push the green button, pull the silver knob on the handle, or lift the red bar.

Boat Travel

Beginning around Easter, a tourist boat calls at Monterosso, Vernazza, Manarola, Riomaggiore, Porto Venere and its nearby islands. Traveling on the sea with views of the shoreline, terraced vineyards, and mountains is well worth a voyage. I suggest it if the weather and seas are in good shape. Boat schedules and prices are posted at train stations, boat docks, hotels, and online at <http://www.navigazionegolfodeipoeti.it/en/>. In general, the boats sail the Cinque Terre regions from about 10:30 to 18:00. However, always verify the schedule at one of the locations mentioned above. Current rates from Monterosso for the most popular voyages are listed below.

All-Day Ticket	€35 Adults
(w/Porto Venere)	€20 Kids (6-11)
All-Day Ticket	€27 Adults
(5 Terre only)	€15 Kids



Cinque Terre

One Way 5 Terre €7-13 varies by disembarkation

Rent a Private Boat and Skipper

If you look around each village's harbor, you'll likely find an advertisement for a private boat and even private tours. Or just look around the harbor and try to pick out a boat looking for business. A voyage from one village to another on a private little boat will cost €30-€50. Split that among several people and it is affordable.

ATC Minibus Shuttle (Pulmino)

These minibuses shuttle tourist and locals within each village, usually beginning at or near the train station. From there they make stops at key locations in town and the hills beyond. They do not travel from one village to the other. They are free with a valid Cinque Terre Treno MS Card, or you can purchase a €2.50 ticket from the driver (€1.50 if pre-purchased at the Park office).

These buses are often completely full of people and operate on an ever-changing schedule, so I wouldn't count on a ride if you're trying to stick to a schedule. The buses and drivers take a break during the afternoon "pausa" from 12:30-16:00 or so. The most useful ATC buses are in Corniglia, getting you from the sea-side train station to the hilltop town (the bus is usually waiting on the road next to the train station at train arrivals) and the bus in Riomaggiore beginning at the foot of via Colombo traveling uphill to the Castello.

For a scenic look at the non-touristy side of the Cinque Terre, consider riding one of these minibuses up beyond town into the hills and santuario churches. ATC Bus schedules are published here www.atcesercizio.it/images/orari/est/Cinque_Terre.pdf.

Hiking in The Cinque Terre

Locals have been walking between the Cinque Terre villages for centuries. Originally these foot paths (*sentiero*) were used to access the terraced gardens, groves, and vineyards which





Getting around the Cinque Terre

provided plenty of food and drink for the medieval villages. Years ago, I recall struggling up the trail between Monterosso and Vernazza and having two old ladies in black dresses and high heels breeze past me on the way home from Sunday mass. Nowadays, the national park has taken over some of the maintenance of these trails and have marked them with blue blazes, red and white blazes, white arrows, and some signage in the villages.

If you only have a couple of days, I suggest sticking to the major coastal trails linking the villages and marked with a blue blaze. These trails are known as *Sentiero Azzurro (Blue)*. With more time, one could venture to the higher trails up in the mountains affording great views of the seas and towns below and practically no crowds! Before beginning your trek, pick up a map at the National Park office (about €5), download the handy app AllTrails alltrails.com/ or get the official Cinque Terre National Park app “Pn5t plus”. Both available from [Apple Store](#) or [Google Play](#).

The National Park is getting better at providing online information about trail conditions, closures, trail descriptions and maps, and elevation profiles. This information can be found at mappe.parconazionale5terre.it/plus/index2.html. For general information about the National Park and its programs visit parconazionale5terre.it.

Cinque Terre Trekking Card

This card is necessary for those hiking on the coastal trails (*Sentiero Azzurro*) between Monterosso and Riomaggiore. All other trails are free of charge and do not require a Trekking Card. A validated Trekking Card entitles the user to all the features mentioned in the Cinque Terre MS Card section except for train travel.

One-Day Card	€7.50 adults (13-69)
	€6 seniors (70+)
	€4.50 juniors (4-12)
	€19.60 family (2 adults and 2 juniors)





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Two-Day Card	€14.50 adults (13-69)
	€10 seniors (70+)
	€7.20 juniors (4-12)
	€31.50 family (2 adults and 2 juniors)

Hiking, Trekking and Trail Tips

Before heading out on one of the coastal trails you need to decide if you can handle the strenuous activity required to complete the hike. Several of the trails are not easy hikes! Remember, the trails begin in a village at sea level and climb many hundreds of feet up into the mountains. You'll need to be in relatively good physical shape, have a supply of water, sunscreen, a hat, and sunglasses. Recently, rules forbidding flip-flops and Vibram sole shoes have been enforced along the most popular coastal trails.

The trails linking Monterosso to Vernazza to Corniglia are the most strenuous portion of the coastal trail. Most likely, these will be the only portion of the coastal trail that will be open, and consequently, the most crowded too. Expect to encounter steep climbs, narrow footpaths, rocky and unstable footing, and lots of stairs/steps.

Expect to find lots of people hiking the coastal trails at almost any time of the day. There have been a few times when I've started out hiking in Monterosso and the trail was so crowded that I turned back and gave up for the day. On a recent tour, an adventurous couple were on the trail before 6:00 a.m., arrived in Vernazza by 7:30, and ended up in Corniglia by 9:30! They did not see anyone on the trail until after 8:00 a.m. A good plan is to begin early (before 8:00) or begin late (after 17:00). If starting late in the day, be sure to give yourself plenty of time to complete your route before sunset.

The SVA Coastal Trail Blue Trail #592

This trail is known by all the names mentioned above and if the entire trail were open, it would stretch seven miles from Monterosso to Riomaggiore. Ironically, the trail is not marked in blue on any map, nor is it blazed blue. So why it is named





Getting around the Cinque Terre

the *Sentiero Azzurro*, the Blue Trail? I don't know. Let me know if you find out the answer! This trail is marked with RED AND WHITE PAINTED BLAZES.

Currently, only about half the trail is open for hiking, the section from Monterosso to Vernazza to Corniglia. The route from Corniglia to Manarola to Riomaggiore is closed and not due to open until 2021. Here, I'll describe the sections likely to be open and to also provide some alternative trails to fill in the gaps. Finally, I'll describe the trails from south to north, the way in which most trail guides and official publications describe them. However, the trails can be done in either direction.

SVA2 or 592-3 Corniglia to Vernazza

Elevation gain: 501 feet, 269 meters

Distance: 2.1 miles, 3.37 Km

Time: 1:30 to 2:00 hours

This trail is wild and scenic, stretching through forests of shrubs, cacti, olive trees, and lush hardwoods. Along the trail you'll find wonderful vista points looking out toward the sea and the surrounding terraced mountains. The trail is rocky and often narrow and can be very dry and dusty in periods of drought. However, with rain, it turns all that dust to mud and the rocks become very slippery. This trail differs from others along the SVA route in that it winds through mostly undeveloped terrain.

The trail begins at Corniglia's railroad station following first the road along the railroad tracks and then zigzagging up a set of 365 stairs (the Lardarina Stairs) leading to the town of Cornelia. You can avoid the stairs by hopping on the ATC Shuttle Bus from the station to the village. At the top of the stairs, continue on the road until you reach Villa Cecio where the trail leaves the road and continues straight. The trail continues through the forest and across a small stone bridge spanning Rio della Groppa, then ascends through some olive groves with great vistas and on to the hamlet of Prevo. From here you are near the apex of your hike. Then the trail descends down some





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stairs and affords great views of the Castello of Vernazza. Approaching Vernazza, you'll find Bar la Torre and some inviting and shady tables along the trail.

SVA2 or 592-4 Vernazza to Monterosso

Elevation gain: 688 feet, 209 meters

Distance: 2.3 miles, 3.6 Km

Time: 2:00 to 2:30 hours

I think this is the most scenic of all the coastal trails. However, it probably is the most strenuous as well. (Consider beginning in Monterosso so you'll get the strenuous climbing out of the way while you are fresh). The route begins in Vernazza at the alley leading to the Church of Saint Margaret of Antioch. From there it is a steep climb winding above the harbor of Vernazza (good views) through olive groves and vineyards. You'll pass a few "waterfalls" followed by more terraced vineyards, and finally, through lemon groves. The last section is a difficult descent on steep and almost unending stairs until you get near the sea, where the path levels out and pops into the old town near the square and beach.

With more time, you'll find additional trekking paths located farther up the hills than the SVA coastal path. These are quiet, secluded, and free. Refer to the online resources for complete descriptions.

Refer to the information in each village's section for a few other shorter walks and scenic destinations.

Beaches and Swimming General Information

Every town except Corniglia has a rocky beach with access to the cool water of the Ligurian Sea. Monterosso is the only town with a sandy/small pebbled beach, rental umbrellas, and chairs. If you're going to the beach, leave your passport at the hotel. Beach attire is appropriate everywhere. Wear a shirt or cover up when going to and from the beach or when dining. There is not much danger of theft or pickpockets in the Cinque Terre, but watch your things when swimming and sitting at outdoor cafés.





Monterosso al Mare (Population 1168)

Monterosso al Mare (Population 1168)

This northern-most village is the only true beach resort in the area. Hotels are plentiful in the new town (known as *Fegina*) and the beaches here are a mixture of sand and small pebbles. You'll find plenty of lounge chairs and umbrellas to rent (about €22 per day during the summer), shops selling beach supplies and tourist trinkets, and cafes lining the seaside promenade. The train station, National Park and Tourist office, and public parking lot are also located in the new town.

Through the pedestrian tunnel, to the south, you'll come upon the old medieval town (*Centro Storico*) which will have you feeling like you've stepped back in time 600 years. Its narrow, cobbled, and crooked lanes follow the old riverbed (still flowing beneath via Roma) up to the top of town. There are many restaurants, artisan shops, a few hotels, and of course, the ever-present town square, local church and bell tower.

Getting to and from Monterosso

The TRAIN station is in the new town (*Fegina*) just steps from the beach. There are three tracks at the train station, but only tracks 1 and 3 are used for passenger trains. If arriving from the south, you'll hop off at platform (*binario*) 1 (from the north it's platform 3) and walk through the tunnel running under the tracks to reach the station. You will have to walk down a flight of stairs to exit the station. From there, you are in the new town. Walking to the left, you'll reach the tunnel and old town in about 10 minutes. Walk to the right to reach the parking lot and the quieter side of the new town.

The ATC SHUTTLE BUS travels along the only road/walkway here (*via Fegina*) that parallels the sea. Since you'll probably not have your Cinque Terre Card activated, the ticket will cost €2.50 if purchased on the bus, or €1.50 if pre-purchased in Park office. This shuttle runs along *via Fegina* from the parking lot (on your right) to Piazza Garibaldi, just beyond the tunnel (on your left).





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Monterosso's has three official TAXI companies and often there is one waiting outside the train station. There is no official taxi stand, so you may need to telephone (mobile +39 335 6165842, +39 335 6280933, +39 335 6165845). It will cost about €10 to get you to your hotel/rooms in the old town.

If DRIVING A CAR to Monterosso, see my suggestions at the beginning of this chapter. A few miles above Monterosso, the road forks, one leading to the old town (Monterosso Centro Storico) or the new town (Monterosso Fegina). I suggest you choose Fegina because of its big sea-side parking lot with security. Parking costs €25/24 hours and you can find a spot here most anytime, except during busy weekends in the summer.

Other Useful Information

Emergencies

112 is an EU emergency number. Calls can be answered in 40 languages.

Additionally, in Italy, dial 112 for Carabinieri, 113 for the State Police, 118 for Medical Emergencies, 115 for the Fire Department, and 1515 for Forest Fires.

Dr. Vitone is listed as a local physician in Monterosso. He speaks English and will come to your hotel if needed. Tel. 338 853 0949.

Pharmacy

Look for the green cross to find one of several pharmacies (*farmacia*) in Monterosso. There is one at street-level at the train station on via Fegina. Tel. 0187 818391. Open Mon-Fri 08:00–12:30 & 16:00–19:30. Closed on the weekend.

Laundry

Wash and Dry Lavarapido is in the new town, just up from the seaside parking lot, behind Ristorante Miky. They offer same-day full service washing and drying. They will collect your dirty laundry at your hotel and bring it back clean, but I prefer to drop it off personally, as early as possible in the





Monterosso al Mare (Population 1168)

morning. Open daily 08:00-19:00. Via Molinelli 17. Mobile 339-484-0940. Very little English spoken here.

Luètu Lavanderia is in the old town up via Roma across from the post office. Open daily 08:00-20:00. Tel. 328 286 1908.

If you want your clothes washed, but not dried, mention *lavare solo, non asciugare* (la-var-reh non ah-shoe-gar-reh).

Food

Market Day is Thursday from about 08:00-13:00. Trucks roll in and set up in the old town square and under the train tracks.

There are several **Grocery Stores** in the town. **Punto Market** is in the new town, just behind Ristorante Miky. M-SAT 08:00-13:00 & 16:30-19:30. SUN 08:00-13:00. **Crai Market** is in the old town on via Roma, just beyond Hotel Margherita on the left. Via Roma, 61. Open daily 09:00-13:00 & 15:00-19:00.

Beaches and Swimming

Monterosso has the best beaches in the region. The new town has many private beaches with umbrellas and chairs for rent. Expect to pay about €22 a day for two lounge chairs and an umbrella. Prices are less in the afternoon and outside of the summer season. You'll also find paddleboats and kayaks for rent from some vendors on the north end of the beach. There are free beaches, open to the public, just in front of the train station, to the north near the soccer court and *il Gigante* statue, and in the old town harbor. Just look for places with no umbrellas and people laying around on towels. Unfortunately, you will be bothered by various illegal vendors selling dresses, towels, and massages. Just ignore them, say no thank you, and they will go away, eventually.

Private Boats and Skippers

Angelo's Boat Tours works out of Monterosso and have a great reputation. They offer tours throughout the day ranging from €100-€150 per person angelosboattours.com/. It is a small outfit run by Alessandro and Brenda, so book your voyage as soon as you know your travel dates.





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Stefano works two boats that can accommodate 6 people each. About €100 per hour for the boat which can be split between up to 6 people. Mobile 333-821-2007. matildenavigazione.com. info@matildenavigazione.com.

Diego offers longer tours, sunset cruises, and more for up to 7 people. Prices vary from €120-€150 per hour. cinqueterreboat.com. 5sterretourfishandcholl@gmail.com

Walks in Monterosso

Begin in the old town, at the entrance to the tunnel, and walk up the stairs next to Albergo Pasquale. This leads to San Cristoforo hill. Soon, making a sharp right on the Salita dei Cappuccini, you'll come upon some zigzagging steps nicknamed Switch Back of the Friars (Zii de Frati). Pause for a look at the statue of St. Francis with a wolf and an amazing vista. Backtrack just a bit and continue going up to the San Cristoforo hill for views of the entire Cinque Terre coastline.

Here you will find the Convento dei Cappuccini (now only occupied by one caretaking friar) and the Chiesa di San Francesco, dating to 1623. It, like many of the churches in the Cinque Terre, dates from a time known as the Romanesque period where the architectural style consisted of, thick walls, round arches with broad supporting pillars, large towers, symmetrical plans, frilly stone work, and striped façades. A painting of the crucifixion attributed to Van Dyck hangs in the church.

The nearby cemetery holds the ruins of an old castle and watchtower built to shelter the locals from raiders and pirates in the 13th century. The 16th-century Aurora Tower can be found at the foot of the hill. Continuing to the top of the hill you'll find a row of graves containing the remains of famous local priests. Turn away from the sea and look up the neighboring mountain finding the church steeple poking out above the trees. This is Monterosso's *Santurario* church dedicated to the Virgin Mary. All the villages have a similar place of refuge in the hills, high above the sea.





Monterosso al Mare (Population 1168)

In the historical center of Monterosso, you can visit the 13th-century Gothic Church of San Giovanni Battista. Its bell tower originally served as a watchtower. The façade is comprised of alternating bands of white and green marble, and the interior features a rose window and a Baroque altar. Next door, find the Oratory of Confraternita dei Neri a place of worship for one of the local confraternities dedicated to arranging funerals, caring for widows, orphans, and the lost-at-sea. Nearby is another, the Oratory of Confraternita dei Bianchi.

Dining in Monterosso

In the Old Town

Ristorante Ciak is always packed with happy eaters, inside and out, and for good reason: it is one of the best places in town! Signore Luigi Corciulo, better known as Ciak, and his wife Matilde opened this restaurant in 1974 promising to serve only traditional Ligurian cuisine. The kitchen is in full view and puts out fresh local seafood, fish, and pasta in huge terra-cotta bowls large enough to feed two to six people. Three popular choices are the local catch in a bowl of spaghetti, risotto, or broth. The gnocchi al pesto is fantastic and the whole fresh fish grilled and split between 3 or 4 people is a feast. Piazza Don Minzoni, 6. Tel. 0187-817-014. Open March-December. Closed Wednesday. Open other days 12:00-15:00 & 18:00-22:30.

Make a reservation for the best seating. ristoranteciak.net in-
foristoranteciak@gmail.com

L'Osteria is a small place with packed indoor seating and a few tables outside. Alessandro and his wife run a great kitchen serving fresh seafood and pasta. All the deserts are fresh and homemade each day. Closed Monday. Open other days 12:00-14:30 & 19:00-21:30. Via Vittorio Emanuele, 5. Tel. 0187 819224.

Cà du Scienza is a bit more upscale than others in the old town. They offer fresh seafood, fish and meat dishes prepared in an eclectic and international style. Big dining room upstairs with a balcony overlooking the square and outside dining in





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the summer. Service is a bit slow and, if dining outside, bring mosquito repellent (as with anywhere in this outdoor square). Also offered are items such as Caesar salad, beef, and chicken dishes. Open daily 12:30-15:00 & 18:30-23:00 with street food served 15:00-18:00. Piazza Giuseppe Garibaldi, 17. Tel. 0187 800659. cadusciensa.com/

Bar Centrale is my go-to place in the old town for a pre-dinner *appertivo*. Cheap drinks are served with snacks from about 18:30. Open daily 07:00-24:00. Piazza Giuseppe Garibaldi, 10. Tel. 0187 817690.

In the New Town

Miky is always packed with well-dressed locals and savvy travelers. Dress up a bit, don't wear beach clothes to dinner. It is family-owned and run with attention to detail, proper service, and pride. Their menu features thoughtfully presented seafood, pasta, and risotto in the classical Ligurian style. Reservations recommended. Closed Tuesday. Open other days 12:00-14:30 & 19:00-23:00. Via Fegina 104. Tel. 0187 817608. www.ristorantemiky.it/index.html; miky@ristorantemiky.it; info@ristorantemiky.it

La Cantina di Miky is run by Manuel (Miky's son) and his wife Christine. They offer a more informal and relaxed setting than the nearby restaurant. Located on the seaside promenade, there is seating outside with sea views, in a secluded garden, or downstairs inside. The food is traditional, fresh and tasty. Try the mixed fried seafood, pesto lasagna, the anchovies starter plates, and the local craft beer. Closed Wednesday. Open other days 12:00-21:30. Via Fegina, 90. Phone: 0187 802525. cantinadimiky.it; lacantinadimiky@gmail.com.

Takeaway and Quick Bites in the New Town

Focciaria Antonio Di Liberatore is my favorite place to pick up a takeaway lunch. Walk in, choose your focaccia, tell the lady at the counter what size, take the ticket, pay the boss lady at the cash register down to the right, get the printed receipt, give back to the lady at the counter who will be waiting





Vernazza (Population 852)

on you with your order to go in a sack. Lots of trays of focaccia from which to choose. I like onion (*cipola*), tomato (*pomodoro*), and a mixture with ham. Closed Thursday. Open other days 07:30-20:00. Via Fegina, 120. Tel. 0187 829039.

Enoteca 5 Terre di Sassari Giancarlo is located on the seaside promenade between the two Miky restaurants. This is a good place to get an aperitivo, a glass of wine, and some snacks. Good for people watching too. Open daily early to late. Via Fegina, 94. Tel. 0187 818063.

Vernazza (Population 852)

This is perhaps the most photogenic village and harbor in the area. It is also the most well-discovered, crowded, and touristy. Consequently, it's best to visit early or late when the day-trippers have packed up and gone home. Because of its natural harbor, the town became active in sea trade after coming under the control of Genoa in the 13th century. It is dominated by the ruins of the castles and bastions built to protect it. The Church of Santa Margherita di Antiochia, built in 1318, stands in the small square overlooking the seaside.

Getting to and from Vernazza

The TRAIN station is located near the top of town on via Roma. There are two tracks at the train station. If arriving from the south, you'll hop off at platform (*binario*) 1 (from the north it's platform 3). You will have to walk down a flight of stairs to exit the station. From there, the harbor is downhill about 100 meters. Walking uphill, takes you to the top of town, the river and the parking garage

Do not DRIVE TO VERNAZZA

Other Useful Information

Laundry

There is a small self-service laundry at the top of town near the post office. Open daily 07:00-23:00.





Cinque Terre

Food

Market Day is Thursday from about 08:00-13:00. Don't get your hopes up, there isn't much to it.

There is a **Grocery Store** in the town center. **The Coop 5 Terre** is at via Roma, 39. Open Daily 07:00-13:00 & 16:30-19:00.

Beaches and Swimming

The harbor has a sort of **dirty sandy cove** where fishermen once dragged their boats ashore. In the summer, you'll find kids playing in the sand and people spreading their towels to lay in the sun. I don't get in the water here. I've seen the local cats using it as their litter box in the evening. However, the harbor has a fine walkway stretching below the church and around to the rocks on the far right. There is a shower in the alcove beneath the church. Bring your towel and find a place to spread it out on the rocks. As you can imagine, the rocks are hard. But they are flat too and the swimming here is great if you like deep water swimming.

Private Boats and Skippers

At the harbor you'll find **Vernazza Water Taxi**. Mobile- 338-911-869 vernazzawatertaxi.it info@vernazzawatertaxi.it

Nord Est offers water taxi service to the other villages. Mobile- 338-700-0436. info@nordest-vernazza.com.

Plan on spending €30-€50 on a one-way trip to one of the other villages for a 6-passenger boat with an outboard motor.

Dining in Vernazza

Don't waste your time dining somewhere other than a place with a view of the sea or harbor. There are many places from which to choose and all restaurants must serve good, fresh food in order to stay in business in this busy tourist town. A good plan is to scope out the choices during the lunch hour and then book a table with a view for the evening. This way, you





Vernazza (Population 852)

see what you are getting both from a food and ambiance standpoint.

On the Harbor

Gianni Franzi has been right here since the first time I visited the Cinque Terre. Typical regional seafood, friendly and quick service. Outdoor seating is preferred if the weather is good. The indoor dining room is nice too. Closed Wednesday, except in August. Open other days 12:00-15:00 & 19:00-22:00. Tel. 0187-812-228. Book a table online at giannifranzi.it

Gambero Rosso is a bit pricier and more upscale than the other places on the harbor and it is not locally owned. That's not necessarily a bad thing, just giving all the information. I've always enjoyed dinner here. Typical seafood and pasta, good service, and good ambiance. They do also have some beef and pork dishes. Closed Thursday. Open other days 12:00-15:00 & 19:00-22:30. Tel. 0187 812265. ristorantegamberorosso.net

Burgus Enoteca is not a restaurant, it is an old family-owned wine bar. Outside tables crowd the steps to the harbor, but the view can't get any better. Inside, it is standing room only. During the *aperitivo* hour, order a drink inside, stand at the bar, and eat all the snacks you want. This is a good value. The bar is located on the harbor, just to the right of the church. Open every day, all day and night. Via G. M. Pensa, 3.

Above the Harbor

Ristorante al Castello is owned by Monica and her husband, Massimo. I met them many years ago on my first visit to Vernazza and have been coming back ever since. The restaurant is up some steep stairs just below the *castello*. The views from their dining terrace are fantastic. Try to arrive for sunset! Now for the food: you've got to try their *lasagna al pesto*. The *frito misto* (mixed fried fish and seafood) is a good follow-up to the lasagna. Their house wine is local and good. Closed Wednesday and Nov to April. Open other days 12:00-15:00 & 19:00-22:00. Tel. 0187-812-296. Via Guidoni, 56, head up the stairs to the right of Ganni Franzi and follow the signs.





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Corniglia (Population 150)

Perched 100 meters above the coast, this is the smallest and quietest village. From the train station, there are 385 steps to reach the town. Don't worry; you can also take the bus, which is usually waiting outside the station with the arrival of each train. The 14th-century Church of San Pietro is one of the best examples of the Ligurian Gothic style and has a rose window made of Carrara marble and a 12th-century christening font.

Getting to and from Corniglia

The TRAIN station is at sea level. There are two tracks at the train station. If arriving from the south, you'll hop off at platform (*binario*) 1 (from the north it's platform 2) and walk through the tunnel running under the tracks to reach the station. Exiting the station, cross the road, and head left to the stairs. Try to connect with the ATC SHUTTLE BUS that is usually waiting on the road in front of the station.

If DRIVING A CAR park on the road beyond the switchback stairs. Only residents can park between Villa Cecio and the stairs. Beyond that, parking is €2.00/hour with a maximum of €10 a day.

Wander around Corniglia

There is not much to particularly see or do in this village. There is one street leading through the hilltop village and it is flanked with several grocery stores, wine bars, gelato shops, and a few restaurants. The main square on Largo Taragio is filled with tables under shade trees and a couple of bars and restaurants. The Santa Maria Belvedere viewpoint is at the end of town and offers great views of the mountains and the harbor and sea below.

Manarola (Population 450)

I used to think of Manarola as the forgotten village, but nowadays, it is loaded with day-tripping cruise excursions, huge tour





Manarola (Population 450)

groups, and us measly tourists hoping for a quiet village. Avoid the hours from 10:00-16:00 and you'll love it!

The town itself is 200 meters through a tunnel from the train station. Emerging from the tunnel, you'll have a choice to make: the harbor or the hilltop church. If you turn right and walk uphill for about 20 minutes, it brings you to the Piazza Papa Innocenzo IV, which offers an amazing view of the sea. In this square you'll find the Church of San Lorenzo, built in 1338, with its Gothic façade and Baroque interior. There is also an oratory and bell tower in the square. If you turn left at the tunnel exit, follow the steps up to the town "square," down some more steps, and follow Via Renato Birolli to the harbor.

Getting to and from Manarola

The TRAIN station is located at sea level. From the station, follow the tunnel to town.

The ATC SHUTTLE BUS won't help you much here unless you plan to go to the Piazza Papa Innocenzo IV and points beyond. The ATC bus stop is halfway up the main street near the post office.

Do not DRIVE TO MANAROLA unless you have a reservation at a hotel or B&B. There is no parking provided other than for accommodations and locals.

Swimming

The harbor is the swimming spot. It is the best deep-water and cliff-diving spot in the Cinque Terre. Sunbathers claim a spot on the steep boat ramp leading down to the water. There is a shower nearby. Others work their way out onto the rocky jetties to find a flat spot in the sun. There is another rocky place to swim farther down the trail towards Corniglia, but it is more of a challenge to get in and out of the water.

A Walk through the Vineyards

Don't miss this experience! Even if you don't feel up to hiking one of the coastal trails, this is a less strenuous but still rewarding experience. The trail begins at the top of town near





Cinque Terre

the Piazza Papa Innocenzo IV, wanders around the rim of the valley loaded with the terraced dry-stone walls, vineyards, citrus groves, and private vegetable gardens. The trail is officially known as 502C Via del Presepe di Manarola and is about 1 mile in length. The trail can be done in either direction, beginning at the harbor or the church at the top of the village. I'll describe it from the harbor.

From the harbor, follow the wide paved trail around to the right, up the hill, ending at the scenic viewpoint (*Punta Bonfiglio*) on the small peninsula jutting into the sea. Here, you'll find a park, playground, benches, and the Ristorante Nessun Dorma. Staying on the path above the restaurant, continue to the entrance of the local cemetery.

This cemetery is typical of all others in the Cinque Terre. In the early 1800's, Napoleon Bonaparte was the king of Italy (and a lot of other regions in Europe as well). He decided cemeteries were unhealthy and a cause for sickness and disease, so he ordered them to be built outside the cities and towns. Here in the hilly Cinque Terre, that meant high on a hill with grand sea vistas. There is a hierarchy in cemeteries such as these: the graveyard, a large enclosed area known as a *locolo*, a mini bone holder (*ossario*), and communal ossuary. Since there is limited space up here on these rugged hills, there is a specific length of time the bones can be held in the first three burial places. After about a generation, the bones are removed to the communal ossuary.

These burial spots are near and dear to the living relatives' hearts. Consequently, you'll find white Carrara marble memorials with embedded photos of the dearly departed. It is almost compulsory that the local living relatives make a weekly trip to the cemetery to say a prayer, tidy up the area, and install fresh flowers on their loved one's memorial.

Exit the cemetery, turn left, and then make an immediate left up the path going along the cemetery's outer wall. After about 100 meters, find the steep concrete stairs on the right and climb slowly to the top. Take a breather!





Riomaggiore

At the top, turn right and walk the rest of the relatively flat trail through the terraced vineyards, groves, and gardens. You'll have fantastic vistas out to the sea and the village of Manarola sprawling below and above on the adjacent hill. This path is named *Via del Presepe di Manarola* in honor of Mario Andreoli, a local resident who has placed wooden religious scenes in his vineyard. The story goes that before his father died, Mario promised to replace the old wooden cross in the family vineyard. Once he got started, he never quit. Notice there are lights attached to many of the scenes. On religious holidays, the place is illuminated with scenes such as the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, the Nativity, and more.

Continue on a mostly level path around the lip of the valley. As it curves to the right, the path will intersect with Manarola's main street, just downhill from the Church of San Lorenzo. Walk up to the church to enjoy the wide sweeping vistas. Walking downhill, the road winds through town to the tunnel leading to the railroad station. But, before you head down hill, look over the railings along the side of the road. Notice the river running about 20 feet below. All these villages in the Cinque Terre were originally built along a river cutting its way from the mountains to the sea. It was not until the turn of the 20th century that these rivers were covered with a viaduct, which became the main street of the village.

Riomaggiore

This is the southernmost village. Trains arrive at the station in the small square know as *Piazza Rio Finale*, which contains a bar, the park service office, and a fountain. Go to the right, through the tunnel, to arrive in the old town on its main street, *via Colombo*. Walking up the hill on the paved road, *via Telemaco Signorini*, to the left takes you, eventually, to either the castle or the piazza at the church St. John the Baptist. If you are looking for a taxi, you may find one here. Otherwise, telephone and ask for one.





Cinque Terre

At the end of the tunnel, the main “street” continues uphill to the left. If you turn right and go down the stairs, you’ll reach the harbor and beach.

Walking up the ancient cobbled street to the left will bring you past shops selling food, wine and beach stuff. The street is lined with bars serving local wine and good food. There are several pizzerias as well.

This part of town is surrounded by terraces. The Church of San Giovanni Battista was originally built in 1340, but the façade was rebuilt in the 19th century in a Neo-Gothic style. The marble doors, rose window, crucifix and organ are worth a visit, and there is a nice view of the village

from the square.

A castle stands atop the hill to the northwest of the village. It was most likely built in the 13th century to protect against attacks from the sea. Today it is used as a conference center and boasts wonderful panoramic views of the coast. The Oratory of San Rocco, next to the castle, was built in the 15th century in remembrance of those who died from the plague. A cliff-hanging trail leads from the beach to old Nazi bunkers and a hilltop botanical garden.

Getting to and from Riomaggiore

The TRAIN station is in away from the village in *Piazza Rio Finale*. You must walk through a 150-meter tunnel to reach Riomaggiore’s main street, *via Colombo*. There are two tracks at the train station. If arriving from the south, you’ll hop off at platform (*binario*) 1 (from the north it’s platform 2) and walk through the tunnel running under the tracks to reach the station.

The ATC SHUTTLE BUS travels up and down Riomaggiore’s main street, *via Colombo*, on a sporadic schedule. There is nowhere to go here but uphill, so if you can catch the ATC bus, it will make your trek easier. Since you’ll probably not have your Cinque Terre Card activated, the ticket will cost €2.50 if purchased on the bus, or €1.50 if pre-purchased in Park office.





Riomaggiore

This shuttle runs up to the top of *via Colombo*, then turns left going to the castle, and then heads out of town towards the cemetery and point beyond.

If DRIVING A CAR to Riomaggiore, see my suggestions at the beginning of this chapter. There are two multi-story parking garages at the top of town. Spaces here are €3.50/hour or €24 per day. Some hotels have parking, so ask before you arrive and have a spot reserved, if possible.

Taxi

5 Terre Transfer & Taxi is run by a couple of locals who do a great job of getting you around Riomaggiore, to any of the other villages, or to La Spezia. Give them a call for a short or long ride. Marzio 340-356-5268; Luciana 339-130-1183. 5terre-transfer.com; 5terretransfer@libero.it

Other Useful Information

Pharmacy

Look for the “Green Cross” on the left about 50 meters up *via Colombo, 182*. They are open in the morning and afternoon and observe the *pausa* in the middle of the day. Tel. 0187 920160

Laundry

Wash & Dry Lavarapido

There is a self-service laundry on *via Colombo*, just up the street/hill from Bar Centrale. Likely to be open 08:30-20:00 daily.

Food

There are several **Grocery Stores** in the town. **Dellara Franca** is on *via Colombo*, on the right as you exit the tunnel from the train station. There is a **Co-op Grocery** up *via Colombo*, across from the laundry. They are open in the morning and afternoon and observe the *pausa* in the middle of the day.

Baggage Storage and Transport

The bar across from the train station will hold your bags for €5/day. If you need help getting your bags up to your hotel





Cinque Terre

in Riomaggiore or to another village, they can help too. Give Roberto a call. Tel. 329-896-6219. Bar open daily 08:30-19:00. Likely closed November-March.

Beaches and Swimming

Riomaggiore's stone-scattered beach is located beyond the harbor. From the bottom of *via Colombo*, walk down the steps and go through the tunnel. Not the tunnel to the train station, there is another. You'll exit at the village's little harbor. From there, work your way around to the left, and keep going on the narrow path until you see the cove and beach. If swimming, I'd suggest water shoes, there are rocks everywhere. Bring a towel and some padding for sunbathing, there is not a soft spot on the beach. Showers are up near the cliff.

Dive Center 5 Terre is located in the tunnel on the route to the beach. They rent kayaks, snorkeling and scuba gear, and offer scuba lesson and dive trips. 0187-920-011. Open in the summer and during good weather.

Dining in Riomaggiore

I am not particularly fond of the restaurants in Riomaggiore. There are better choices in the other villages. However, I do recommend the following places that serve good quality local fare.

Trattoria La Lampara is at the foot of *via Colombo*, on the left as you exit the tunnel. They offer indoor and balcony seating on the street. BTW, you'll see "La Lampara" in every village. The term refers to the lamp the fishermen use when fishing at night to attract the fish their way. This "La Lampara" offers fresh seafood. I like the spaghetti alla vongole (clams), and stuffed mussels. The restaurant has an upscale vibe with friendly service.

Bar Centrale is about halfway up *via Colombo*, on the left. They have outdoor service, with tables under a covered area on the street. Good for drinks, snacks, and quick eats. They offer a full menu that is good for lunch, but I prefer to dine elsewhere for dinner.





Traditional Cuisine and Vino

Enoteca & Ristorante Dua Cila is down by the harbor, immediately on the right when you exit the tunnel from town. Good fresh seafood and *antipasti di mare*. I have fond memories of this place from years back when I ordered a whole sea bass that was too big for me to finish it all. I shared it with about half the restaurant and there was still some left over! Open daily 12:00-24:00. Via San Giacomo, 65. Tel. 0187-760-032.

Traditional Cuisine and Vino

Seafood and fresh fish reign supreme here in the region of Liguria. Years ago, fishermen would set out each evening for these villages, fish all night, and arrive back in the harbor by daylight. Locals would gather at the docks in the early morning to purchase the fresh seafood and fish and take it home to cook for lunch and dinner. That still happens nowadays in the Cinque Terre, but on a much smaller scale. Today, there may be only a handful of fishermen going out each evening from the Cinque Terre, but they do return each morning with a fresh catch. This local catch is supplemented by other fishermen in the surrounding towns up and down the Liguria coastline to help put fresh and delicious seafood on the menu.

Acciughe – The ubiquitous fish here is the anchovy. In Italian it sounds tastier, *acciughe!* Try to pronounce it like this: ah-CHEW-gay. First thing to forget is the oily, slimy, salty anchovies packed in a tin in your granddad's cupboard. Also, forget about sardines, it not the same fish. The *acciughe* found on the tables of Cinque Terre restaurants are fresh and arrive on your plate in great variety. You find them raw, fried, marinated, salted, butterflied, whole, swimming in lemon juice, or served with dipping sauce. They are so plentiful that chefs take pride in their unique way in which to prepare and present them to their guests. These small fish swim in large schools with annual runs from the Atlantic Ocean, through the Straits of Gibraltar, and along the Mediterranean coasts of Spain, France, and Italy. At night, fishermen put out powerful lights to attract the *acciughe* to their nets. The next day, they are on your table for lunch!





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Acciughe make their most dramatic culinary appearance on the *antipasti frutti di mare piatti*, that is the plate(s) of mixed fruits of the sea. This is a staple started in many restaurants and the chef takes pride in the way in which he can show off these tasty bites. In addition to *acciughe*, your starter will include squid, mussels, shrimp, cuttlefish, and filleted fish all heavily drizzled with olive oil and fresh lemon juice. This starter platter could include up to ten plates and is certainly enough to feed two or three people. Even if you don't like fish, try it and split the order amongst the table.

With this description, you'd think *acciughe* were the only thing to eat, but there's lots more. Here is my rundown of the fine food and wine from the region.

Tegame alla vernazzana – This is a typical dish from Vernazza. It is a casserole-esque dish consisting of layers of anchovies, potatoes, tomatoes, local white wine, oil, and herbs.

Muscoli ripieni – Stuffed mussels are cooked and stuffed with a dressing similar to our stuffed crab in the USA.

Branzino & Orata – Seabass and Seabream. These are whole fish, the seabass (not to be confused with Chilean Seabass) is large, up to 5 or 6 pounds. The seabream is smaller, 1 pound or less. These are usually grilled or roasted whole and cooked with potatoes and vegetables. The whole fish is presented tableside on a platter and drizzled with olive oil, lemon, salt, and pepper. Most waiters will debone the fish and take away the head and tail, but only after you see it. Speaking of seeing it, be sure to ask to see the fish, raw and uncleaned, before you decide to buy it. Whole fresh fish should have a very mild fish scent, its eyes bright and bulging, and its gills should be bright red or pink. Fresh fish are sold by the kilogram (1 Kg = 2.2 pounds). Figure 0.5kg of whole uncleaned fish per person will yield about 8 ounces of cooked fish.

Gamberetti – Generally speaking, shrimp is smaller than what we have in the USA. Most likely it will have its head and legs attached and it will not be deveined. If served as part of the *antipasti frutti di mare*, it will be presented without head, tail, legs





Traditional Cuisine and Vino

and will be deveined. These are often served deep-fried along with other sea critters.

Calamari – that is the Italian word for squid! It comes raw or boiled in cold salads and antipasti dishes drizzled in olive oil. It is also deep-fried like commonly seen in the USA.

Seppia – Cuttlefish is similar to squid and octopus, except it has a head and teeth, sort of. It is famous for its ink sac which holds black ink that has a rich sea(weed) flavor. It is usually paired with pasta or risotto.

Vongole – Clams are most often served with pasta in a rich wine and herb sauce.

Pesto- Liguria has perfect weather from growing basil and you'll find it growing in every garden or *orto* you pass while walking to town or on the trails. Long ago, it was discovered that mixing basil, *parmigiano* and *pecorino* cheese, pine nuts, garlic, and olive oil then grinding it all together into a paste makes a tasty concoction. You'll find jars of pesto available in all the shops and grocery stores ready for you to pack up and take home. But try some here first! My favorite is *pesto lasagna* where layers of pasta are slathered with pesto and baked to perfection. *Il Castello* in Vernazza and *Cantine di Miky* in Monterosso serve some of the best. You'll also find pesto on *gnocchi*, a fresh pasta made from mashed potatoes, flour, and eggs. The best is at *Ristorante Ciak* in Monterosso where if you walk by the kitchen window in the late afternoon, you'll find *Signore Ciak* and his crew making this and other delights. Pesto is also added to *trofie* (a short and dense pasta made from flour and a bit of potato) and *trenette* (long, flat, and wide pasta). All the *pasti* mentioned above are made with ridges or dimples to give the *pesto* something to stick to.

Focaccia has its origins here in Liguria as well. The dough is spread thin, punched with fingers, and sprinkled with salt and water, then baked on a sheet pan. This results in a large sheet of baked bread resembling a pillow made by all the finger holes. These holes, like the pesto pastas mentioned above, are designed to capture the various topping and give more flavor.





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They come with many toppings, onions (*cipolli*), tomatoes (*pomodori*), ham (*prosciutto*), mushrooms (*funghi*), and other delights. You'll find *focaccia* being made at a shop called a *focacceria*. One of my favorites is *Focacceria Antonio Di Liberatore* in Monterosso.

Vino delle Cinque Terre – this white wine is produced locally in all the villages and in a couple of other towns in the province of La Spezia, but nowhere else! The wine is made from grapes grown on the terraced hillside that you see everywhere in the Cinque Terre. The grapes are mostly Bosco and Albarola, although some producers include Vermentino. Many restaurants serve local table wine in a carafe ordered by the liter, half-liter, or by the bottle. More expensive wines (€15-€30 per bottle) have a government label certifying the wine was produced from grapes grown in the Cinque Terre region. This is known as DOC (*Denominazione di Origine Controllata*). This regulation defines the production area, wine color, permitted grape varieties and proportions, styles of wine, minimum and maximum alcohol levels. Cinque Terre DOC wine must contain at least 40% of the local Bosco grape, but may also contain up to 40% of both Vermentino and Albarola. The final 20% can contain white varieties approved by the local wine consortium. You can't find this wine outside the Cinque Terre! So, even if you don't like wine, go there and give this unique crisp and dry wine a try. It pairs perfectly with the local cuisine!

Finally, there are two liqueur drinks that may be offered after dinner as a *digestivo*. *Limoncello* (*Limoncino*) is made from local lemon juice, sugar, and strong alcohol such as grappa or vodka. It tastes sweet, tart, and lemony. *Sciacchetra* (shah-keh-TRAH) is made from grapes that have been left on the vine almost until they are raisins. Once picked, the small amount of juice is squeezed out resulting in a very sweet and 18% alcoholic finish.





Events and Festivals

Events and Festivals

Check these websites for up-to-date information on festivals and special events in the Cinque Terre region. lamialiguria.it and cinqueterre.it





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Overview and Orientation

Volterra is my favorite Tuscan hill town and the perfect place for a visit. Not too big, not too crowded, and certainly not loaded with tacky tourist shops; it is authentic in every way. It is a beautiful town surrounded by ancient fortifications, guarded by an impressive fortress, and perched high on a hill overlooking the fertile fields of western Tuscany. Visiting here tends to make you forget about touring and focus on settling into the laid-back lifestyle of the local folks.

It's hard not to “go local” with a visit to the market or a stop at the neighborhood bar to knock down an espresso. Engage in conversation with the shopkeepers and get lost wandering the narrow, cobbled streets. On the town square, enjoy a crisp glass of wine at a café and then hang out for the late afternoon *passeggiata* where everyone gets out to visit. Finally, enjoy a tasty dining experience featuring some of the best restaurants in Tuscany. Embrace Volterra and experience *la dolce vita*!

Practical Information

Getting to and from Volterra

By Plane

There are two major airports in Tuscany: **Galileo Galilei International Airport** in Pisa and **Amerigo Vespucci Airport** in Florence. From either, you can take a bus or train or rent a car to get to Volterra.

In Pisa, take the PisaMover to the Pisa Centrale train station.

In Florence, take the “Vola in bus” shuttle to the bus station near the Santa Maria Novella train station.

By Train

The closest train station to Volterra is on the Cecine-Volterra railway line. The stop is **Volterra Saline – Pomarance**. It is 6 miles from Volterra. The closest larger train station is **Pontedera**. From either station, it is possible to take a bus to Volterra.





Practical Information

By Bus

From **Pisa** (from Pisa Centrale train station), take a bus to Pontedera and then change to the bus to Volterra (**line 500**).

From **Florence** (from Santa Maria Novella train station), take the bus to Colle de Val d'Elsa (**line 131**), which will take you to the train station in Colle, where you will change to the bus to Volterra (**line 770**).

From the Volterra Saline – Pomarance train station, take bus line 780 to Volterra.

By Car

There are a number of parking lots outside the city walls. Only residents can drive within the city. You can park at: Porta Fiorentina (small paid lot), along Viale F. Ferrucci (paid street parking. The lot in front of this is for residents), Porta Docciola (RVs can park here. It is at the bottom of the hill and you need to climb lots of steps to get to town), at Gioconovo (paid, along viale Porretti), Porta Marcoli (paid, some spots are reserved for residents), and Piazza M. della Libertà (underground paid lot, the entrance is before the piazza on the right).

Getting around Volterra

Walking

Volterra is a compact town and very easy to walk. It is only half a mile from one end of the walled city to the other.

Tourist Information

Volterra Card

The Volterra card is valid for 72 hours and includes access to a number of the city's top destinations: Guarnacci Etruscan Museum, the Pinacoteca, the Alabaster Ecomuseum, Palazzo dei Priori, the Acropolis and the Roman Theatre. It costs €16 and can be purchased at any of the locations mentioned, in addition to the tourism office (Piazza dei Priori).





Volterra

Other Useful Information

Pharmacy

There are two pharmacies near the Piazza dei Priori.

One is just past the Cassa di Risparmio, across Via Roma. Address: Via Ricciarelli, 2. Hours: Monday-Friday 9 AM to 1 PM and 4 PM to 8 PM and Saturday 9 AM to 1 PM.

The other is in the opposite direction. Address: Via Porta all'Arco, 1. Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 9 AM to 1 PM and 4 PM to 8 PM and Saturday 9 AM to 1 PM

Post Office

There is a post office in Piazza dei Priori. Open Monday-Friday 8:20 AM-7:05 PM, Saturday 8:20 AM-12:35 PM

Laundry

Lavandria Azzurra 2000

Via Roma, 7

Open daily 07:00-11:00

Self-Service. Next door, you can drop off early and pick up late.

Bathroom Facilities

There are clean and monitored toilets just off Piazza dei Priori. With your back to the door of the palace, walk to the corner that is at about 2 o'clock. Look down the small street, via delle Prigioni. The toilets are on the left about 20 meters, just across from the bread shop *al Vicolino*.

Sights in Volterra

Piazza Martiri della Libertà

Most likely, this busy square will be your first look at Volterra. It is here all vehicular traffic halts and the town becomes a pedestrian-friendly zone. Tour buses and regional buses stop here as well.





Sights in Volterra

Porta all' Arco (Etruscan Arch)

This massive, yet eroded, arch was originally constructed in the 4th century BC as one of many entrance gates into the city.

Notice the oldest stones resemble those that can be seen throughout Italy, like in the Colosseum in Rome. This stone is known as tuffa and is found all over the Italian peninsula. Essentially, the stone is a result of volcanic eruptions where water, lava, and ash meld together to form these huge chunks.

The three almost indistinguishable heads were placed in the tuffa stone arch in the 1st century BC, more than 2,000 years ago! The other more uniform stones date from the 13th century when the Etruscan walls were incorporated into some of the newer fortifications. Many believe this is the only remaining Etruscan round arch with a keystone in place. Many local experts believe the Romans used this arch as the model for their rounded arch and keystone construction technique, which can be seen almost anywhere in the former Empire.

Not only is the Porta all' Arco famous as an ancient relic, but it also has a WWII connection. It seems that on June 30, 1944, Nazi forces were planning to blow up the arch to slow down the advancing Allied forces. Heartbroken Volterrans quickly conceived a plan to avoid the travesty by ripping up all the stones that paved the via Porta all' Arco and using them to plug up the gate. Hence, they were able to convince the German commander that the now unusable gate was no longer a threat.

Palazzo dei Priori (City Hall)

Back in the Middle Ages, when Volterra was an independent city-state, it held no allegiance to a pope, an emperor, or other city-states. Therefore, it was important to put their unique "stamp" on things in the form of ornate public buildings.

Volterra's City Hall, constructed around 1209, was just such a structure. It served as a fortress, a palace, the court, and a public hall of records for centuries. It is believed to be the oldest of any Tuscan city-state and to have served as the model for the famous Palazzo Vecchio in Florence.





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The many coats-of-arms embedded in the palace walls chronicle the ruling families of Volterra, dating back a thousand years.

The horizontal “staff” carved into the wall, near the doorway, served as the official “rule” or yardstick for Volterrans who gathered in the palace courtyard to conduct trade.

For €1, it is possible to visit the city council chambers (when not in use) to experience the opulently painted room and its dragon light fixtures.

Il Duomo (La Cattedrale di Santa Maria Assunta)

You can see a portion of the Duomo from the Piazza dei Priori, just to the right of City Hall. There are horizontal black and white stripes on the rear façade, where a little doorway often opens into the Duomo.

To get the full experience of the Cathedral, walk around the block and enter from the cathedral square. The present Cathedral was completed in 1120 and dedicated to Mary and her Assumption into Heaven.

Before entering, look around the square. Here you will find a typical Italian arrangement of a bell tower, a baptistery, and the church. As in Pisa, Florence, Siena, and other towns, this was important because people could not enter the church without being baptized. Hence, a newborn would enter the baptistery from the western door, participate in baptism, exit through the east door, enter the church through the west doors, and finally, participate in worship facing the altar on the eastern end of the cathedral.

Church

The entrance is flanked by two solid marble columns supporting a rounded arch. Higher up, more decorative marble is strategically placed to add detail and ornamentation to the austere stone façade.

Stepping inside, notice the highly polished granite columns symmetrically supporting decorative round arches. In contrast,





Sights in Volterra

the floor provides an array of geometrical shapes tying together the interior. Although the cathedral was constructed in the 12th-century Romanesque style, much of the interior dates from a remodeling job completed in the late 16th century by the Florentine Medici family. The ornate and highly decorative gilded ceiling depicts the Assumption.

Notice the various coats of arms from Volterra families and that of the Medici (the Medici coat of arms contains six “pills” representing their original profession as doctors or *medici*).

The chapel to the left of the entry door houses several richly painted statues depicting Biblical scenes. They are hundreds of years ahead in their artistic development.

The Rosary Chapel is on the left, just before the Pulpit. The painting is by Fra Bartholomew, completed in 1497. It depicts the Annunciation. Take note of the rich colors and attention to detail, especially in the Virgin Mary.

The ornately carved Pulpit was completed in the 12th century. Its carved scenes detail Jesus’ Last Supper. All the disciples are present, although Judas is down under the table with an evil spirit.

To the right of the altar is the Chapel of the Deposition. Here, richly painted wooden figures depict the removal of Jesus from the cross in three-dimensional form. This work, completed in 1228, is an amazingly realistic representation that shows action and emotion in the figures. It was centuries ahead of its time.

The incandescent windows above the altar, instead of the typical stained glass, are actually made of sheets of alabaster.

Baptistery

The Baptistery is constructed on an octagonal base and dates to the 12th century. The façade consists of the characteristic green and white stripes of marble. There are few decorations inside, but there are two baptismal fonts. The one in the center is by Vaccà in 1760. The octagonal font in the corner is by Saso-





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vino (1502) and depicts the baptism of Christ, with the virtues of Faith, Hope, Charity, and Justice.

Tower

The bell tower was built in 1493 after the original one collapsed. There is an inscription around the base that recalls this fact.

Museo di Arte Sacra (Sacred Art Museum)

The museum is housed in the Bishop's palace, right next to the Duomo. It contains the collected works of art taken from neighboring churches that have been deconsecrated or left untended.

Museo Etrusco Guarnacci (Etruscan Museum)

The museum houses a treasure trove of Etruscan artifacts tucked away in "old school" display cases. This is the perfect example of artwork that is stashed away and only available for those who take the extra effort to go out of their way (to Volterra) for the experience. Often dusty and neglected, the artifacts chronicle the history of the Etruscan culture dating from 1500 BC.

There is very little English explanation, but you don't really need it to appreciate the works.

Perhaps the most famous work of art is *Ombra della sera* (Shadow of the evening), pictured here. This bronze statue has come to symbolize Etruscan society.

Just as important are the numerous funeral urns which were designed to contain the ashes of loved ones who passed away. Each urn is carved with a scene specific to the deceased in hopes that it would present the gods with a favorable impression on their life on Earth.

The museum also contains loads of finely crafted jewelry designed to adorn the Etruscan people. Evidently, they had good taste and plenty of gold with which to work! The artisan on the road above the Roman theater handcrafts fine replicas of the jewelry.





Sights in Volterra

Pinacoteca e Museo Civico (Art Gallery and Civic Museum)

The museum is located in the 15th-century *Palazzo Minucci-Solaini*. It houses a collection of paintings, initially taken from churches and monasteries that have fallen into disuse. The most notable work is *The Disposition* by the Florentine Renaissance painter Rosso Fiorentino. The painting depicts Christ's removal from the cross, done in an extreme mannerist style with characteristic elongated limbs and bodies. Other noted works include: a *Pietà* by the Volterrano artist Francesco Neri and the *Annunciation* by Luca Signorelli. Additionally, there is a fine altar piece by Domenico Ghirlandaio known as *Christ in Glory*.

Palazzo Viti

The palace offers an authentic look into the private residence of the nobility. Twelve rooms display ornate decorations, frescoes, fine woven rugs, collectibles, and furniture from the 15th through 20th centuries. The palazzo is actually occupied by the Viti family, so it has a "live-in" appeal. Many say this is the finest residential building in Italy.

Teatro Romana (Roman Theater)

Until the 1950s, this Roman theater and adjacent baths were covered in a pile of dirt, garbage, and debris that had accumulated in the 1,500 years since the fall of Rome.

The story goes that in the 1950s, a local resident noticed the rounded indentation in the Middle-Ages-era wall and sought funding and permission from the government to excavate. The government, bound by bureaucracy, gave permission to dig but offered no funding. It just so happened the local resident had an association with the "mental hospital" occupying the old Medici-era fortress, so he commissioned the patients to dig at no cost to anyone. The result of their labors revealed the perfectly preserved 1st-century BC *teatro* and 3rd-century AD Roman baths.





Volterra

The theatre stage is typical Roman design with three levels from which the actors would appear: level 1 for mortals, level 2 for heroes, and level 3 (at the top) for gods. All Roman theatergoers knew this design, and thus, the playwright had an easy way to present the cast to the audience.

[View the Teatro for Free](#)

Via Lungo le Mure runs atop the Middle Ages-era wall, just above the Roman Theatre. From here, you will have a great view of the ancient Roman ruins and the surrounding countryside to the north. This is also a great place to enjoy a glass of wine, a moonlit evening, and the quiet side of Tuscany. No wild after-hours parties! All is quiet in Volterra after 21:00. Go to *La Vena di Vino* if you want to kick up a ruckus.

Also, from here you can see portions of the four-mile Etruscan city wall, dating from the 4th century BC. Look to the left and find the distant church, then notice the stone (wall) just below. These are traces of the Etruscan wall that encircled Volterra and the surrounding valley fields more than 2,500 years ago.

Brief History of Volterra

Volterra has been around a long time. The first evidence of a settlement in the area was during the Neolithic Age when settlers moved from “low ground” to the more defensible “high ground” of Volterra. The town sits on a hill about 540 meters above sea level, making it one of the highest spots in Tuscany. Beginning in the 8th century BC there is evidence that the Etruscans settled here and founded the town as Velethri. It eventually became one of the twelve city-states of Etruria and by the 4th century BC, a great stone wall was constructed to fortify the city. As you walk through the town today, notice all the references to the Etruscans: your hotel is named for them, there is a museum dedicated to them, the jeweler near the Roman theatre fashions jewelry after Etruscan artifacts and the great stone gate, *Porta all' Arco*, dates from the Etruscan era.

The Etruscans were forced to “join” the **Roman Empire** in 3rd century BC after the Romans defeated them in several bat-





Brief History of Volterra

tles. The town's name changed to *Volatarrae* and after several centuries of good relations with Rome, the inhabitants were granted the right to Roman citizenship in 90 BC. Unfortunately, Volatarrae got caught up in a civil war between two Roman generals and sided with the losing fellow. A two-year siege ensued (82-80 BC) and finally Volatarrae had no choice but to surrender. This was followed by a terrible sacking of the town and its inhabitants stripped of their citizenship.

Even with this terrible defeat, Volatarrae seemed to prosper into the 1st century BC. Historical artifacts and archeological evidence suggest there was new construction and a rebuilding of the city. The Roman Theatre dates from the 1st century BC and the nearby baths date from the 4th century A.D.

After the fall of Rome in the 5th century, Volterra became a diocese of the rapidly growing Church and a small temple dedicated to Mary was the city's first Duomo. Giusto became the first bishop and patron of Volterra. Legend has it that Bishop Giusto miraculously saved the city from a terrible siege in the 6th century. Being under siege for months, the townsfolk were to the point of starvation and exhaustion. Giusto persuaded the townsfolk to throw all their remaining bread over the walls in clear view of the invaders. Seeing this, the Barbarian invaders simply gave up the siege because they thought if the Volterra people could afford to throw away their bread, they were surely capable of fending off the long siege. The Barbarians gave up, went home and the city was saved!

By the 9th century the leaders and Bishop of Volterra became so powerful they formed their own government independent from any other jurisdiction. Things remained in check for several decades and then the power went to the leaders' heads causing envy, strife and discord. By the 12th century there was great division between the bishop's rule and the nobility. It all came to a head in 1150 when a new bishop took charge. The feudal lords and middle classes united to oust the bishop. As a symbol of unity, construction began in 1208 on the **Palazzo dei Priori** and was completed in 1257. This "city hall" be-





Volterra

came an outward symbol of civic pride and unity of the newly formed free commune.

It was during this time that Volterra took on the appearance we see today. The town went to great expense to construct massive fortified walls and the wealthy nobles constructed many tower houses (like you see in San Gimignano). One such tower remains in Volterra and is known as the “Tower of the Little Pig.” Look up and around while in Volterra and see if you can find it. It was also during this time that the façade of the cathedral was embellished with the black and white marble you see today.

The middle ages were filled with wars and squabbles between neighboring city-states and from foreign invaders. Volterra was constantly exhausting its resources to defend against the ever-powerful folks in Florence, Siena and Pisa. Around 1361, after much feuding between two powerful families, Volterra came under Florentine control. In the **Renaissance**, Florence imposed new land taxes on Volterra. The people of Volterra revolted and Lorenzo de Medici (Florence’s ruler) sent in troops and the city was once again sacked in 1472. In the same year, Lorenzo ordered the **fortress** built to control the city and send a “message” to all that Volterra was now under Florentine rule.

The Importance of stone

Look anywhere in Volterra and you will find stone. The streets, palaces, churches, and city walls are made of it. Upon close inspection, you’ll find little seashells embedded into this unique stone known as *panchino*. Volterra, on the western frontier of Tuscany, has always been isolated from society and had to make do with what they had.

Alabaster

Early on, *alabastro* (alabaster) was discovered in and around Volterra. Previously, this stone was known only in Egypt around the town of Alabastron, famous for antique vases and perfume bottles. Once it was discovered in Volterra, the local craftsmen began duplicating the ancient relics from Egypt.





Tours and Tour Guides

The alabaster of Volterra is known as chalky alabaster and is particularly soft and easy to carve. It comes out of the ground as a white chunk of stone that is eventually divided into smaller pieces. The Etruscans used only the best alabaster to carve funerary urns and sarcophagi decorated with ornate imagery of the deceased, scenes from their daily life and imaginary journeys beyond the tomb. The Etruscan craftsmen colored the white alabaster with minerals, turning them into richly colored and decorated works of art.

Apparently, the use of alabaster dropped out of vogue during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. It was not until the 17th century that it once again gained popularity. By the 18th century, Volterra's alabaster was world-famous. According to records, there were sixty alabaster workshops in little Volterra.

Today, even though alabaster does not play an important role in world art, craftsmen still thrive in Volterra. You will find several workshops managed by aged craftsmen passing down their trade to future generations. There are several alabaster workshops in Volterra. All welcome visitors and are happy to have you watch as they sculpt and work the raw alabaster stone.

My favorite is Alab'Arte (gallery and showroom) where alabaster is crafted by locals Roberto Chiti and Giorgio Finazzo. Alab'Arte is just across the street from the Etruscan Museum. Their real-live workshop is across the street and down the hill at the Porta Marcoli. Stop in and watch them in action!

Tours and Tour Guides

Walking Tours

Much of the information contained here has been gleaned from numerous visits and guided walks with my friend and local resident, **Annie Adare**. Annie showed up in Volterra some years ago, fell in love with the place, decided to stay, and, eventually, fell in love with a local young man as well. She and Francesco married, have two wonderful children, and live just outside the town walls. Through their agency, **Tuscan Tour**, they arrange





Volterra

American weddings and guided tours of Volterra and the surrounding countryside. Read more about it on their website tuscantour.com.

Wine Tasting

La Vena di Vino (see below for more information on this wine bar).

Shopping

Alab'Arte (gallery and showroom), just across the street from the Etruscan Museum. Alabaster is crafted by locals Roberto Chiti and Giorgio Finazzo. Visit their workshop across the street and down the hill at the Porta Marcoli to watch them in action.

Markets

The **Punto Simply Market** is in the center of town on Via Gramsci, 12. Open Monday to Saturday 07:30-13:00 & 16:00-20:00. Sunday 08:30-13:00.

There is also a **weekly market** on Saturday mornings in the Piazza dei Priori.

In September (on the Monday following the third Sunday of the month), there is a fair with stalls set up in Piazza dei Priori, Piazza Dan Giovanni and along Via Roma selling a smorgasbord of sweets.

Entertainment and Outdoor Activities

Festivals

Volterragusto is held in March, October and November. It is meant to assist showcase the region's famed white truffle, but you can sample all kinds of local produce including wine, cheeses, oil, chocolate and salami. There are also historical reenactments. You won't want to miss the districts of Volterra competing in a cheese rolling competition along Via Franceschini.





Traditional Cuisine and Vino

Volterra AD 1398 is celebrated on the second and third Sundays in August, takes visitors back to the middle ages with shows, events, markets, craftsmen, musicians, jugglers, peasants and noblemen, with everyone in costume.

Traditional Cuisine and Vino

Being in Tuscany, Volterra shares many of the traditional dishes from the region. You'll find cured meats, sausage, and cheese on the antipasti plates. Chefs are proud of their homemade liver pate which is served atop a grilled piece of bread (*crostini*). Hand-made pastas with truffle or wild boar (*cinghiale*) sauce are a staple of every restaurant. The T-Bone steak (*bistecca alla Fiorentina*) comes thick and cooked medium-rare. A dish unique to Volterra is *Zuppa alla Volterrana*, a rich vegetable soup with day-old bread which becomes moist and soaks in all the ingredients.

Growing grapes is difficult here in western Tuscany. The soil is mostly grey gumbo clay which makes maintaining the vines a chore. Nevertheless, there are a few vintners in Volterra who have, against all odds, begun to produce some excellent wines. There are no DOC or DOCG designations here. Most of the wine is classified as table wine, but don't let that fool you... it can be very good!

The local white wine is vermentino, a grape variety which is usually grown near the seaside. The resulting wine offers a crisp feel on the tongue with floral and fruity flavors. It often possesses some salty undertones, especially from the grapes grown at the seaside. This is a very drinkable wine that pairs well with fresh fish, roasted vegetables or goat cheese.

From nearby, San Gimignano, you'll find VERNACCIA DI SAN GIMIGNANO, a DOCG white wine produced from the Vernaccia grape grown in the vicinity of San Gimignano. Many experts agree that this is the oldest grape variety in Italy, dating back to 1276. According to DOCG regulations, Vernaccia di San Gimignano must contain at least 90% Vernaccia. Vintners may add up to 10% of other approved white grape varieties. In order





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to achieve riserva status, it must be aged at least 12 months. The wine is crisp with lots of acidity and laced with tart apple and citrus flavors. Serve it chilled. It makes a good easy-drinking and refreshing wine for everyday use or to drink on a hot summer's day.

Red wine is produced locally from mostly Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Sangiovese grapes. The resulting wine takes on a taste that differs from that of the more famous wines produced farther to the

Dining Suggestions

I find that cuisine in Tuscany mainly consists of heavy and hearty rustic home cooking. It's all about simple food prepared to taste great. You'll find fresh vegetables, superb olive oils, grilled meats, fresh bread, and all the cured ham, salami, and sausage you'll care to eat. Finding a place to eat is not difficult because there are a slew of restaurants, sandwich shops, and wine bars in every town. Add tourism to the mix and the places to dine multiply. Culling out the best from the just "ok" takes some research. Here are a few of my favorite dishes.

Antipasti

Tuscan Bread is made without salt. This tradition continues from the days when salt was very expensive and poor Tuscan farmers could not afford to use salt on bread.

Tuscan bread drenched in olive oil and sprinkled with salt is a common antipasti.

Bruschetta- toasted Tuscan bread brushed with olive oil and garlic and topped with tomatoes or mushrooms or whatever fresh vegetable is available that day.

Crostini – Smaller pieces of Tuscan bread, toasted and topped with various pâtés. *Crostini alla fiorentina* is topped with chicken liver pâté.

Dried meat and cold cuts – Try a selection of mixed *salami*, *prosciutto*, *pancetta*, or *finocchiona*. Add a few pieces of local cheese, such as *pecorino*, and you've got a wonderful start





Dining Suggestions

to any meal. By the way, you'll not find a true Tuscan sitting around drinking red wine with nothing to eat. Any of the above cold cuts or cheeses make a perfect match for a good glass of red wine from Tuscany.

Salami – Salt-cured and air-dried cold cut sausages

Prosciutto – prized salt-cured leg of a pig

Pancetta– salt-cured pork belly, kind of like our rustic bacon

Finocchiona – salami with fennel

Lardo– pure cured pork fat

Primi piatti

Hearty pasta dishes with meat sauce usually make up the traditional first plates. There are hundreds of pasta types, but some of my favorites are:

Pappardelle- wide flat pasta usually served with wild rabbit (*lepre*) or wild boar (*cinghiale*) sauce.

Ravioli – stuffed with local cheeses and served with meat sauce, black or white truffles (*tartufi*) or a simple butter sauce.

In the winter you will often find *ribollita*, a soup made from whatever's left over in the kitchen and “re-boiled” with day-old Tuscan bread slices.

Secondi piatti

Bistecca alla Fiorentina – a T-bone steak grilled over an open fire and cooked very rare. After cooking it is seasoned with a little olive oil and salt. Typically the meat comes from the pure white *Chianina* cattle grazing in the fields of Tuscany.

You'll also find various types of wild game: wild boar, rabbit, pheasants, and such. Often these are included in an assortment of grilled meats done up on a skewer.

Dolci

Cantucci is often served with a small glass of *Vin Santo*. You might know *cantucci* as *biscotti*, a twice-baked crunchy almond cookie. *Vin Santo* is a sweet almond/raisin wine.





Volterra

Check out my blog for more information on Tuscan cuisine.

davidmcguffin.com/spotlight-on-italian-cuisine-tuscany/

Restaurants, Cafés and Bars

Ristorante Enoteca Del Duca it is the classiest restaurant in town. Their menu feature traditional Tuscan cuisine as well as a new array of menu items with an international flair. The main dining room, in a 15th century building, features stone arches, elegantly set tables, and a friendly and professional waitstaff. In the summer, they open their outdoor garden for a unique dining experience surrounded by ancient Etruscan stone walls. The restaurant is owned and operated by the husband and wife team of Chefs Genuino and Ivana and their charming daughter, Claudia. Their cellar is extensive and contains fine wines from Italy and the rest of Europe. Claudia and Genuino are vintners themselves, owning Podere Marcampo just outside of town. Their own award- winning wines pair well all the menu items and are amazingly affordable. This is a great place for a special night out or romantic dinner. Closed Tuesday. Open other days 12:30-15:00 & 19:30-22:00. Via di Castello 2. T. 0588-81510.

enoteca-delduca-ristorante.it

Ristorante Da Beppino features ingredients from their organic farm near Volterra. Chef Angelo Senes insists on only fresh in-season ingredients and locally sourced meats, fresh local fish, homemade pasta. Angelo's son, Antonio and his wife, Sara divide their time between the farm and the restaurant. Their restaurant features comfortable indoor and outdoor dining with a knowledgeable and friendly staff. Open daily 12:00-22:00. Via delle Prigioni, 13. T. 0588-86051. dabepino.com

Ristorante Ombra della Sera offers elegant dining in their inside dining room and a more relaxed atmosphere at their street-side tables. Regardless of where you choose to dine, the food will be excellent featuring homemade pasta, truffle dishes, local cheeses and salami. The owner, Massimo, is a wonderful host and will treat you well. Closed Monday. Open other days 12:00-15:00 & 19:00-22:00. Via Gramsci 70. T. 0588-86663.



Dining Suggestions

Ristorante Il Sacco Fiorentino is another family-run restaurant featuring mostly inside tables, a local crowd, and really good fresh food. Closed Wednesday. Open other days 12:00-15:00 & 19:00-22:00. Via Guisto Turazza 13. T. 0588-88537.

Pizzeria Ombra della Sera This place is always busy and is a hangout for teenagers and locals who know good pizza. Step up to the counter, order your pizza and watch the pizzaiolo (pizza making guy) prepare your pizza right in front of your eyes. Closed Monday. Open other days 12:00-15:00 & 19:00-22:00. Via Guarnacci 16. T. 0588-85274.

Pizzeria Tavernetta has great pizza too, plus an upstairs dining room featuring a ornate frescoed ceiling. Good food and good ambiance, what more could you want? Closed Tuesday. Open other days 12:00-15:00 & 18:30-22:30. Via Guarnacci 14. T. 0588-88155.

La Vena di Vino (The Vein of Wine) Some years ago, my friends introduced me to this unique wine bar. That first night, I was instantly welcomed by owners Bruno and Lucio and a cast of characters from the town. We spent the evening drinking wine and grappa, singing karaoke, and trying out our Italian and English on each other. Since that night, I've held a bond of friendship with the folks I met at this unique enoteca. Each day, Bruno and Lucio open a few bottles of good Tuscan wine and serve it up with tasty antipasti. Decorating the ceiling is a 1960s vintage Volkswagen Beetle adorned with bras donated by ladies who probably had too much vino! This is THE place to hang out, especially in the late evening when the rest of the town sleeps. Closed Tuesdays. Open other days 11:00-01:00. Via Don Minzoni, 30. Tel. 0588 81491. www.lavenadivino.com

Café Etruria is located in a hidden garden with grand views across the rooftops of Volterra. It is a wonderful place for an appetitivo and light snacks. Owners Paola and Daniele are friendly and helpful. In the summer, they put on a BBQ on Friday evenings. Open daily 11:00-20:00. Via di Castello, 11. T. 0588-87377. albergoetruria.it



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Picnicking Locations

The hilltop archeological park is a great place for a picnic. There are several markets around town when you can pick up drinks, meats, cheeses, and other ingredients to assemble your outdoor feast (see above).





Siena

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Overview and Orientation

Siena and Florence are no more than 40 miles apart, yet they provide the modern-day tourist with a totally different experience in culture, art, and history.

Florence, now with half a million residents, became the original Renaissance city of art, culture, and power of the 15th century. Siena, on the other hand, with only 60,000 residents provides a look back into the era before the Renaissance, known as the Middle Ages.

The Republic of Siena came to power through prosperous trade and banking. The well-organized administration of the *Ghibelline* family steered Siena to prominence as a recognized powerhouse in the late 13th century. It was during this time that Siena prospered and built the town you visit today.

Unfortunately, Siena was devastated by the plague in 1348, losing one-third of its citizens and falling into years of decline. By the early 15th century, Siena's golden age had come to an end. For nearly 700 years Siena sat stagnant, firmly entrenched in medieval times. While this was devastating for the Siennese economy in the 16th to 19th centuries, it's a good thing for modern-day tourism. Today, with a population of about 60,000, Siena looks and feels much as it did at the turn of the 14th century.

Siena is divided into seventeen neighborhoods known as *contrade*. Each *contrada* is represented by a colorful banner and a rider in the *Palio*. The *contrada* is a tight-knit group of residents bound together by localized patriotism and a sense of civic pride. Every important event is celebrated only within one's own *contrada*. Hence, you may stumble onto one of these neighborhood events celebrating a baptism, a death, a marriage, the *Palio*, a church holiday or a food or wine festival.

Don't miss out on the opportunity to venture off the tourist path and do some exploring on your own! It is nearly impossible to get lost; just don't venture beyond the city gates and





Practical Information

walls. If you do find your-self turned around a bit, just ask anyone, “*Dov’è il Campo?*” (do-veh ill kahm-poh).

Practical Information

Getting around Siena

Public Transportation

There is no public transportation available in the city center, but if you are travelling beyond the city walls, busses are operated by Siena Mobilita. You can buy tickets at tobacconists, newsstands and other points of sale. Be sure to validate your ticket once on board.

Walking

Siena must be explored on foot. The historic medieval city center is designated a pedestrian-only zone. Except for taxis and service vehicles, no vehicular traffic is allowed within the city walls. Siena is situated on the site of several red clay hills (hence the name “siena” or burnt orange) so traveling anywhere in the city is likely to have one going up and down a hill or two to get anywhere. Additionally, many of the streets are cobbled, dating from the Middle Ages, and require a little extra effort when walking.

Taxi

Taxis are available for hire for those who are physically challenged or just don’t want to take that long walk back to the parking. There are taxi stands at several main squares around the city, but you’ll probably not be near any of them when you need a taxi. You can call a taxi by dialing 0577 49222 and asking for a cab to pick you up at your location. The dispatcher will confirm a specific cab number and name (i.e. #80, Ricardo) and an approximate arrival time. Alternatively, you could sit down at a bar or café, order a drink, and ask the waiter to call a cab when you are ready to leave. It is appropriate to offer a few euros as a tip when requesting someone to call a cab for you.





Siena

Bicycle

SiPedale is the bike-sharing service in Siena. There are 18 stations around the city. One-day and two-day passes are available through the Bicincitta App for €10 and €15 respectively. See bicincitta.com or the app for more information.

Tourist Information

While there is no city pass, the **OPA Si Pass** is a combined three-day pass for the Cathedral and the Piccolomini Library, the Museo dell'Opera, Baptistery, Crypt, Oratory of San Bernardino and Diocesan Museum of Sacred Art. Price varies by season from €8 to €15. To reserve tickets, call +39 0577 286300.

The **Gate of Heaven pass** is all inclusive (including tours of the cathedral rooftops). Tickets can be purchased at the ticket office for €20.

To determine which ticket is right for you, visit operaduomo.siena.it.

Church Attire

Respectful attire is required. Shoulders and knees must be covered. No hats or sunglasses.

Other Useful Information

Hospitals

Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria Senese is located north of the city. Address: Viale Mario Bracci, 11, 53100 Siena SI, Italy

Pharmacy

There is a pharmacy on the Piazza del Campo. Antica Farmacia del Campo. Address: Il Campo, 26. Open: Monday-Saturday 9AM-7:30PM

Laundry

Lavanderia Europea

Via delle Terme, 55





Sights in Siena

+39 0577 44550

Hours: Monday-Friday 8AM-1 PM and 3 PM to 7:30 PM. Saturday 8 AM-1 PM

Drop off and pick up later.

Northeast of Piazza del Campo.

Lavanderia Waterland

Via dei Rossi, 94

+39 333 794 7993

Hours: Daily, 7 AM to 10 PM

Self-service

Sights in Siena

Il Campo

Like many medieval towns in central Italy, Siena's center is traffic free, giving free reign to the pedestrian to explore with ease. Today as in the Middle Ages, Il Campo, Siena's main square, bustles with activity. This once was the political center of town, but more importantly it is the spot where locals and tourists alike meet and socialize. The piazza, shaped like a fan, is paved with red bricks set off by contrasting white stone slabs. The white stones form eight straight lines dividing the piazza into nine sections. Each section represents a trade or banking group who ruled Siena during its medieval era of prosperity.

From the shops and cafés above, the piazza slopes down to the dominating façade of the **Palazzo Pubblico** and the nearby bell tower. The Palazzo Pubblico, or Town Hall, was built around 1300 in the Gothic style. Notice the marbled arches forming the foundation and the characteristic triple-arched windows above.

Torre del Mangia

Soaring above the Town Hall and Campo is the 300-foot-tall Torre del Mangia. This bell tower, the tallest secular tower in Italy, was named for a night watchman who devoured his earnings like a glutton eats food. Below the tower, is a log-





Siena

gia-shaped chapel constructed in 1352 to mark the end of the plague.

It is a grueling 400 steep steps to the top of the bell tower. But, if you are fit, the view is certainly worth enduring a racing heart and burning thighs. At the top you'll find the huge bells and broad sweeping vistas of Siena and the surrounding Tuscan countryside. Hours: 10:00-19:00 mid-March through October; 10:00-16:00 remainder of the year. The ticket office is located at the foot of the tower in the city hall. Last admission is 45 minutes before closing. Cost: €10.

At the top of the Campo stands the **Fonte Gaia**, the Fountain of Joy, constructed by Jacopo della Quercia. In the Middle Ages a city's wealth was often judged by its public fountains. The marble panels date from 1858 and are copies of the della Quercia's 1419 originals.

The Duomo

The **Cathedral of Siena**, known as *Duomo di Siena* in Italian, is formally called *Santa Maria Assunta* (Most Holy Mary of Assumption). The cathedral was originally designed and completed between 1215 and 1263 on the site of an earlier structure. It has the form of a Latin cross with a dome and a bell tower. The dome rises from an octagonal base with supporting columns. The lantern atop the dome was added later by Baroque legend Bernini.

The exterior and interior are constructed of white and greenish-black marble in alternating stripes with the addition of red marble on the façade. Black and white are the symbolic colors of Siena, which are somewhat linked to the black and white horses of the legendary city's founders, Senius and Aschius.

In 1339, Siena was determined to outdo their archrival, Florence. As work was progressing on the new Duomo in Florence, the Sieneese undertook a plan to build a huge Cathedral with the existing Duomo being the transept (the "arms" of the cross design) and the nearby piazza (near the present-day Duomo Museum) becoming the new nave. You can see this clearly by





Sights in Siena

standing in the piazza on the “bell tower side” of the church and looking at the surrounding building’s wall, which contains a few of the original marble arches now filled in with brick and mortar. This project was doomed from the outset by technical problems. Its final blow of defeat came in the form of the terrible plague of 1348.

Don’t miss going inside the cathedral. It’s here you will find beautiful frescos, ornate inlaid marble floors, and colorful stained-glass windows. However, topping the list of “not to miss sights” are works by Michelangelo and Bernini as well as the **Piccolomini Library**. Purchase a combination entrance ticket at the nearby Duomo Museum. (*Museo dell’ Opera*).

Since you’ve bought a ticket for the Cathedral, be sure to give the Duomo Museum a walk-through. You can skip all the artwork and jump right to what I think is the best view of Siena and Tuscany. It’s kind of difficult to locate, but follow my instructions and you’ll be rewarded! From the ground floor, go upstairs to the top floor. Walk through the room on the right to a small doorway leading to a narrow spiral stairway. Look for a sign noting **Panorama del Facciatore**. At the top of the stairway you will be outside on what would have been the “front” of the massive cathedral of 1339, had it been completed.

Up here we can make some sense of Siena’s winding multitude of streets and alleys. Across the valley is the austere *San Domenico* with its relics of Saint Catherine. There in the center of town is Il Campo and its Gothic landmark bell tower. Here, from our vantage point, you can see how Siena was a defensible position in the Middle Ages. Beyond the town walls stretch the amber, green, and olive hills of Tuscany, which for centuries have beckoned travelers and tourists to settle in and enjoy.

[Saint Catherine of Siena](#)

Catherine (1347-1380) was the second youngest of a very large Siennese family of 25. Her father was a dyer and belonged to the lower middle-class faction of tradesmen known as “the Party of the Twelve.” In early childhood, Catherine began to experience heavenly visions. As a result, she consecrated her life to Christ





Siena

at age seven. At sixteen, Catherine took the habit of the Dominican order. For three years, she locked herself away in a room at her family's house where she experienced celestial visitations and first-hand conversations with Christ.

It was soon after this that Catherine emerged from her self-imposed confinement and joined her Dominican sisters in tending the sick, serving the poor, and working for the conversion of the sinners. During the summer of 1370, she went into a trance-like coma and emerged with a divine mission to spread her message to the world.

She began to write letters to popes, bishops, dukes and kings, begging them to work for peace for the war-torn area we now know as Italy. It was during this time when in Pisa that Catherine received the Stigmata (the wounds of Christ) on the fourth Sunday of Lent, 1375.

Two years later Catherine went to Avignon and convinced Pope Gregory XI to return the papal seat to Rome. In 1378, Pope Urban VI summoned Catherine to Rome. It was here she spent the rest of her life working with the sick and destitute, laboring diligently for the reformation of the Church. Catherine was canonized in 1461 by the Sienese-born Pope Pius II.

[Basilica San Dominico](#)

The Basilica San Dominico is a Gothic church constructed in the 13th–15th centuries. Its featureless façade and unremarkable interior are well suited for that of the Dominicans who have forsaken worldly goods and dedicated their lives to preaching the Gospel. Here is a short “tour” of the interior:

Walk up the steps in the back to find a portrait of Saint Catherine, Siena's patron saint, painted by her contemporary, Andrea Vanni.

In the nave, continue about halfway up on the right to find a metal bust of Saint Catherine, and in the small case, a portion of her finger and the chains/straps she used for self-flagellation.

Closer to the alter (about 10 meters beyond the bust) is a small chapel with many candles. Look closely to see Saint Catherine's





Shopping

actual head on the altar surrounded by the candles. The nearby frescoes by Sodoma depict scenes from the saint's life.

Totally unrelated but also of interest are the colorful banner flags representing the seventeen *contrade* neighborhoods of Siena.

Brief History of Siena

Siena, like many Tuscan hill towns, was settled in the time of the Etruscans (ca. 900–400 BC) when it was inhabited by a tribe called the Saina. The Etruscans were an advanced people who changed the face of central Italy with their advanced culture. Later, a Roman town called *Saena Julia* was founded here in the time of the Emperor Augustus. The first document mentioning it dates from AD 70.

All over Siena, you will find images of the she-wolf suckling Romulus and Remus. Just take a look around Il Campo, the Duomo, public squares, drainpipes, etc. I think there might be more images of the suckling she-wolf in Siena than in Rome! So, what's the connection? Legend has it that Remus' son **Senius** fled Rome, wandered north and founded Siena. The folklore seemed to stick and now you'll find the she-wolf woven into every *contrade* (neighborhood). Look around and see how many you can find.

Note: If going to Rome, see my extensive account of Romulus and Remus and the Siena connection (under Rome).

Shopping

There are three main pedestrian streets that link the local neighborhood with Il Campo. These streets contain the best shopping in the city. Like one of our classy upscale shopping malls in the USA, Siena's cobbled streets are flanked by an endless assortment of shops selling clothing, shoes, jewelry, toys, hand-made ceramics, books, stationary, food and much more.

The *Via di Citta*, *Banchi di Sopra* and *Via Dei Montanini* are filled with the local folks each evening during the *passeggiata*, or evening stroll. It is here you'll find the young and old residents





Siena

taking in all Siena has to offer. **Don't miss this opportunity to experience Siena!** The *passeggiata* usually begins around 7:30ish in the summer and about 5:00ish in the winter.

Markets

The **city market** is held every Wednesday morning at La Lizza, near the Fortezza. You can find fresh produce, flowers, clothing, shoes, bags and other household goods. Hours: Wednesday, 8:30 AM to 1:30 PM

Entertainment and Outdoor Activities

Palio di Siena

This horse race is held twice a year in Siena on July 2 and August 16. Typically, it consists of ten men, dressed in *contrade* regalia, riding bareback around the circumference of Il Campo. Originally, all seventeen of the *contrade* were represented in each race. Now only ten entries are allowed due to a race in the 18th century where too many riders and horses were killed or injured. Now, there is a rotation in place for each race. A grand parade precedes the event that attracts visitors from all over the world. The event itself (3 laps around Il Campo) only lasts about ninety seconds and most often includes several fallen horses trying to make almost impossible turns in the piazza, as well as riderless horses arriving at the finish line without their jockeys.

Traditional Cuisine and Vino

Panforte, meaning “strong bread,” is a confection with its origins in Siena. Legend has it that in 1205, serfs and tenants of the Mentecellesi nunnery brought spices and honey cakes for the yearly census. In those days, nunneries prepared medicinal mixtures of herbs and spices. Later, the concocting of these was assumed by the *speziali* (chemists), and along with it, the preparation of Panforte. As you stroll the streets of Siena, notice the different varieties of Panforte with their ancient names and logos of long-lost pharmacists' families.





Traditional Cuisine and Vino

Round in shape, Panforte's basic ingredients are fresh almonds, candied fruit (primarily citrus), spices and honey. The most widely sold Panforte today is *Panforte Margherita*, named in honor of Queen Margherita, the wife of the Italian king Umberto I, and based on a recipe which gave the cake a more delicate taste. Panforte is best served with Vin Santo, a sweet raisin wine with origins in Tuscan monasteries.





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Practical Information

Overview and Orientation

No visit to Italy is complete without spending a few days in Florence. Tourists today can comfortably see the major sights and experience the city's ambiance in just a few days. Regardless of the duration of your visit you'll want to see the major sights, get in some shopping, enjoy a fine Tuscan-style dinner, and sample some *gelato* (the world's best ice cream).

This is a busy city that can wear even the most avid sightseer to a frazzle. In the hot summer months, it is important to buy into the idea of the afternoon siesta. Do your sightseeing in the cooler morning and early evening. Take a nap or visit a museum in the afternoon.

Here are some sights and activities to consider: visit the *Accademia*, home of *Michelangelo's David*; explore the city on foot to visit the *Duomo*, the *Piazza della Signoria*, and the *Ponte Vecchio*; visit the *San Lorenzo Market* for some shopping and people watching; enjoy a nice dinner at one of my recommended restaurants; and later, take a gelato-licking stroll through the *Piazza della Repubblica* and on to the *Ponte Vecchio* for lively street entertainment.

Practical Information

Getting to and from Florence

By Plane

Florence's airport, **Amerigo Vespucci**, is 4k northwest of the city center (approximately 20 minutes). **Taxis** are stationed in front of the terminal and cost €22 to arrive downtown, including major hotels. Each piece of luggage is an additional fee of €1.

The "**Vola in bus**" shuttle departs approximately every 30 minutes, 7 days a week, from 5:00 am to midnight. It goes directly to the Busitalia bus station (Via Santa Caterina da Siena, 17) near the Santa Maria Novella train station. Leave the ter-





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minal and head to the bus station on the right. Tickets cost €6 one way (€10 round trip). One-way tickets can be purchased onboard.

If you are flying into Pisa, you can take the PisaMover shuttle to Pisa Central and take a train to Florence's Santa Maria Novella train station (see below).

By Train

The city's main train station is **Firenze Santa Maria Novella** (abbreviated Firenze SMN). This is a pretty central location. However, if your hotel is not nearby you can take a taxi or a city bus (run by ATAF). All of the main lines stop at the train station. The TRAM line from Santa Maria Novella takes you to Scandicci and is a good alternative to buses during peak hours.

If you are taking a day trip to Florence, there is a place to store luggage at track 16.

By Bus

Most buses go to the Santa Maria Novella train station. From here, you can walk, take a taxi or city bus to your final destination.

By Car

The historic center of Florence is a Limited Traffic Zone, and special permits are required to enter. If you do not have the correct permit, you will be faced with expensive fines. If your hotel is in this zone, you can drive to it, but you must unpack and leave the zone immediately (unless your hotel offers parking). Inform your hotel that you arrived by car so that they can give your license plate number to the police and have you removed from the fines list. If you will be staying for a few days, ask your hotel for suggestions on where to park.

Alternatively, there are paid parking lots around the historic center, including one at the Santa Maria Novella train station. Along the Arno River, you can park anywhere you see a blue line or paid parking area. Just park and purchase a ticket at a nearby machine to display on your dashboard.





Practical Information

Getting around Florence

Public Transportation

The main **bus** lines are run by ATAF. A single ticket is valid for 90 minutes. Tickets can be purchased at any authorized sales point (tobacconists, bars or any shop with and ATAF sticker in the window). There is also a ticket booth in front of the Santa Maria Novella train station (to the left as you exit) where you can purchase tickets and route maps.

If you buy the Firenze Card (see below), for an additional €7 you can include unlimited travel on ATAF buses for the time that the card is active. You will receive a special bus ticket that you will stamp the first time you ride a bus.

Single tickets cost €1.50, a packet of 10 tickets costs €14. Visit the website ataf.net for information on where tickets are sold, route closures and to help you plan your route.

Tips for riding the bus

Avoid riding the buses during rush hour when they are packed. There are no night buses.

The front and back doors are for getting on the bus and the middle door is for exiting. Once on the bus, be sure to validate your ticket at the nearby machine. It will print the date and time on your ticket, and you will be able to use it for 90 minutes to get on and off different buses. If the controllers check your ticket and it is not validated, you will have to pay a fine.

Buy your tickets ahead of time. It is sometimes possible to buy a ticket from the driver, but it costs more (€2.50), change is not given, and it is possible that the driver won't have any.

Florence also has an electric **tram** line that runs from its station near the SMN train station to the suburbs of Scandicci.

Walking

It is very easy to navigate the historic city center on foot.





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Bicycle

The *Mille e una bici* bike sharing service will set up by the city to promote the use of bikes. Bikes can be rented at four locations: in front of the SMN train station and the Campo di Marte station, as well as Piazza Santa Croce and Piazza Ghiberti. Prices are €2/hour, €5/5 hours, €10/24 hours. See en.comune.fi.it/administration/mobility/florence_by_bike.html for more information.

Hop-On-Hop-Off Buses

City Sightseeing Firenze operates the sightseeing buses in Florence. They are open top buses accompanied with audio guides. Prices begin at €23, with options for 24-, 48- or 72-hour validity periods. Visit www.city-sightseeing.it to purchase tickets.

Taxi

To take a taxi, find taxi rank or call to schedule a pickup. Taxi Radio (tel 055 4499/4390) and Taxi Socota (tel 055 4242 or 055 4798) are the two major taxi companies. Rates can be confusing, so confirm the price with the driver as soon as you get in the cab.

Tourist Information

Firenze Card

This card allows you priority access to more than 75 museums, churches and other attractions in Florence. It is valid for 72 hours, from the time of your first entrance. Family members under 18 get free admission when accompanied by an adult with a Firenze Card. Reservations are still required for the Dome of the Duomo, the Uffizi and the Accademia.

The card costs €85 per person, whether purchased online or at a sale point. For an additional €7 per person, you can include access to public transportation.

Visit www.firenzecard.it to purchase tickets, see which museums are included and find a pickup point.





Practical Information

Church Attire

Appropriate clothing is required to enter churches. Short shorts, tank tops, sandals, hats and sunglasses are not allowed.

Museum Reservations

Many of the city's most popular sights have long lines, particularly the Uffizi, the Accademia and to climb to the dome of Il Duomo. You can avoid some by purchasing the Firenze Card (see above). You can also make reservations. Visit firenzemu-sei.it to reserve tickets online for a €4 fee. You can also call to reserve tickets +39-055-294-883. One benefit of calling is that you pay for your tickets when you pick them up. Alternatively, your hotel may be able to call and make reservations for you.

Other Useful Information

Hospitals

Medical Service Florence is located near the Duomo (Via Roma, 4). With your back to the Duomo's façade, walk past the baptistry and take a left on Via Roma. It will be on your left.

Pharmacy

There are two pharmacies facing the baptistry and another near the Piazza della Signoria.

Laundry

Easy Wash

Via Maso Finiguerra, 19

Open daily 07:30-23:00

Self-service. Next door to Hotel Adriatico

Express Wash

Via Sant'Antonino, 6

Open daily 07:30-22:00

Self-service. Near Mercato Centrale and San Lorenzo Market.





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Bathroom Facilities

The train stations in Florence have nice, clean toilet facilities that will cost about €1.50. Museums have public toilets as well. Look for the universal icons pointing the way.

Areas to Avoid

Be on the lookout for pickpockets in all tourist areas of Florence. Be particularly careful and alert near the train station and the underpasses near the train station. Watch your stuff. Don't stop where the underground tunnel exits onto the street near the train station. You're sure to be a pickpocket's target if you're not alert. Exercise reasonable caution, wear your money belt, and keep an eye on your surroundings. If you do this, you'll enjoy your stay in Florence.

Sights in Florence

Florence's major sightseeing areas are:

- The Palazzo Vecchio and the Piazza Signoria, which is the political and cultural center of the city
- The Ponte Vecchio and Arno River, known for its artisans
- Florence's Cathedral and the religious areas
- The outdoor markets around San Lorenzo Church

Piazza della Signoria

This square was considered to be the main political and civic center of Florence in the Middle Ages and Renaissance era. The square is flanked by the imposing **Palazzo Vecchio**, the **Loggia della Signoria**, several outdoor cafes, and lots of ART.

Palazzo Vecchio

The Palazzo Vecchio, noted for its soaring bell tower and impenetrable fortifications, was built during the Middle Ages. It was constructed in the Gothic style and its primary purpose was to provide refuge and housing for the city's rulers. A century later, **Cosimo I** moved in and remodeled in the new Renaissance style. Notice the entrance is flanked by two grand statues





Sights in Florence

leaving no doubt that the Medici's were the cultural leaders of the day. On the left is a replica of Michelangelo's *David* and on the right the *Lion of Florence* by Donatello. The originals stood here until 1873 when they were moved to an indoor location for protection. You can step inside the palace's courtyard to get a free sample of the artistic beauty and political power the Medici's must have possessed.

Loggia della Signoria

It was constructed at the end of the 14th century. Originally it served as a forum for public speech and debate. But later, when the Medici's had more art than they knew what to do with, it was turned into an outdoor sculpture gallery. With the Renaissance came the end of 1,000 years of Europe wallowing in the grime and decay of the Dark Ages. Renaissance means "rebirth" and in Italy this idea was closely connected with the rebirth of that which was once the grandeur of classical Greece and Rome.

Many examples of this return to the classical arts are here in the Loggia. **Giambologna's: *Rape of the Sabines*** from 1583 and **Cellini's** masterpiece *Perseus with the Head of Medusa* (1545-54) are excellent examples. In these two works of art we can see the artists' zeal for displaying the human figure as a whole in full three-dimensional perspectives. The figures look real! This is art simply for the sake of enjoyment. The Renaissance artists were appreciated, and it was assumed that great art is the product of individual "genius." Cellini wrote in his *Autobiography* that when his bronze statue of Perseus was unveiled here in 1554 "on the instant of its exposure to view, a shout of boundless enthusiasm went up in commendation of my work, which consoled me not a little."

Galleria Uffizi

Just around the corner from the Loggia and Palazzo Vecchio are the offices of the Republic. In the 15th and 16th centuries this building and courtyard would have been alive with government officials scurrying about conducting the business of the





Florence

Republic. Today it's known as the **Galleria Uffizi** (Uffizi is the Italian word for offices) and houses the world's greatest collection of Florentine Renaissance paintings. The *Galleria Uffizi* is small and well organized. You could see the entire collection in about 2 hours. If you love painting or have more than a day in Florence, you should include a visit to the Uffizi in your tour planning. Famous works on display here include *Madonna with Child and Two Angels* by Filippo Lippi, *Spring* and *The Birth of Venus* by Botticelli, *Doni Tondo* (Michelangelo's only painting in Florence), and *Venus of Urbino* by Titian.

Today the courtyard is filled with artists peddling their masterpieces, unlicensed vendors selling worthless junk, and of course, tourists. During the peak season, entry can take hours without a reservation. However, with a little planning you can avoid all this and go directly to the front of the line. Nowadays many museums, including the Uffizi, allow you to make a reservation online. Visit florenceart.it for complete details.

Ponte Vecchio

Since Roman times there has been a bridge here. The raging flood waters of the Arno destroyed many of the earlier bridges, but this one has stood the test of time since the mid-1300's. The Ponte Vecchio (old bridge in Italian) was constructed around 1340. The upper corridor and shops were added later in the 16th and 17th centuries. The Medici's gave the shops on the bridge to local gold and silversmiths and they have occupied the space ever since. Today, a trip to Florence is not complete without a window-shopping stroll across the Ponte Vecchio, and although not cheap, the gold and silver here is top quality and sold at a fair price.

Via Calzaiuoli

This street connects the Piazza Signoria with the **Piazza del Duomo**. It is a pedestrian-friendly window-shopper's delight. Here, lining the street, you'll find posh and trendy shops, banks, street vendors, taxis, tourists, and locals out for a stroll.





Sights in Florence

A turn in any direction will take you off the main tourist route and into Florence with a local flair.

Santa Maria del Fiore

Better known as the **Duomo**, it is the third largest church in the Christian world. From here its multi-colored façade dominates the entire piazza...totally overwhelming your line of sight. The marble façade, quarried in nearby Carrara, was installed over the original brick and stone in the late 19th century. As awesome as it looks, it is not the focal point of the Piazza. Look up. The red-tiled dome is a marvel of the Renaissance. You see, construction of the Duomo was begun in 1296. That's the Middle Ages, 150 years before the age of Renaissance thinking. Yet its architect designed it to be capped with a huge dome such as those seen in the ancient ruins of Rome.

By 1418 the cathedral walls and interior were complete. All that was left was to do was to put on a roof! The only problem was that no one knew how to approach the task. To get things moving the church leaders announced a competition offering cash payment for anyone who could devise a plan and model that could be put to use for the cathedral's vault. Local boy, **Filippo Brunelleschi**, eventually won the competition and spent the next 16 years supervising the construction of the dome. What we see here today are actually two domes. Brunelleschi's design called for a "dome-within-a-dome" tied together with an intricate series of timbers, bricks, and mortar. But the results, as you can see here, are beautiful and have stood the test of time and nature. Brunelleschi's dome became the model for all others. The domes of the US Capitol in Washington DC and St. Peter's in Rome are built from the same design. When the great Michelangelo was commissioned to construct the dome of St. Peter's in Rome, he said "I can build a larger dome, but none as beautiful as Brunelleschi's dome in Florence."





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Inside the Cathedral

Often, especially in mid-morning, when the tour groups arrive, there is a waiting line to get inside. I'd suggest visiting the Duomo after lunch to avoid the crowds. Once inside, remember this cathedral was constructed during the Middle Ages using piers, arches, and vaults for support. This style, known as Gothic, was widely used throughout Europe. It's not until the interior of the dome comes into view that you begin to realize just how innovative Brunelleschi's design really was. Notice how the dark Gothic arches open up to the vast space covered by the dome. The light flows in through the lantern windows above and fills the place. The huge fresco on the dome's interior is ***The Last Judgment*** by Vasari and Zuccari.

The Bell Tower

Back outside notice The ***Campanile***, or bell tower, which was built earlier than the Dome. The commission was given to **Giotto** in 1334 but he died shortly afterwards, and the work slowed down. The Gothic Campanile took until the end of the 14th century to complete. You can climb both the dome and Giotto's tower for stunning views of the city and surrounding countryside. But you'll have to do it on foot, as there are no elevators. To get to the top of Brunelleschi's Dome you'll climb 464 steps that traverse the passageways between the two domes. Giotto's Tower is slightly shorter with only 414 steps, plus from here you'll have Brunelleschi's magnificent dome in view.

The Baptistry

Before leaving the Piazza del Duomo we need to take a look at one other member of the Church complex. When traveling in Europe you'll notice that many churches south of the Alps have three distinct features: the church building proper, the bell tower, and the baptistery. The **Baptistry of St. John** is the oldest building on the square. Dating from the 13th century, it is octagonal in shape symbolizing the "eighth day," the time of the Risen Christ. That time is beyond our earthly time which is measured in seven days. The interior is decorated with geometric designs and floor mosaics acquired from Islamic trade.





Sights in Florence

The ceiling contains a huge medieval mosaic depicting yet another scene of the ***Last Judgment***.

Most interesting are the Baptistery's exterior bronze doors. You'll remember that in the Middle Ages only the aristocracy and men of the Church were educated. The majority of people could not read or write, so the Church included visual aids to help the common man understand Biblical stories. The Baptistery's exterior bronze doors are great examples.

The oldest doors, on the south, depict the life of John the Baptist, the patron Saint of Florence. These were fashioned by Andrea Pisano in the 1330's. Ghiberti beat out Brunelleschi and was given the commission for the north doors which depict the Life of Christ. However, the east doors are the most famous!

Michelangelo declared them worthy to be the Gates of Paradise upon seeing them for the first time. Fashioned by Ghiberti in 1425-52, they recall scenes from the Old Testament. Truly unique is the way in which Ghiberti designed the flat panels to appear three dimensional...what later became known as "perspective" was a forgotten artistic device until this time. Each panel tells more than one episode. Notice the "Story of Joseph" beginning with him being cast into the well by his brothers. Continuing, Joseph is sold to the merchants, Joseph being delivered to Pharaoh, Joseph interpreting Pharaoh's dream, Pharaoh honoring Joseph, Jacob sending his sons to Egypt, Joseph recognizing his brothers and Joseph returning home.

Galleria dell' Accademia

The Accademia museum's most famous works are Michelangelo's ***David*** and a set of unfinished sculptures known as the ***Prisoners***. The museum itself is just a few blocks north of the Duomo. Understandably, the Accademia is a popular tourist attraction and comes with long lines and hours of wait time. As with the Uffizi Gallery, the Accademia also allows you to make reservations for a specific date and time.

The main gallery is filled with statues known as "the slaves" and "St Matthew." These unfinished works of Michelangelo





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seem to depict the struggle between the marble and the attempt of the artist to set them free.

Michelangelo was just 29 when he began work on the chunk of marble that would eventually become the colossal **David**. He had recently been recognized for his talents in creating the famous Pieta now in St Peter's Basilica in Rome. The work was commissioned by the Medici family, and upon its completion in 1503 stood "guard" over the entrance to the Palazzo Vecchio on the Piazza della Signoria. David remained here for almost 375 years until it was moved in 1873 to its present location here in the Accademia.

Much has been written about this colossal work of art, but for me it captures the true spirit of the Renaissance. Not since the times of the Greeks and Romans had anyone dared capture the human attributes of strength, determination, and emotion. In David, Michelangelo captures the physical emotion of a young man on a mission... to kill a giant and defeat the Philistine army.

Brief History of Florence

The powerful Medici family ruled Florence for most of the 15th century. It was through their patronage that the great artists of the Renaissance literally chiseled themselves from the constraints of the Middle Ages into a new artistic beginning. It is impossible to visit Florence without exploring the art and architecture that shaped the Renaissance.

In the 13th and 14th centuries, the area we know as Tuscany was filled with many independent states varying in size, wealth, and government. In short, their foreign policy consisted largely of trying to gain as much territory as possible while preventing others from doing the same. Cosimo de Medici was a banker who carefully built up a complicated political machine which preserved the republican form of government while giving him almost dictatorial powers. During his rule from 1434-64, Florence prospered and was at peace with the other cities in Tuscany. Lorenzo de Medici, Cosimo's grandson, took over leadership in 1469 and ruled until 1492. Lorenzo the Magnifi-





Shopping

cent, as he was known, was the most famous ruler of Florence. His patronage of art and education made Florence the cultural leader of the Renaissance in Italy.

Tours and Tour Guides

River Cruises

There are a number of river cruises available to take you along the Arno River. See viator.com to choose the cruise that is right for you.

Shopping

Luxury Boutiques

Via de' Tornabuoni is the Fifth Avenue of Florence. You can find luxury boutiques from Ferragamo, Gucci, Versace, Hermes, Tiffany, Cartier and more. Take a stroll and check out the window displays.

Department Stores

La Rinascente is a six-story department store with a rooftop café that offers stunning panoramas.

Piazza della Repubblica, 4. Open Monday-Saturday 9AM-10PM and Sunday 10:30AM-8:30PM

Markets

San Lorenzo Market is a great place to wander, shop, and haggle. It's always packed with locals and tourists alike searching for bargains. Here you can find affordable leather goods, linens, crockery, clothing, and other odds and ends. The prices are soft and it's customary to deal a bit. This outdoor market surrounds the **Church of San Lorenzo**, which is famous for being the Medici family parish church. Looking at the front façade here will help you imagine what the Duomo and Santa Croce looked like before the colorful marble was added in the 1800's. Around back, behind San Lorenzo Church, are the Chapel and the tombs of the Medici family. Here you'll find lavishly decorated tombs sculpted by Michelangelo for the family.





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Mercato Centrale is located in the neighborhood of the San Lorenzo Market. The Mercato Centrale is THE place to do your food shopping in Florence. Everyone from famed chefs to old grandmothers buy their food here. It is a destination that should not be missed! The main floor houses kiosks vending vegetables, meats, fish, wine, cheese, and any other food product. There are several food stalls that make fresh sandwiches and hot meals. My favorite is “Nerbone” offering pork sandwiches (*porchetta*), stewed beef & broth (*bollito*) and intestines with veggies (*trippa*). Located in the corner closest to the San Lorenzo Church. Open Monday-Saturday 07:00-14:00. The first floor (USA second floor) of the market has been totally revamped as a upscale foodie and wine place called **Il Mercato Centrale**. Here you can purchase gourmet foods to eat in or take away but stay awhile and enjoy the new hip place to gather in Florence.

Via dell’Ariento. Open everyday 10:00-midnight.

Mercato di Sant’Ambrogio is the city’s second largest market, offering fresh food and various household items. You can buy fresh fruits and vegetables, cheeses, cold cuts, olives, bread and more. Piazza Ghiberti. Open Monday-Saturday 7:00-14:00.

Traditional Cuisine and Vino

The Aperitivo

The Italians live to eat! The evening meal is considered to be the major meal of the day. To fully appreciate it the stomach must be fully prepared. Therefore, many Italians, especially men, hit the bars between six and eight o’clock for drinks and snacks to get their stomachs in the mood for dinner. It used to be that you could walk into a bar and find the local gentlemen sitting around a table having their *aperitivo* (cocktail) over a friendly debate or discussion on the news of the day. Now, as a younger generation of Italians comes into their own, the *aperitivo* has been joined by an assortment of light snacks and munchies that are more than enough to “hold you over” until dinnertime.





Dining Suggestions

You can save some money by going inside a bar and standing at the counter. Usually, the drinks are a fraction of the cost of drinking at an outside table. Plus, there is the added bonus of FREE MUNCHIES (*cicchetti*). Even in Florence, with the ritzy outdoor tables on the *piazzi*, you can dig into the local flavor simply by standing at the counter. Try it!

Campari is the *aperitivo* of choice for several generations of Italians. It is liquor made of bitter herbs and orange peels. At first sip, its bitterness is enough to stand your taste buds on end and curl your toenails. It is definitely an acquired taste, but usually after a couple of drinks most say they enjoy the experience.

Campari was invented in Milan in the 1860s and today lends an air of sophistication to those who drink it. I suggest a ***Campari Spritz*** which is a blend of prosecco, *Campari* and a splash of soda. The simplest way to enjoy it is mixed with soda water. When mixed with *vino bianco*, it is known as ***Campari macchiato***, literally, “stained with white wine”. Try it with some salty snacks such as potato chips. Don’t be too judgmental at first. Sip the drink a little at a time, and you’ll begin to enjoy the mixture of the bitters doing a dance with the salt on your taste buds.

Dining Suggestions

Restaurants, Cafés and Bars

There are thousands of restaurants in Florence catering to city’s tourist industry. Most of them serve traditional Tuscan cuisine at outside and indoor dining venues. Unfortunately, most are mediocre in terms of food and service. Be especially aware of restaurants employing beckoning waiters standing on the street inviting you in for their special drink and meal. With that said, here is my short list of favorite eateries that serve tasty and fresh fare.





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Near the S.M.N. Train Station

Ristorante La Martinicca da Pino just down from Piazza Santa Maria Novella and serves up tries and true regional dishes with no pretense. There are a few tables on the street, which I suggest avoiding. Dine inside where there is AC and attentive service. Closed Sunday. Open other days 12:00-14:30 & 19:00-21:30. Via del Sole, 27/r. T. 055 218-928. www.ristorante-la-martinicca.com.

Ristorante La Spada offers traditional Tuscan fare in several modern and sleek dining rooms. Meat dishes and pasta are always a good choice. Open daily 12:00-15:00 & 19:00-10:30. Via della Spada, 62. T. 055 218757. <http://ristorantelaspada.it/it/>





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Overview and Orientation

A visit to Venice deserves at least a day and a half and two nights. I suggest an early afternoon arrival in Venice, find your hotel and check-in. Then, grab a canal-side seat, a slice of pizza, and take in the commerce on the Grand Canal.

Later, stroll to the Piazza San Marco and see the sights there. Make your plans for the following day deciding when to visit the Basilica, *Doge's Palace*, Campanile, and museums. Then wander the route leading to the Rialto Bridge stopping at the shops and savoring the local culture.

At nightfall find a spot to have dinner and then end your day sitting on Piazza San Marco sipping a drink while listening to one of the musical ensembles.

Day two should include seeing the sights, getting lost in the neighborhoods, and maybe even a ride out to the nearby islands of Murano, Burano or Torcello. Cap off the evening with a gondola ride. The next morning float out of Venice and on to your next destination.

Many tour groups visit Venice in just one day, arriving by 10:00 a.m. and leaving by 6:00 p.m. Ninety percent of Venice's tourists are floated in, shown a pre-determined list of sights, and then floated out before dark. If possible, spend the extra time and money to stay on the island or the nearby lido and experience the city.

Practical Information

Getting to and from Venice

Venice is connected to the mainland by a long causeway. The town of **Mestre** is located on the mainland side of the causeway. Mestre has lots of parking and inexpensive hotels but lacks the ambiance of Venice. Don't stop here, even if you are pinching pennies and are in search of cheaper sleeps! Consider making the nearby town of **Padua** your "home base" and take a train to Venice for the day. Alternatively, you might consider





Practical Information

staying on the **Lido di Venezia** (the beach area just to the east of Venice) and taking the water taxi to Venice.

Whether traveling independently, or in a group, swap out your heavy suitcase for a lighter bag, taking just the items you'll need during your stay in Venice. You'll be thankful as you make your way by boat and/or foot into town.

By Plane

From **Marco Polo International Airport**, it's a 20-minute ride by land taxi or the airport bus to Piazzale Roma. To purchase tickets for the **airport bus**, look for the ATVO ticket counter or ticket machines in baggage claim. Tickets are €8 one way, €15 roundtrip. To take a **land taxi**, follow the signs on the arrivals level. Taxis cost €40.

To reach the nearby islands or other historic destinations, you can take the **Alilaguna airport boat**. Ask at the ticket booth for the best route based on your destination. Tickets are €8 one way, €15 roundtrip and include one suitcase and one carry-on. **Water taxis** are also available and average more than €100 for central Venice. Purchase tickets at the water-taxi ticket booths in the arrival area, then take the moving sidewalk to the boat piers.

Luggage storage is located in the arrival area, near the post office.

By Train

Trains connect Mestre with Venice's Santa Lucia station. If traveling to Venice by train, do not get off at Venice-Mestre, instead go to the end of the line and get off at Venezia Santa Lucia.

Upon arrival at **Santa Lucia Station** head outside to the dock and catch *vaporetto #1 or #2* to the city center. It is a scenic 30-minute cruise up the Grand Canal to San Marco. The station has luggage storage, but it moves around because of station renovation. As of Spring 2016, it was near Track 1. Cost: €6/5 hrs.; €11/24 hrs. Open daily 06:00-23:00. Alternatively, you





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can walk to the San Marco/Accademia area in about 45 minutes.

If you are visiting one of the outer islands or simply do not want to travel the Grand Canal, take the *vaporetto* #5.1, #5.2 or #4.1, #4.2 to skip the traffic on the Grand Canal. Study the boat routes to determine which *vaporetto* to take.

By Bus

The bus station is located as **Piazzale Roma**, across the Grand Canal from Santa Lucia Station. It is a large open square. Head to the dock and catch *vaporetto* #1 or #2 to the city center.

There are ticket offices and areas to store your luggage around the square. You can also cross the canal to the Santa Lucia train station and store your luggage there.

By Car

If arriving by automobile, you'll be channeled across the causeway and into parking lots with vacancy. Just follow the green traffic signals. Most likely you'll end up in the multi-storied **Tronchetto parking facility** (€30+ per day). Plan ahead and ask your hotel for a discount voucher which could save you up to 50%. After parking, leave the garage (avoid the con-artist offering you a water taxi to San Marco) and head toward the water and the *vaporetto* #1 or #2 dock for boats to the city center (€7.50 one-way to any stop on the line).

By Cruise Ship

The Venice Cruise Terminal is located near the *Tronchetto* parking facility. Many cruise ships offer free shuttles to Piazzale Roma. Alternatively, you can take the cable tram called the People Mover. From there, you can catch the *vaporetto* #1 to the city center or walk (30-40 minutes).

Luggage can be stored in the Marittima and San Basilio buildings. Office are usually open when cruise ships arrive and depart but may vary by season or day.





Practical Information

Getting around Venice

The city of Venice is on an island, isolated from the mainland, and surrounded by water. When seen from the air, Venice resembles the body of a fish. The Grand Canal flows through this fish-shaped island entering at the mouth (*Tronchetto*) and emptying out at the tail near *Piazza San Marco*.

Forget about addresses and street names. Venice is a maze of canals, alleyways, bridges, *campi*, and dead ends. Orient yourself by knowing major landmarks. *Piazza San Marco* at the tail, the Rialto Bridge represents the belly, and the train station is at the mouth. With this, set off to find your own little niche of Venice.

Walking

Navigate by landmarks not street names. Look up, find a bell tower or church spire and use it for orientation and direction. Yes, you'll get lost, but it's safe. And you'll discover what most tourists miss: the local's un-touristy version of Venice.

The main "walkable" tourist routes are usually well marked. At major squares and intersections, a yellow sign can be found (look at the second story level on building corners) giving directions to major sights.

The most common are:

- *per San Marco*, to Saint Mark's Square
- *per Accademia*, to the Accademia
- *per Rialto*, to the Rialto Bridge
- *per Ferrovia*, to the train station

Follow the crowds and signs and you'll only get a little bit lost. To ask for directions, say: "*dov'è San Marco?*" (dough-veh san mar-ko) and follow the direction in which the person points. Wander a little bit in that direction and ask someone else the same question. Eventually you will end up back in St. Mark's Square.





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By Boat

Vaporetto (pl. vaporetti)

Venice's canals are filled with passenger boats making scheduled stops along the major canal routes. These *vaporetti* are inexpensive, will cut down on a whole lot of walking, and will provide wonderful views of the city from the lagoon. It's €7 for any stop on the line, but see the *Hello Venezia Pass* info below if you plan to take more than one trip. Buy your tickets at the booths near the *vaporetto* dock.

The *Hello Venezia Visitor Travel Card* is the way to go when traveling around Venice. These cards can be purchased at most vaporetti piers and tourist offices. Be sure to validate it each time you board by touching it to the white ticket machine on the dock. Visit the ACTV website for complete information.

<http://www.actv.it>

€20 — 1 Day/24 hours

€30 — 2 Days/48 hours

€40 — 3 Days/72 hours

€60 — 7 Days

There are several different *vaporetti* lines, but for most the #1 and #2 are all that matter. Determining the direction of travel can sometimes be a problem. Normally, there will be two stations (docks) at each stop. One station is for the direction toward San Marco (*per San Marco*) and one docks for travel toward Tronchetto (*per Tronchetto*). But like most things in Italy, this is not always so. I've taken what I thought was the right boat only to find it was going in the wrong direction. If in doubt, ask the attendant in a questioning tone, "*per San Marco, or per Rialto*" to verify the *vaporetto* stops where you want to get off. But don't be alarmed if you make a mistake. The worst that can happen is you'll see something you had not expected. Enjoy the ride, get off at the last stop, or when the driver kicks you out. Catch another boat back to your destination and try to get it right the next time around.





Practical Information

The *Vaporetti* #1 is the slow boat, taking 45 minutes to cruise the length of the Grand Canal. It makes every stop allowing an in-depth look at the city from the canal.

Vaporetti #2 is the fastest boat, making only a few stops along the Grand Canal. This boat takes about 25 minutes from one end to the other. The stops are: Tronchetto (parking lot), Piazzale Roma (bus station), Ferrovia (train station), Rialto Bridge, San Tomá (Church of the Frari), the Accademia Bridge, and San Marco.

Traghetto (pl. Traghetto)

Locals and savvy travelers take advantage of these little gondola boats to ferry them across the Grand Canal. Their docking locations are marked on most good maps. Making use of the *traghetto* can save time by cutting out a lot of walking to reach one of the three bridges crossing the Grand Canal (€2 per ride).

Water Taxi

The canals of Venice are loaded with speedboat-like taxis ready to whisk you effortlessly to your destination. These fancy speedboat taxis can be found moored at most busy points along the Grand Canal. Although quite pricey (€30-40), they can be economical for small groups or those with lots of luggage. An added bonus is you get a local as your private “tour guide” and the best views of the city. Prices can be soft; negotiate and settle on a price before you step into the boat.

Hop-on-Hop-off Buses

There is a hop-on-hop-off boat in Venice. However, the prices are comparable to the Hello Venezia Visitor Travel Card but there are only 6 stops. From April through October, it includes a second line that travels to Murano, Torcello and Burano. Tickets can be booked at viator.com.

River Cruises

There are a number of river cruises, dinner cruises, sunset cruises, gondola rides and walking tours available for advanced purchase on viator.com.





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Tourist Information

City Pass

You can also purchase Venezia Unica city passes. Purchase combination transportation, museum and church passes or personalize your card by selecting the attractions you want to visit. Cards loaded with your passes can then be picked up at ACTV ticket machines or at the many points of sale in the city. Find more information at veneziaunica.it/en/.

Church Attire

Conservative dress is required to enter churches in Venice. Your clothing must cover your shoulders and knees. In addition, you will be required to leave backpacks and large bags (including large purses) by the cloakroom in museums and many churches.

Museum Reservations

Venice is a very popular destination, and there are always lines for many tourist destinations, like Saint Mark's Basilica. Book in advance, either with the city pass mentioned above or on the official websites to skip the lines.

Other Useful Information

Post Office

There is a post office in Saint Mark's Square, across from the Basilica. It is open from Monday to Friday from 8:30 am to 6:00 pm and Saturday from 8:30 am to 1:00 pm.

Hospitals

There is one hospital on the island. It is located north of Saint Mark's Basilica.

Ospedale SS Giovanni e Paolo

Sestiere Castello, 6777, 30122

Venezia VE, Italy





Sights in Venice

Pharmacy

There is a pharmacy near the Rialto bridge. Cross the bridge to the east side of the canal and follow the road (with your back to the bridge) until you come to an open square. You'll see Farmacia Morelli straight ahead. Open Monday-Saturday 8:30am-7:30pm

Laundry

Coin Laundry

Via Lepanto, 78, 30126

Lido di Venezia

Open daily 08:00-21:00

In Lido, self-service

Lavanderia Gabriella

S. Marco, 985, 30124

Open Monday-Friday 8:00-12:30

Near Saint Mark's, drop off

Bathroom Facilities

The train stations in Venice have nice, clean toilet facilities that will cost about €1.50. Museums have public toilets as well. Look for the universal icons pointing the way.

Sights in Venice

Saint Mark's Square

Piazza San Marco is the heart of Venice, surrounded by luxurious shops, famous cafes, a medieval church, and an important palace, it is no wonder you'll find every tourist looking up, jaw ajar, and camera in hand. By day it is crowded with tourists, pigeons, and vendors all out to get their share of the *Piazza*. But stay awhile, let the sun set, the tourists leave, and the orchestras tune-up. Then, the *piazza* becomes a lively concert venue with four "dueling" ensembles.

Poking around the Piazza

Walk over to the *Basilica* and turn around looking into the square. Here you'll find the only true "square" in Venice. All the





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other open spaces of Venice are called *Campi* or *Campielli* (the smaller ones). Only St. Mark's Square is called a *Piazza*. This is one of Europe's grandest public places. The Piazza San Marco showcases four unique architectural styles taking us visually through one thousand years of Venetian architecture. It reaches the length of two football fields and is surrounded by the offices of the most important citizens of the republic known as *Procuratie*.

With your back to the church, look to the right and find the "old office buildings" which define the northern edge of the *piazza*. These were built in the 16th century (Renaissance) era. Notice their classic columns, two story design, and plain decorations. Compare this with the lavishly decorated "new office buildings" to your left. These were built in the 18th-century Baroque era. Now check out the "offices" in front of you framing the western end of the *piazza*. These, built by Napoleon in the late 19th century, are in the neo-Classical style and symbolize a return to the order and symmetry of ancient Rome and Greece.

Now turn around and look at the *Basilica*. Work was begun in A.D.828. It is a mixture of many styles because it took over a century to complete. Notice the architectural influences gleaned from the Venetian's trade connections with Byzantium (present day Istanbul). The multiple domes, rounded arches, pointed gables, banded columns, and detailed mosaics are just some of the unique characteristics of the *Basilica*.

Look over to the right at the Renaissance clock tower. Notice the bronze men swinging hammers to strike the hour. The tower was built in 1496 by the Ranieri brothers. They received a huge financial reward for their efforts, but legend has it that the political leaders plucked their eyes out to prevent them from repeating their work in another town. The clock tower marks the entrance to the Mercerie, a street lined with shops, stretching from San Marco to the Rialto Bridge.

Take a look at the bell tower (*campanile*). It rises 325 ft. above the *piazza* and has long been considered the symbol of Venice.





Sights in Venice

The present tower is a careful reconstruction of the original 15th-century tower, which collapsed in 1902.

See the small square to your left, leading out to the lagoon. This is known as the *Piazzetta*. Framed by the Renaissance building on the right and the *Doge's Palace* on the left, this makes for a grand entrance into St. Mark's Square. The tall red granite columns near the water were imported from the Orient in 1172 and have stood here ever since.

The column on the right holds a statue of *San Teodoro*. St. Teodoro was Venice's original patron saint. The statue was cobbled together with pieces of Roman sculpture. St. Theodore is standing atop a dragon, which legend holds he slayed. Many people, especially those from Florida, think the creature is an alligator from the swampy areas around Venice. Poor old St. Theodore was booted out as patron saint when the bones of St. Mark were imported to Venice.

The column on the left (closest to the *Doge's Palace*) holds the Winged Lion. It too was imported from the Orient and adopted as the symbol of St. Mark the Evangelist and the Republic of Venice. Between the two columns, those condemned to death were once publicly strung up and executed.

At the point where the *Basilica* intersects with the *Doge's Palace* you can find a little group of red men huddled together. They are known as **The Tetrachs** and date from the 4th century. They were imported from Egypt or Syria and represent four warriors from the Roman Empire of Diocletian. No one really knows why they were stuck here.

The Piazza San Marco has a lot to offer. It is no wonder that tourists for centuries have been enamored with this "grand drawing room" of Europe. Now that you are oriented, here are a few things you'll not want to miss.

Gelato: Over to the left of the clock tower (under the porch of the offices) is a shop that sells great gelato. Although it is a bit pricey, this place sells the real stuff, not a cheap imitation. On sunny mornings, wander over to the shady area by the fountain, just to the north of San Marco. Grab a seat on the cool





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marble steps, savor your gelato, and take in the sights and sounds of the *piazza*.

Tourist Information: There are two TI's nearby. Standing with your back to the church look for the passageway leaving the *piazza* on the far left. The TI's is in this passageway (open daily 09:00-17:00). There are **Public toilets** nearby (cost is about €1, open 08:00-21:00). To find the WC, leave the *piazza* through the walkway near the TI, turn to the right and follow the "Albergo Diorno" sign marked on the pavement. The other TI is on the lagoon. Leave the *piazza* and walk toward the lagoon. At the water, turn right. There is a WC here, too. (09:00-19:00).

An evening of dueling orchestras—For the price of a drink (about €10), you can have a comfortable seat and table for the entire evening on the *piazza*. Grab a table, the waiter will bring a menu, place your order, and enjoy the dueling orchestras. This experience is a little pricey, but you can't have this experience anywhere else in the world.

St. Mark's Basilica

Saint Mark's Basilica combines both Byzantine (eastern) and western styles. It is an odd mix of architectural styles comparable to no other church in Europe. Construction was carried out during the 11th century and its consecration was in October 8, 1094. Since then, each successive *Doge* has added to this mix by installing pillars, mosaics, arches, doors, columns, and statues. The Basilica houses the bones of Saint Mark, the Evangelist. A disciple of Christ, St. Mark is best known for his chronicles of Christ's life found in the New Testament.

The church is built on the plan of a Greek cross, four equal sections forming a "plus sign." Western Christianity tends to focus much attention on the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ. This is why from Paris to Rome you will see churches loaded with crucifixes and images of Jesus' death. Eastern Christians tend to place more emphasis on Jesus' resurrection. Look around St. Mark's, you won't see many crucifixes. As you travel around Europe, notice the basic floor plan design of churches you visit. The majority will be built on the Latin cross design





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(in the shape of a crucifix). It is not until you get to Venice, and points further east, that you see the Greek cross design as here in St. Mark's.

Appropriate dress is required in order to visit the Basilica. The guards at the door are adamant in enforcing the strict dress code. Countless tourists are turned away each day because they show up in shorts, tank tops, or bare too much flesh. Wear appropriate attire or you too will be denied entrance.

Bags must be left at Ateneo San Basso (Piazzetta dei Leoncini, in front of the Gate of Flowers, north façade).

In the peak tourist season the line to get in can stretch to the lagoon. Go early (by 9:45) to beat the tourist crowds arriving from the mainland by boat or go later in the afternoon. Free reservations are available at <https://www.venetoinside.com/>. Simply printout the form with your entry time and present it at the door to the left of the general entry. (free admission, Mon-Sat 09:30-17:00; Sun 14:00-17:00, no photos, appropriate dress required).

David's Tour of the Basilica San Marco

Take a look at the outside. Notice the façade, sporting five large doorways decorated with lots of marble and sculptures, it represents several centuries of decoration. The central doorway has three arches with shallow-carved reliefs in a Byzantine-Romanesque style. Above the doorways are copies of the famous four bronze horses of Venice (more about these later). Finally notice the last doorway on the left depicting, in vivid mosaic, the coffin of St. Mark being carried into the church.

Now, get in line, walk past the men checking for proper attire (hopefully you'll make it) and head inside, turn right and go underneath the last dome.

The Atrium might be roped off, but you can still see most of the artwork. The mosaics you see here are all made of tiny pieces of glass set in wet plaster. St. Mark's is famous for this type of artwork and you will find some of its best and oldest located here in the Atrium. Mosaics (as with other medieval





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artwork) were considered high-tech visual teaching aides for the common people. Without the ability to read or write, this served as a perfect medium to tell Biblical stories and spread Christianity to the people. Facing the church, look up, and you will see the story of Adam and Eve as it unfolds in the bottom ring of mosaics. Now, facing the Piazza, look on the arch above you and find the story of Noah and the great flood. Notice also on the entrance door from the Atrium to the Basilica the image of Jesus with the hand of God blessing all who enter.

⇒ *Leave the Atrium and go into the Basilica.*

There is a lot to see here, but we'll just concentrate on a few special areas. Walk toward the altar and notice the Greek cross floor plan. Notice the central dome with its arms, or transepts, radiating out to equal lengths and capped off by smaller domes. Ponder all the tiny pieces of glass making up the mosaics on the Basilica's ceilings. Do you get a sense of "awestruck by gold?" Look at the floor, no doubt you've noticed it is uneven, making the geometric tiles even more three-dimensional than originally planned. The city of Venice is sinking. Every building, yes even San Marco, is built on a foundation of long logs pile-driven into the marshy soil. The best of these pilings was used for the exterior walls; inferior pilings were used for the floors. Hence, the undulating wave-like condition of the floor. But remember it is over 1000 years old! Notice the fine detail in the animals and geometric patterns displayed here in monochromatic tile work.

⇒ *Look at the central dome.*

Gaze upward and notice the theme here is not that of death, but of the Ascension of Christ into Heaven. Look around; even though the interior of the Basilica is somewhat dark and dank, there is a positive theme. Jesus is alive and rules from Heaven! Below is Mary, flanked by two angels, and the twelve Apostles.

The Venetians played a pivotal role in history. Sitting between the east and west, Venice absorbed big chunks of each unique culture. We've seen here in San Marco the blend of art and architecture from the two cultures, but Venice's economy was





Sights in Venice

also boosted by its relationship to Byzantium. In a.d.313 the Emperor Constantine moved the seat of the Roman Empire to Byzantium. Rome was left in ruins and the new capital; Constantinople (modern day Istanbul) bathed in the glories of Rome while taking on Greek ideal and an oriental outlook.

The Venetians tapped into this new portion of the Empire by establishing trade routes to Constantinople and points farther east. During the Crusades (a series of military expeditions to “save” the holy city of Jerusalem from the Muslims) the city of Constantinople was threatened by the Turks. In 1204, Constantinople sent out an appeal to the west for help in defending the city against the invading Turks. The Pope sent armies to Constantinople, drove out the Turks, secured Constantinople, and then looted the city for themselves. Among the treasures shipped back to Venice are the bronze horses and many items in the Treasury.

In the far corner of the right apse is the Treasury containing many of these artifacts from the Crusades. Here you will find richly decorated items of silver and gold, ornate chalices, religious icons done in gold, silver, and precious gems, and other artifacts relating to worship and royalty (admission €2).

The Golden Alter Piece (Pala d’Oro) is also worth a closer look. You’ve no doubt noticed this under the stone canopy as you entered the Basilica. Beneath the alter lies the body of St. Mark. The altar was constructed by Byzantine craftsmen between a.d.976-1345. All this gold detail is a bit much. Try to take in one scene at a time and perhaps you will recognize a Biblical scene or two. If you look closely you can see the tomb of St. Mark through the altar. The stone canopy deserves a closer look too. It portrays scenes from the New Testament in ornately carved detail (admission €1.50).

The Four Bronze Horses are upstairs and can be reached by taking the stairway in the Atrium marked Loggia dei Cavalli, Museo. There is a lot to see up here and the admission cost is money well spent. You’ll get a close-up look at some of the ceiling mosaics, a great balcony view of the Basilica, an awesome





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view of the piazza and lagoon from the second story outdoor porch, which contains the replica horses, and finally, in a room by themselves, the real bronze horses. These horses have literally galloped the globe. Originally cast in the 2nd century B.C. they were taken by Emperor Nero to Rome. Constantine took them with him to Constantinople, in a.d.313. Then during the Crusades, the Venetians stole them and brought them back to Venice along with their other loot from Constantinople. Napoleon took them to France when he conquered Venice in 1797. Here they stood atop the triumphal arch at the Louvre. Finally, they were returned to San Marco at the fall of Napoleon's empire (admission €5).

Finish looking around the Basilica. On your way out notice the main support pillars of the Basilica. See the "high water marks" ringing the pillars and adjacent walls? Remember, you are on an island in the Adriatic Sea and flood tides engulf the piazza several times a year. Nearby notice the image of the Apostle St. Mark holding a gun.

The Doge's Palace (Palazzo Ducale)

This palace was a symbol of Venetian power and glory. It was initially built in the 12th century but completely transformed in the 14th–16th centuries. The palace was designed to be a multifunctional structure containing the residence of the *Doge*, the seat of the government, the courts of Law, and also a prison for criminals (April–October open daily 09:00–19:00; November to -March open 9:00–17:00. Last entry 30 minutes before closing. Telephone 041-522-4951).

The €20 ticket gets you in to see the Doge's Palace and a few other museums around Venice. They are: *Museo Correr* (described below), *Pallazzo Mocenigo*, *Museo del Merletto di Burano* (glass museum on Burano, closed Wednesday), *Museo Del Vetro di Murano* (lace Museum on Burano (closed Tuesday). The ticket is valid for three months. If the entry line is too long, consider purchasing your entry ticket across the *piazza* at the *Museo Correr* and then skip the ticket line at the palace.





Sights in Venice

Venice was a major world power for over 400 years (about 1150-1550). This palace was built to impress and overwhelm all who visited. Just imagine you are a notable guest of the Doge arriving by boat in the 15th century. From the Grand Canal you see this beautiful palace. Would you be impressed and perhaps a little bit intimidated? The palace, coupled with the arsenal (we'll talk about it later), sent a clear message to all who visited Venice. "Don't mess with us, we've got what it takes to fight back."

David's Doge's Palace Tour

Notice the exterior of the palace. The ground floor has pointed arches typical of the Gothic style supported by rows of decorative columns. Originally, these columns sat on raised pedestals, but over the centuries the entire palace has sunk into the boggy soil so they are no longer visible. (You can see an example of the original columns in the entry and ticket area. These excavated columns are surrounded by plexiglass and give a view down to the original pedestals). The upper level of the palace has a lot more detailed and frilly latticework giving an eastern and Islamic flair. This style, known as flamboyant Gothic, was made famous by the Venetians and influenced by their ties to Byzantium. The geometrically designed pink and white marble façade lends to the overall beauty of the palace.

If you get a chance, (maybe a moonlight stroll later tonight) look at the three corners of the palace. They are beautifully decorated with carved niches depicting Biblical scenes. Notice especially the one at the corner nearest the lagoon and *piazza*. Here we see **Adam and Eve** with a most seductive serpent beckoning them to taste the forbidden fruit. (Throughout Europe you'll find recurring Biblical scenes such as Adam and Eve, The Creation, The Last Judgment, and so on. While traveling in Europe I find it interesting to compare the mood presented by the various artists who obviously include a bit of their own religious philosophy, or that of their patron, in their work).





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⇒ *The ticket booth and entrance to the palace is on the side nearest the lagoon.*

Once inside, you'll enter the courtyard. Take a look around. To the right is the large façade of the palace with its lower stories in the Gothic style and its upper stories in the Renaissance style. Straight ahead is a clock façade done in the Baroque style. So again, just as outside in the piazza, we see three distinct time periods forever captured in stonework. Notice the *Scala dei Gigante* (The Stairway of the Giants). It has been given this name because of the enormous statues of Mars and Neptune standing guard at the top. Walk over to the foot of the stairs. Turn around and you'll see the "real" entrance to the palace is behind you. It is called the *Porta della Carta* or "door of the papers" and is named for palace scribes who hung out here waiting their call to "record" official documents for the Republic, sort of like our modern-day court reporters. Again, this was built to impress and overwhelm visitors to Venice. The Doge would stand at the top of the stairs to greet guests and dignitaries allowing them to stand in awe taking in all the "grandness" of the palace and the obvious wealth of Venice.

The shaded porches that surround the palace, both outside, and here in the courtyard, are known as loggia. Not only did these loggia provide shade, but they also served as areas where one could look out on the grandeur of Venice.

One more thing before we go inside. Since its construction, there have been several events which have altered the palace's grandeur and appearance. Two disastrous fires (May 1574 and December 1577) destroyed the rooms of the Collage, the Senate, and the upper floors of the building. This fire totally destroyed many of the original works of art. In 1797 the palace was the scene of a revolution in which crowds assaulted the palace destroying everything within reach. Finally, the French and Austrians, who ruled Venice for much of the 19th century, claimed many furnishings and artwork as their own.

Originally, in order to enter the palace one would enter by way of the "Door of the Papers," climb up the "Stairway of the Gi-





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ants,” walk across the second story loggia, and finally be faced with the impressive Scala d’ Oro (The Golden Staircase). This Golden Staircase was yet another structure designed to further impress palace visitors. It was designed and constructed between 1557 and 1559 and contains a richly gilded ceiling of stucco and fresco.

The entire palace is loaded with artwork done by famous Venetians such as Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese, and Bellini. Royals throughout Europe were known to decorate the walls and ceilings of their palaces with artwork. But nowhere is it carried to such excess as here in the Doge’s Palace. In fact, you’ll soon find yourself overwhelmed and adopt a “gee, there are paintings in this room, too” attitude. Don’t worry; I’ll point you to the most significant works. You can think of everything else as lavishly decorated wallpaper for the palace.

⇒ *Climb the richly decorated “Golden Staircase” to the second floor.*

*Note: The second floor deserves a quick walk through, but the good stuff is upstairs on the third floor. On the second floor you’ll find public rooms, some private chambers, and gathering rooms.

e*When you’re finished on the second floor, return to the Golden staircase and climb up to the decadence on the third floor.*

After ascending the Golden Staircase you’ll come to a small room known as the **Atrio Quadrato**. The richly decorated room served as sort of a holding room for visitors.

⇒ *Enter the next room.*

In this room, known as the **Room of the Four Doors**, palace visitors were greeted by staff members and sent in the direction of their business. Venice was a democratic society with three governmental branches: the executive, legislative, and judicial. Each of the three remaining doors led to one of these governmental branches.





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The room was designed by Palladio. He also built the impressive church of San Giorgio Maggiore located just across the Grand Canal from St. Mark's Square. Notice the intricate and ornate stuccowork on the ceiling and over the doors. Artists of the Baroque era were famous for adding ornamentation to the excess.

⇒ *Enter the next room with the big fireplace.*

Here in the **Antecollegio** noble and commoners alike waited their turn to see the Doges. Hanging below the ornately decorative ceiling are two notable paintings. The first, on the wall opposite the window, is known as *The Rape of Europa* and was painted by Veronese around 1580. The Renaissance brought a renewed interest in ancient Roman and Greek subjects. Here Veronese depicts the mythological story of Zeus and Europa. It is said Zeus spied Europa picking flowers near the sea one day and fell madly in love. He appeared to her as a bull and carried her off into the sea to the island of Crete. There, she bore him three sons, Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Sarpedon, each of whom became kings.

Look over at the painting by the window. This is by Tintoretto and titled *Bacchus and Ariadne*. This 1576 oil painting is yet another mythological story put to canvas.

Here Bacchus, the god of wine, offers the mortal Ariadne a crown of stars. These paintings were "big stuff" back in Renaissance period. Notice the color, nudity, depth, and perspective in these paintings. For a civilization that had been trapped in the backwardness of the Middle Ages for a thousand years, this new art form was truly something to be proud of and to show off.

⇒ *Enter the next room.*

The Collegio - In this room the Doge, sitting on the platform at the far end, would receive guests and preside over official ceremonies. On other occasions the Doge and his cabinet of advisors would meet here in private to discuss matters concerning the State.





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The gold embossed clock on the wall is in the twenty-four hour format and designed to run counter-clockwise (I'll tell you why in a minute). Notice that a sword is used for the clock hand. The ceiling (guess which era, yep, Baroque) is done in 24-carat gold with Renaissance paintings by Veronese hung from the ceiling. These are actual oil on canvas paintings hung flat on the ceiling and then the ornate gold décor was designed around them. (Hanging paintings on the ceiling was not a common practice. Usually if one wanted artwork on the ceiling it would be done in the medium of fresco, paint applied directly to wet plaster, as in the Sistine Chapel. But here in Venice the climate was too damp for the fresco technique to be practical).

⇒ *Enter the next large room.*

The Senate Chamber- This was where the legislative branch of the Venetian government convened. Sixty senators and the Doge met here to discuss issues and pass laws. The senators spoke from the podium over between the windows.

The paintings here on the walls and ceiling form a cycle depicting the divine favor cast toward the Republic of Venice. Tintoretto's *Triumph of Venice* commands center stage on the ceiling. Here you see Lady Venice up in heaven with all the gods. Lesser beings swirling around bring up gifts. Hummm...do you suppose that is really how the Venetians saw themselves?

Notice the clocks on the wall. One of them backs up to and shares the same mechanism as the clock in the Collegio. This one runs clockwise, the one in the Collegio runs counter-clockwise.

Now is a good time to talk a bit about the paintings the various Doges had commissioned for themselves. In the previous rooms and the exterior facades, you've no doubt noticed the humble images of a kneeling Doge. Of course this was far from the truth. The ruling Doge had great power and was humble to no one. But they did not see it this way. Their image of themselves was that of a humble servant, hence the numerous images of kneeling Doges in Venice. But look here above the entry





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door and you will find one of the few images of a Doge standing, not kneeling! (Look at the flanking panel for a comparison with a kneeling Doge).

⇒ *Now you'll pass again through the Room of the Four Doors. Turn the corner and go into a large room with a semi-circular platform at one end.*

The Room of the Council of Ten was the seat of the judicial branch of the government. Venice had a worldwide reputation for swift and harsh justice dished out by a dreaded group known as the Council of Ten. This group included the Doge and other prominent elected officials. Their duty was to investigate crimes of a political nature against the security of the State.

Over time, The Council of Ten stepped way beyond its bounds and became an entity of its own. In its heyday, they had their own budget, were accountable to no one, and had a slew of police and CIA-type investigators. Eventually, the dreaded Council of Ten became the un-official ruling body of the State. If one was so much as suspected of causing trouble, they could be swept off the street, tried in secret, and sentenced to life in prison, without due process or a fair trial. On the right, notice the small door leading off the platform. This leads through secret passages to the prisons and torture chambers.

The large central oval painting is a 19th-century copy of Veronese's *Jupiter Attacks the Vices*. How appropriate for this chamber of horrors! The original painting, stolen by Napoleon, hangs today in Paris' Louvre museum.

⇒ *Pass through the next room. As you exit notice the "Lion's Mouth" carved on both sides of the exit doors. These are scattered throughout the palace and are here for anyone to voice a complaint or suspicion about another. All you had to do was scribble a note on a scrap of paper and drop it in the "Lion's Mouth." This got the Council of Ten in motion to do a little investigative work. The Armory Museum is up the stairs on the 4th floor.*





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The Armory Museum displays all sorts of stuff with which to fight, torture, and kill. Once you've looked at the displays, turn around and glance out the window. In the lagoon you'll see San Giorgio Maggiore, the church built by this palace's major architect. Off in the distance you can see Venice's beach on the Adriatic Sea. Known as the Lido di Venezia, it is a typical beach with expensive hotels lining its shores. The small village atmosphere along the streets lining the lagoon make this a perfect place to escape the tourist crowds of Venice.

⇒ *Go down the stairs, turn left, pass through a long hall with wooden beams and seats built into the walls. At the end of the hall turn right.*

The Hall of the Grand Council-Two-thirds the length of a football field and about as wide, this room could accommodate over two thousand people at one time. It was designed for the nobles of Venice. In theory, these nobles ran the Republic. The *Doge*, senators, and even the Council of Ten were elected from this group known as the Grand Council. The *Doge* was elected here and then presented to all of Venice's citizens from the balcony at the far end of the room overlooking the *Piazzetta*.

Surrounding the room are portraits, in chronological order, of the seventy-six *Doges*. The one at the far end is *Doge Falier*. His image is blackened-out because he opposed the will of the Grand Council. He was tried for treason and beheaded.

Above the *Doges* throne hangs the largest oil painting in the world. Tintoretto's masterpiece titled *Vision of Paradise* contains 1700 square feet of canvas. Christ and Mary are at the top of heaven surrounded by hundreds of saints. There is too much to see here, just concentrate on one area, and then move on.

The rest of the room shows great scenes from the building of the Republic. By the time the palace was completed, Venice was actually basking in the glories of the past. At the turn of the 16th century, Venice's prominence was on the decline. Its trade routes to the east were compromised by Portugal's great age of discovery. Fighting and war depleted Venice's manpower and





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arsenal. Eventually the rest of Europe and the Turks outranked Venice and further gobbled their holdings.

⇒ *Exit the Grand Hall and follow the route through some of the once “secret passageways.” You’ll cross the covered Bridge of Sighs and enter into the “new” prisons.*

The Prisons: This is where people ended up when they got on the wrong side of the Council of Ten. The most notorious cells were known as “the wells.” Located in the basement, they were wet, damp, full of mold and mildew, and cramped. By the 16th century “the wells” were overcrowded with political prisoners. New prisons were built across the canal and connected to the Doge’s Palace by a covered bridge so as to conceal the identity of prisoners.

You can choose the short or long tour route for the prisons. Since you’ve gone this far I’d take the long route for a grand tour of the dungeons. Life was not fun in here!

The Bridge of Sighs: As the name suggests, this was the last look at romantic Venice a condemned prisoner would get before going into the new prison across the canal. This ends the tour of the Doge’s Palace. Exit the prison, cross the Bridge of Sighs, gaze out the latticed window and sigh! Follow the signs back to the courtyard and out the *Portal Della Carte* to the *Piazzetta*.

This ends your tour of the Doge’s Palace. Take a break, enjoy the square!

Museo Civico Correr

As mentioned earlier, this museum is included with your admission ticket for the *Doge’s Palace*. The museum is dedicated to preserving and documenting the history of the city of Venice. There is a cafeteria and great views out over St. Mark’s Square (see “buying tickets for the *Doge’s Palace*” above. Open daily April-October 09:00-19:00, November-March 09:00-17:00, last entry 1 hour before closing time. Telephone 041 522 4951).





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Campanile

This bell tower is just over a hundred years old. It was built to replace the original 1000-year-old tower/lighthouse that toppled to the ground one morning in 1902. Today you can ride an elevator to the top for a grand view of Venice, the lagoon, outer islands, and the sea. The bells ring every hour, so plan your time accordingly. (€10, daily 09:00-19:00).

Galleria dell' Accademia

Located at the foot of the Accademia Bridge, this gallery sports the World's best collection of Venetian Renaissance Art. You will find works here by: Veronese, Bellini, Giorgione, and others. Don't try to pack this and the Doge's palace into one day unless you are a hardcore art fanatic. Sometimes there can be long lines as they only allow 300 people in at one time (€12, Monday 08:15-14:00, Tuesday-Sunday 08:15-19:15, audioguides are available in English for €6; no photos, telephone 041 522 2247).

Santa Maria Glorioso dei Frari

This church, located in the San Paolo neighborhood, is the most important architectural structure in the Venetian Gothic style other than St. Mark's Basilica. It was built between 1340 and 1443 for the Order of the Friars of St. Frances. It contains tombs of notable members of the Republic's nobility and lots of artistic masterpieces. The masterpieces are presented here, not hanging on a wall as in a museum, but in the exact location for which the artist intended. In Italian this is known as *in situ*. In English it means "on location." There are many places in Europe to experience *in situ* art, but none better than here in Venice.

Just to the right of the high altar you'll find the Chapel of St. John the Baptist. Located here is Donatello's woodcarving of St. John. This work, dated and signed by Donatello in 1438, shows a haggard St. John after forty days of solitude in the desert. Donatello was a native of Florence and a key artist in the transitional time between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. No-





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tice how the woodcarving still has the medieval elongation and flatness found in altar screens of the Middle Ages. But there is a rebirth beginning here. St. Mark is a real person. His emotion can be seen and felt in Donatello's chisel marks.

Bellini's *Madonna and the Saints* is located in the chapel farther to the right. Bellini was a Venetian artist. He painted many Madonnas in his lifetime. Most had the unifying characteristic of placing the subjects in a most beautiful physical setting. Also notice that Bellini has painted Mary in an un-lady-like position with her legs spread wide apart. Before leaving here, turn around and look at the wall behind you. Do you see the fresco depicting a tapestry on the wall to the far left? Notice the lady peeking out from behind the tapestry. What do you think? Hired by the chapel attendants to help enforce the no photography policy.

Now turn your attention to the red and gold painting hanging over the altar. Titian worked on this huge altarpiece (*The Assumption*) for more than two years from 1516 to 1518. It has to be seen as a milestone in Titian's career establishing him as a more universal artist who drew inspiration from outside the confines of Venice.

The powerful figures of the Apostles reflect the influence of Michelangelo and some parts of the painting are similar to the icons used in the works of Raphael. Some art historians believe Titian was striving to get away from the typical Venetian Renaissance style and develop an artistic style of his own.

The picture is composed of three orders. At the bottom are the Apostles (humanity), amazed and stunned by the wondrous happening. St Peter is kneeling with his hand on his breast, St Thomas is pointing at the Virgin, and St Andrew in a red cloak is stretching forward. In the middle, the Madonna, slight and bathed in light, is surrounded by a host of angels. Above is God, the Father, calling the Virgin to him. The painting is signed as Ticianus down low in the middle of the picture.

Scattered about the church are the tombs of Canova (the one shaped like a pyramid) and Titian (done up in grand style). Be-





Sights in Venice

hind Titian's tomb there is a carved marble copy of his masterpiece, the Assumption.

Finally walk over to the left and take a look at the huge tomb with an exit door beneath. Take a close look at the black men clothed in solid white and holding up the second level. Concentrate for a moment on their intricately carved eyes and facial expressions. This sculptor is good! You can almost feel the men's agony and hatred as they are forever forced to bear the load of the Doge's Monument above. This monument was completed in 1669 and is an excellent example of the ornamental style of the Baroque era.

Cost, Hours, and Location: €3, Monday-Saturday 9:00 to 18:00, Sunday 13:00-18:00, dress appropriately, telephone 041 522 2637. The church is located in the San Paolo neighborhood. Get a map and wander from the Rialto bridge back into the neighborhood for a few hundred meters.

The Jewish Ghetto

Not on the beaten tourist path, but yet an interesting excursion for a unique look at the people and culture of Venice. The word ghetto is actually a word in the Venetian dialect meaning "foundry" in English. This area of Venice was known as the foundry district, in Venetian "ghetto", and is the sight of a former copper foundry. Through the centuries the term ghetto has acquired many meanings. But in this, the original ghetto, the term was nothing more than a description of the area of town in which the Jewish community resided. Jews settled here in 1516 and were "confined" to the foundry area. There were a lot of people here. Notice the seven and eight story buildings around Campo del Ghetto. There were so many people here that building construction had no way to go but up. Some believe these tall buildings were Europe's first skyscrapers, built not for posterity, but for purpose. There is a Jewish Museum, located on Campo Ghetto Nuovo, that presents an excellent history of this original Jewish ghetto (Guided tour only leaving hourly. €3, June-September=Sunday-Friday 10:00-19:00,





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October-May= Sunday-Friday 10:00-17:30, closed Saturday, telephone 041 715 359).

Arsenale

During the Crusades the Venetian's needed a construction site for the large number of ships needed to maintain a naval presence in the east. This Arsenale dates from the 12th century and is enclosed by a medieval wall with watchtowers. The Arsenale has two entrances: the land gateway topped with stone lions taken from ancient Greece, and the water gateway marked by another set of massive towers. Although you cannot go into the actual Arsenale, it is possible to walk around the perimeter walls.

Rialto Bridge

The Rialto Bridge is almost as famous to visitors as San Marco. Its builder was Antonio Ponte. Antonio won a competition to design and build the bridge, beating out such notable artists as Michelangelo and Palladio. The bridge was completed in just three years time opening to foot traffic in 1591. It is constructed on a foundation consisting of some 12,000 wooden pilings driven into the ground. The bridge has three walkways all of which are lined with shops and souvenirs. It is very crowded during the day when the tourists are in town shopping. You'll find it is deserted in the early morning and late evening.

Surrounding Islands

Murano

Murano owes its fame and prosperity to its glassmaking industry, which was relocated to the island in 1291 for fear of fires and the abundance of smoke. In the 15th and 16th centuries, it was the premier glass producing center across Europe. Glass artisans were revered but suffered severe punishments if they tried to relocate their businesses.

Many factories offer tours and glass-blowing demonstrations but are closed on the weekend.





Surrounding Islands

Museo del Vetro

This glass museum houses a number of antique pieces. Palazzo Giustinian, open daily 10 AM to 6 PM (November to March to 5 PM)

How to get to Murano: 4, 4.1, 4.2 or 12 from Fondamenta Nuove. 3 from Piazzale Roma

Burano

Where Murano is famous for its glass, Burano is famous for its lace. Like the glass, Burano's lace was the most sought after in Europe in the 16th century. The main road, Via Baldassare Galuppi, is lined with traditional lace and linen stalls. At the Museo del Merletto, you can watch authentic lace being made and see samples of antique lace.

Museo del Merletto

Open: Tuesday to Sunday 10 AM to 6 PM (November to March to 5 PM)

How to get to Burano: 4 12 from Fondamenta Nuove. 14 from San Zaccaria via Lido and Punta Sabbioni

Torcello

The colony on Torcello was established between the fifth and sixth centuries and once supported 20,000 inhabitants. However, the rise of Venice pushed it into decline, and its population today is about 60.

The Byzantine cathedral, Santa Maria Assunta, was built in 639 but underwent massive renovations in 1008. It retains its Romanesque form and has a ninth century portico and a campanile offering stellar views. Inside, the entire West wall is covered with doomsday mosaics dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Next to the cathedral sits the Santa Fosca church. It is only open from mass. The nearby Museo dell'Estuario houses archaeological finds from the island and religious artifacts.

Santa Maria Assunta. Open daily, 10:30 AM to 4:30 PM (March to October: 10:30 AM to 5:30 PM)





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Museo dell'Estuario. Open Tuesday to Sunday, 10:30 AM to 5 PM (March to October: 10:30 AM to 5:30 PM)

How to get there: 4 12 from Fondamenta Nuove, then 9 from Burano

Brief History of Venice

Venice is a tourist attraction in itself. Even if there were no museums, no churches, and no entertainment, the lagoon-locked city would attract tourists just for its character. Founded more than thirteen hundred years ago, the collection of boggy islands became a refuge for local tribes fleeing the invading Franks. Protected by marshlands and several kilometers of water, it provided safety and peace of mind to those who inhabited the area.

Settlers eventually began driving piling into the bog to provide support for buildings. The marshland was transformed from a swamp to an island built of pilings and wood, canals served as the streets, and boats served as carriages. In A.D. 811 a *Doge* (from the Latin *dux* meaning leader) was elected and Venice was on its way to becoming a world power. In 828, the relics of Saint Mark were brought from Alexandria and he became the town's patron saint.

Several councils, designed to limit the *Doge's* power, supervised the role of the *Doge*. The Grand Council developed the laws; the Senate was responsible for foreign affairs, the economy, and the military; and the Council of Ten was responsible for security. The Council of Ten maintained a network of secret police and informants, which, by design, created an air of mistrust but ensured control of the city.

The Middle Ages saw Venice rise to become a world power. Being strategically located on an important trade route between the Middle East and Europe, Venice seized the opportunity to regulate trade and shipping routes. In effect, the Venetians became the "middlemen" between the economies of the East and West. Cargo of precious spices, silk, and jewels all passed through Venice and merchants became very rich.





Shopping

By 1450 Venice was at its zenith, being both a political and religious power in Italy. Venice maintained its independence from the Pope, the Holy Roman Empire, and kingdoms to the north by maintaining a powerful army and navy, as well as forming alliances with neighboring kingdoms. The late 15th century saw the discovery of the Americas and new trade routes. Consequently, a decrease in trade through Venice led to a slow decline of the Republic. Finally, in 1797, Napoleon Bonaparte entered and abolished Venice's constitution and dissolved the Republic. Later Napoleon ceded the city to Austria. It was not until 1866 that Venice and the Veneto were united with Italy.

Since the early 1800's Venice's population has dwindled. Once commanding the attention of worldwide trade, now Venice delights in being an enchanting destination and on the must-see list of tourists worldwide. Today it's the home to about 58,000 people living in the old city center. Recent decades have seen the young people leave for a bigger and more active life in the cities of Italy. Many have forsaken their traditional family ties, leaving an older generation to live out their lives in Venice. Just a few blocks off the San Marco and Rialto tourist route visitors can find local neighborhoods filled with laundry flapping in the breeze, women chatting from their windows high above the alleys, and gentlemen visiting at the local square. Most visitors to Venice miss this intimate look into the city's culture. Don't let it pass you by, get out and explore!

Shopping

Rialto Market

The fruit and vegetable market has been in existence for hundreds of years, its stalls lining the Grand Canal in San Polo. Fishermen also sell the day's catch in the market next door. The markets open at dawn, and the vendors begin to pack up by noon so make sure you visit early. Around lunchtime, the fishermen cook what hasn't been sold, offering delicious fresh fish meals for a few euros.





Venice

From the Rialto Bridge, cross to the west side and follow the river north (to the right). From the Rialto Mercato vaporetto stop, follow the Canal to the right.

Entertainment and Outdoor Activities

Festivals

Carnevale—February/March

Since 1268, Venetians (and now flocks of tourists) don Venetian masks and costumes in the week leading up to Ash Wednesday.

Saint Mark's Day—April 25

St. Mark is the city's patron saint. The day is celebrated with a procession to the Basilica. Traditionally, men give a red rosebud to the women they love.

The Vogalonga—May

this event was created around 1990 to raise awareness of the swell created by engine powered boats. Teams in rowboats run a 30 km course, beginning in St. Mark's Basin, by the Doge's Palace.

Ascension Day—May

ascension Sunday celebrates the marriage to the sea, recalling the victorious undertaking of the Venetian fleet in 998 to liberate Dalmatia. From that year forward, the Does would board a boat called the Bucintoro and throw a ring into the water to symbolize the city's dominion over the sea. Today, the Mayor and other civil authorities board the Bucintoro and lead a procession of historical boats to the Church of San Nicolò on the Lido where the ring is still thrown into the water. There are also rowing races, classical music concerts, period costume parades, theatre performances and the Sensa Fair.

Regata Storica—September

Venice holds its biggest event on the first Sunday of September. There is a procession on the Grand Canal, including many peo-





Entertainment and Outdoor Activities

ple in costume. Following the procession, there are four rowing races.

The Redentore Feast—July

this festival falls on the third Saturday in July. Originally established in 1576 to celebrate the end of a terrible epidemic, boats gather in St. Mark's Basin to watch fireworks at midnight and then head to the Lido to await sunrise.

Opera

The Gran Teatro La Fenice is one of Italy's most important opera houses. It was fully restored after a fire in 1996. The upper season runs from May to November. Tickets begin at €20. Campo San Fantin, San Marco 1977 www.teatrolafenice.it

Events

Tickets to most events can be purchased from Venezia Unica. veneziaunica.it





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Overview and Orientation

“Is there a land of such supreme and perfect beauty anywhere?” wondered the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow after a visit to Lake Como. Set in the foothills of the Alps along the border with Switzerland, the lake is framed by snowcapped mountains. It sits virtually deserted in the winter, but by mid-March the wealthy, glitzy crowds begin to roll in. Visitors come to hike in the hills or go boating and of course, they come for the incomparable views of the Alps. The lake is shaped like a running man, head at the Alps and feet in Lombardy. Bellagio is in the “crotch”, Menaggio at his right (western) hip and Varenna at his left (eastern) hip.

Practical Information

Getting around Lake Como

Public Transportation

The public **boat** service is operated by Navigazione Laghi. There are three options. The **motorships** (the blue line) run two main routes Como-Colico and Lecco-Bellagio (summary only). This route makes a lot of stops and gives you time to relax, admire the coastline and take a lot of pictures. The **hydrofoils** (the red line) run from Como to Colico. This is a faster route with fewer stops and slightly higher prices. The **ferries** (the yellow line) are larger than the other boats and only run in the central part of the lake connecting Bellagio, Varenna, Menaggio and Cadenabbia.

You can purchase tickets at the ticket office near the dock at most towns. Tickets can be purchased onboard at no additional cost if the ticket office is closed. Prices vary depending on your destination and type of ticket. For example, a one-way ticket from Como to Colico is €12.60, a ticket for the day (get on and off unlimited times) is €28, a six-day ticket is €84. A supplement of €4.90 is required to take the faster service.





Lake Como

There are **trains** that run from Lecco to Colico along the eastern side of the lake. However, the only train station on the western side of the lake is in Como.

ASF Autolinee runs the **buses** from Como along the western side of the lake. In Como, bus stops are located outside the two main train stations: Como S. Giovanni and Como Nord Lago. You can travel to any destination from Como to Colico and from Como to Bellagio. SAL Lecco operates the buses on the eastern side of the lake. Take the bus if you want to travel from Lecco to Bellagio. If you want to travel along the eastern edge of the lake, take the train instead. Tickets can be purchased at tobacconists or newsstands and at bus ticket offices. You can also purchase tickets on board for an additional fee.

Private Boat

In many towns, you can also hire a private boat tour, which is more expensive but allows you to design your own itinerary. Tours begin at €180.

Taxi

You can find taxi stands in front of train and bus stations. You can also call to be picked up. Taxis can be expensive but are also the fastest way of travelling around the lake.

Here are some taxi companies operating in the area.

In Bellagio—Autopubbliche, Phone: +39 031 950 913

In Como—Taxi Como, Phone: +39 031 271 000

In Lecco—Radio taxi, Phone: +39 0341 1916

Tourist Information

Museum Pass

Abbonamento Musei Lombardia is a card that grants you free entrance to 80 museums and attractions around Lombardy. You can purchase it online at lombardia.abbonamentomusei.it/ or in Como at the Museo Archeologico “Paolo Giovio”, piazza Medaglie d’Oro 1. The card is valid for 365 days and costs €45.





Sights in Lake Como

Other Useful Information

Hospitals

Ospedale Valduce is in Como. Address: Via Dante Alighieri, 11, 22100 Como CO, Italy

Pharmacy

There are pharmacies peppered along the lake in every town. In Como, **Farmacia Centrale** is one on the corner at Piazza Cavour. Address: Via Caio Plinio Secondo, 1. Hours: Tuesday through Saturday 8:30 AM to 7:30 PM, Monday 3 PM to 7:30 PM

Laundry

Lavanderia La Preferita

Via Borgo Vico, 113
22100 Como CO, Italy
+39 031 570731

Hours: Monday to Friday 8:30 AM to 12:30 PM and 2:30 PM to 5:30 PM, Saturday 8:30 AM to 12:30 PM.

Drop off and collect later

Near the Santa Teresa bus stop

Lavanderia Self-Service

Via Luigi Cadorna, 30
22100 Como CO, Italy
+39 031 489 3707

Hours: Daily, 7 AM to 10 PM

Self-service

Near the XX Settembre bus stop

Sights in Lake Como

Bellagio, the Pearl of Lake Como

This small town is the perfect place to while away the afternoon with its breathtaking views of the lake, picturesque streets, classy boutiques and plethora of restaurants and bars.

The town is laid out in a series of terraces ascending steeply from the lakefront up to via Garibaldi. There are several “lanes”





Lake Como

consisting of hundreds of cobbled stairs connecting the lake with via Garibaldi at the top.

The main street, **via Garibaldi**, is lined with shops and cafés and leads to the main town square, Piazza della Chiesa. Here you will find the Romanesque **Basilica di San Giacomo**, with impressive frescoes, statues and bell tower. On the other side of the square is a medieval tower that was once part of the town's defenses but now serves as a tourist office. The fountain in the center of the piazza is said to have been commissioned by a resident Englishman to commemorate Queen Victoria's diamond Jubilee.

If you leave the piazza and pass the church, you can follow the road out to the tip of Bellagio, where the lake divides into two branches. Here there is a lookout, a park and a little harbor at **Punta Spartivento**.

If you follow via Garibaldi in the opposite direction, you will pass the entrance to **Villa Serbelloni**. The villa's grounds encompass much of the wooded hill behind town and offer panoramas that can't be seen from town. The interior is not open to the public but you can tour the terraced park and gardens, where you can see a variety of flowering plants, fountains, a grotto and the ruins of an old defensive fortress.

On your right, you'll see the yellow **town hall** building next to the small 11th-century **Church of San Giorgio**. Across the street you'll see signs and a flight of stairs marking the paved footpath that heads towards **Pescallo**, a little fishing hamlet looking out over the eastern branch of Lake Como, about 10 minutes away. In the 13th century, it featured one of the biggest fish markets on the lake.

As you rejoin the main road (now **via Valassina**), you'll see a stretch of field used as a nursery, which is the most important source of income for Bellagio after tourism. At the end of the sidewalk on the left, you'll come to the empty **Villa Giulia**. A previous owner cleared the wide grassy path in front, known as the **Vialone**, so that he could have a view of both branches of the lake. Take the Vialone all the way to the western side of





Sights in Lake Como

the lake. Here you can admire a scenic view of the lake framed by cypress trees. If you look up the hill to your left, you will see a **19th-century mausoleum**, built for Gian Giacomo Poldi Pezzoli, an art collector.

You can take the road to the left down to the suburb of **San Giovanni**, where local teens sun themselves on the harbor wall and the little town square is decorated with a grotto to honor the Madonna of Lourdes. This is also where the **Museum of Navigational Instruments** is located. If you continue to the water you will see the **Church of San Giovanni** on your right, the first church built in Bellagio dating back to the 10th century.

From the suburb of San Giovanni, walk back up the way you came and take **Via Melzi d'Eril** on your left. Or, from the end of the Vialone, you can take the path behind Hotel Silvio to reach the suburb of **Loppia**. Over the wall you can see the **Romanesque Church of Santa Maria di Loppia**. At the dock, you can see two **Larian gondolas** from Lake Como, which were used until the end of the 19th century to ferry goods and animals. Behind the white domed **Capella di Melzi** (the Melzi family chapel) stretch the **Villa Melzi gardens**. In spring the gardens bloom with azaleas and rhododendrons, but the carefully sculpted trees and well-manicured grass are a delight in any season. There is a little museum in the orangery, and the garden also features a pavilion at the water's edge and a shady water garden. The **Villa Melzi** was the first English-style park on the lake. It was commissioned in 1808 by Francesco Melzi d'Eril, an associate of Napoleon, and his descendants still occupy the house today (€ 6.50 or €8 for a 2-day pass).

Continue through the gardens along the lakeside walk, known as the **Lungo Lario Europa**, and you will find yourself once more in the center of Bellagio.

Como

In **Piazza Cavour**, you'll find the 14th-century **Duomo** with its green dome. It houses a nice collection of ancient tapestries





Lake Como

and Renaissance-era paintings. **I Tigli in Theoria**, a tea room and restaurant in a renovated two-story palazzo, has a lovely courtyard garden.

In Como, you can take the funicular up the mountain to **Brunate**, a small town perched 1,600 feet above the lake. Continue up the steep, rocky trail to **Faro Voltiano**, a remote lighthouse on a nearby peak. There won't be many visitors so you will be able to enjoy the breathtaking panorama across the lake and into Switzerland in relative solitude.

Tremezzo

Here you can visit the late-17th-century **Villa Carlotta**, which serves as a museum and botanical garden house. Be sure to visit the Italian gardens surrounding the villa, comprising nearly 20 acres of flowers and fruit trees (€10 for the villa, museum and gardens. Open daily, April to mid-October 09:00-19:30. Last tickets sold at 18:00. Shorter hours during the off-season).

The **Grand Hotel Tremezzo**, a luxury hotel, has created an artificial beach scene, with trucked-in sand and a pool floating in the lake.

Varenna

When you arrive in Varenna, head south to visit **Villa Monastero**, a former monastery and noble's residence with lakeside gardens. From the north end of town, you can take a steep hike to **Vežio** to explore the 13th-century castle that was once part of a chain of early warning medieval watchtowers.

Menaggio

Menaggio features an attractive seafront promenade. The old town is comprised of mostly 19th-century buildings painted in muted tones, but as you walk up the streets, it takes on a more medieval feel with narrow alleys, steep stairs and stone buildings. Take a stroll through one of the numerous gardens, pop into one of the little churches or visit the ruins of a medieval castle above town. You can also explore the remnants of the medieval wall that used to surround the town.





Brief History of Lake Como

Lenno

This is the boat stop for visiting Villa Balbianello, has a centuries-old hand-worked olive press which still produces the highest quality olive oil.

Villa Balbianello

The view of Lake Como from Villa Balbianello might look familiar; it was featured in *Star Wars Episode II* and the Bond remake *Casino Royale*. It was built by Cardinal Angelo Durini in 1787. When the villa was first completed visitors gained access via a steep staircase leading up from the lake. Guests were welcomed by the words engraved in the floor of the portico: “Do what you want”, which embodied the spirit of the location, a place where people gathered to discuss literature and the arts. The villa juts out over the lake on a little peninsula, and the loggia provides beautiful views opening onto both sides of the lake. The interior remains decorated in the 1970s style chosen by the previous owner and hosts a rich collection of Chinese, African and pre-Columbian art alongside 18th-century English and French furniture. The gardens are not to be missed (€10 for gardens; €20 for gardens and guided tour of the house. Closed Monday and Wednesday; hours 10:00-18:00).

Brief History of Lake Como

Lake Como is Europe’s deepest lake and its third largest. A massive glacier carved out the gorge 10,000 years ago. While there is evidence that prehistoric man lived in the area, the first large settlement was established by the Romans under Julius Caesar. Como flourished under Roman rule, which led to invasions from the Goths and the Huns. It later changed hands between the Longobards, Milanese, the Holy Roman Empire, the French, Spanish and Austrians. In 1859, Lake Como became part of the Kingdom of Italy. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, villas were built along the lakeside and in the hills above. The region also attracted many artists who were inspired by the scenery.





Lake Como

Shopping

Markets

The **Mercato dell'Artigianato e Antiquariato** is held every Saturday in Como at the Piazza San Fedele, where you can buy vintage clothing, art, furniture and home goods.





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Overview and Orientation

Milan has been an important trading center since it was founded by the Romans in 222 BC. Home of the Design Museum, all the major design showrooms, an endless cycle of trade fairs and some of Italy's most famous fashion houses, Milan is a bustling city brimming with ambition and energy. A leader in the postwar redevelopment of Italy, the city hopes that the tech industry will join the country's business and fashion center.

Practical Information

Getting to and from Milan

By Plane

Milan's international airport is **Milan Malpensa Airport**. If you are flying from the United States, this is likely where your flight will land. Some European flights use **Linate Airport**. Most low-cost airlines fly into the nearby **Orio al Serio Airport** near Bergamo.

To reach downtown **from Malpensa**, you can take the **Malpensa Express train**. It departs from both airport terminals. You can take a train that stops at Milano Porta Garibaldi, Milano Centrale or Cadorna, depending on your final destination.

Trains depart at approximately 25 and 55 minutes past the hour every hour from 5:25 am to 11:30 pm. Tickets cost €13 and can be purchased from the ticket office located in the airport terminals. You can also purchase a round-trip ticket but you will need to take the train line indicated on the ticket.

The **Malpensa Shuttle bus** runs every 20 to 30 minutes from both terminals to Milano Centrale (Via Sarmartini, on the west side of the building). Buses run from approximately 5 AM to 1:30 AM.

Tickets cost €10 one way, €16 round trip. Visit the website to book your ticket ticketonline.malpensashuttle.it.

You can catch a **taxi** from the taxi stand, located on the ground floor at both terminals. For Terminal 1, exit gate 6. For Termi-



Practical Information

nal 2, exit gate 4. It takes approximately 50 minutes to reach Milan city center and costs €95. Four person maximum. If you take a taxi, make sure it has a window sticker that reads: “Taxi autorizzato per il servizio aeroportuale lombardo” to ensure that you pay the displayed fair.

Free and discounted rates on airport transfers are available through the MilanoCard (see below).

If departing from Milan, note that Milan Malpensa has two terminals, but they are far apart. You will probably fly out of Terminal 1 but be sure to check your terminal. Don't worry if you make a mistake; the terminals are connected by a free shuttle.

If you land at **Linate Airport** or **Orio Airport**, there are buses that will take you to Milano Centrale.

By Train

You will likely arrive at **Milano Centrale**. There is a place to leave your luggage at the end of platform 21 on the ground level. The Trenitalia ticket office is also on the ground floor, and there are several self-service ticket machines around the station.

There is a Saponi & Dintori supermarkets inside the station below ground level. Take the escalators from the entrance hall at the station's main entrance.

From the station, it is about a 1.5-mile walk to the Duomo and Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II.

There is also a metro stop just outside the station (see below).

By Bus

The two major bus stations in Milan are Lampugnano, to the northwest, and San Donato, to the southeast. To get to the city center, you can take the Metro (just outside each bus station).

By Car

You must purchase a ticket prior to entering Milan's city center, which has restricted access on weekdays at various times.



Milan

Tickets can be purchased at public transportation stations, newsstands and tobacconists. However, it is better to park your car and explore the city centre on foot. Curbside parking spaces are indicated by blue lines, and you can pay for your space at nearby ticket machines. Display your ticket on your dashboard. The hourly rate for the spaces increases the closer you get to the center of town. For a list of parking lots managed by ATM, visit www.atm.it/en/ViaggiaConNoi/Auto/Pages/ParcheggiStruttura.aspx

Getting around Milan

Public Transportation

City buses, trams and subways are run by ATM. Transportation services run throughout the greater Milan area, but you will likely only need to travel in zones Mi1-Mi3. Be sure to buy tickets for those zones, as the price goes up for additional zones. They can be purchased at subway stations, tobacconists and newsstands. Single tickets are €2 and are valid for 90 minutes. You can also purchase daily tickets (valid for 24-hours) for €7, three-day tickets for €12 or a packet of 10 tickets for €18. You can get free access to public transportation with the MilanoCard (see below).

Walking

Milan's city center is very walkable. If you get tired, you can hop on public transportation (see above).

Bicycle

BikeMi is the city's bike sharing service. Stations are located around the city. Daily (€4.50), weekly (€9) and yearly (€36) subscriptions are available. Renting a bike for the first half hour is free, and there is a small fee for every half hour after that. There is also a convenient app. See bikemi.com for station maps and information on how to rent the bikes.

Hop-On-Hop-Off Buses

The hop-on-hop-off bus in Milan is run by **City Sightseeing**. You can save 10% with the MilanoCard (see below). Prices



Practical Information

start at €22. Book on the company's website or shop around to find discounts on websites like viator.com.

Taxi

Taxis licensed by the city of Milan are white. Taking a taxi in Milan can be very expensive but may be your only option if you are travelling late at night. Remember that you must call in advance, and the meter starts running when the taxi leaves to pick you up. You can call for a taxi at 39 02 7777.

Tourist Information

Milanocard

The MilanoCard provides free access or discounted rates on more than 500 tourist attractions. This card is different than other city cards. Many attractions offer free access to a certain number of cardholders, first-come first-served. However, it also includes discounts at restaurants, hotels, stores and event tickets. Access to public transportation is free. Options include 24-hour (€11), 48-hour (€17) and 72-hour (€19) cards. Visit the website for more information milanocard.it

Church Attire

Respectful attire is required. Shoulders and knees must be covered. Hats and sunglasses should be removed.

Museum Reservations

Reservations for DaVinci's Last Supper fresco are hard to come by. Make a reservation as soon as you know you'll be in Milan. The cost is €8 which includes the reservation fee. To book online visit vivaticket.it and choose *Cenacolo Vinciano*. To book by phone, from the USA dial 001-39-02-9280-0360. The number may be busy, but when you get through, choose option 2 to speak to someone in English. There is a better chance to snag a reservation here because cancellations typically do not show up on the online website. See the section on Santa Maria delle Grazie below for more information.



Milan

Other Useful Information

Hospitals

There are several hospitals in Milan, including Policlinico of Milan. Address: Via Francesco Sforza, 35.

Pharmacy

There are several pharmacies in Milan. There are two on the Piazza del Duomo.

The one near the Galleria, is open every day from 8:30AM to 10:30PM.

Laundry

Lavanderia self-service Milano

Via Alessandro Tadino, 6,
20124 Milano MI, Italy
+39 349 314 2939

Hours: Monday-Saturday 8:30AM-1:30PM and 2:30PM-7:30PM, Sunday 2:30PM-7PM

Areas to Avoid

Exercise caution in areas with high concentrations of tourists, such as train stations, the Piazza del Duomo, Castello Sforzesco and the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele. Be wary of strangers, particularly children, trying to talk to you or offer you “free” gifts. Not to worry; stay alert and keep your valuables in your money belt and you’ll be fine.

Sights in Milan

Piazza del Duomo

The main attraction in the piazza is **the Duomo**. It is the third largest church in Europe and one of the largest Gothic churches in the world. Although construction began in the 14th century, it took nearly 500 years to complete. The roof is adorned with 135 spires and countless statues and gargoyles. The location was carefully chosen for its history of worship; a Roman tem-





Sights in Milan

ple to the goddess Minerva once stood here. Building disputes, changes in materials, setbacks and a lack of money kept the project languishing for centuries until Napoleon ordered the final stages of construction, adding the façade to the building.

The oldest statues can be found at the apse end of the cathedral, which was built first. The façade is done in a Baroque style up to the first windows and then neo-Gothic. Each of the five bronze doors was sculpted by a different artist. You can take an elevator to the roof to get a closer look at the spires and the Madonnina, the gilded copper figure of Mary on the highest spire. On a clear day you can see the Alps.

Inside there are 52 pillars, one for every week of the year, capped with statues of saints. The sundial on the floor near the main entrance was installed by astronomers in 1768. It is so precise that it was long used to regulate clocks in the city. The oldest of the stained-glass windows can be found in the chapels on the right, dating to 1470. A nail allegedly from the cross hangs at the apex of the apse's vaulted roof.

To the right of the Duomo (when facing it) is the **Palazzo Reale**. This opulent mansion was originally built in the 1300s by the Visconti family and was added to over the centuries. Piermarini, the architect of La Scala, gave the palazzo its neo-classical look when he was commissioned to update the residence for Archduke Ferdinand of Austria in the 1770s. The Palazzo also hosts the **Duomo Museum**, with more religious artifacts and information about the Cathedral's history.

The **statue** in the center of the piazza is of Vittorio Emanuele II, the first king of unified Italy.

Also on the square (to the left of the Duomo) is the **Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II**, known as Milan's living room because it connects the Piazza del Duomo with the Piazza della Scala. Shopping has always been the main activity here, with the twin powerhouses of Prada and Louis Vuitton in the center, but there are also plenty of cafés where you can order an overpriced espresso. Completed in 1877, the shopping arcade is topped by an impressive marriage of glass and iron. The ceiling





Milan

vaults are decorated with mosaics representing Asia, Africa, Europe and America. The mosaics on the floor include the coat of arms of Vittorio Emanuele's Savoy family and symbols representing Milan (a red cross on a white flag), Rome (a she-wolf), Florence (an Iris) and Turin (a bull). If you can't find the bull, just look for the spinning tourists. Spinning around on the bull's testicles is supposed to bring visitors good luck.

Pass through the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II and you'll come out in the **Piazza della Scala**.

Piazza della Scala

La Scala opera house takes its name from Santa Maria alla Scala, the 14th century church that once stood on the site. It was founded under the auspices of Empress Maria Theresa of Austria after the city's previous theater was destroyed in a fire. It was inaugurated in 1778 with an opera by Salieri. Many of the best known works of Rossini, Puccini, Verdi, Bellini and others premiered here. The opera house was bombed during World War II, but was swiftly rebuilt. It reopened in 1946 with an opera conducted by Toscanini. La Scala is one of the most prestigious opera houses in the world and tickets are almost impossible to come by. It features one of the largest stages in Europe and holds over 2,000 seats.

The **Museo Teatrale**, adjoining the theater, was opened in 1913. It offers a taste of La Scala's splendor, with exhibits of past sets and costumes, and visitors can stand inside boxes 13, 15 and 18 for a view of the auditorium.

A **statue of da Vinci** stands in the center of the square. A solemn Carrara marble da Vinci looks down on four of his pupils.

The **Palazzo Marino** stands across the square. Built in the 16th century, it has served as Milan's City Hall since 1861.

Castello Sforzesco

The castle was originally built by the Visconti family in 1368. It was then updated by Francesco Sforza, Lord of Milan in 1450, who turned it into a Renaissance residence. However, the cas-





Sights in Milan

tle and its court fell into decline at the end of the 15th century when Ludovico 'il Moro' was imprisoned. In the early 19th century part of the castle was knocked down, and it was only saved from demolition thanks to an architect who suggested using it to house Milan's various art collections. It is now home to 12 mini museums covering a gambit of topics from Paleolithic history to 1950s furniture. Michelangelo's last sculpture, the *Rondanini Pietà*, is also here.

Santa Maria delle Grazie and the Last Supper

The 15th-century Renaissance Church of **Santa Maria delle Grazie** holds one of da Vinci's most famous works. The monks ran an active branch of the Inquisition in the monastery here. When Napoleon suppressed religious congregations it was turned into a barracks and military warehouse. In 1943, the great cloister of the monastery was destroyed in a bombing but miraculously the refractory's walls were spared. The terra-cotta façade is an excellent example of the Lombard tradition, and the carved wooden choir stalls in the apse date from 1470.

The Last Supper depicts Jesus's last meal with his apostles, specifically the moment after he reveals that one of them will betray him, and you can see the reactions of shock and rage from the apostles. It was painted directly on the dining hall wall of the convent in 1495. Da Vinci invented his own technique to use tempera paint on stone rather than doing a traditional fresco on plaster. The doorway was added in 1652 and a portion of the painting with Jesus's feet was removed. Legend has it that every apostle was based on a real-life model and the painter searched the jails of Milan for the perfect-looking scoundrel for Judas.

NOTE: Reservations for DaVinci's *Last Supper* fresco are hard to come by. It is wise to make a reservation as soon as you know you'll be in Milan. The cost is €8 which includes the reservation fee. Guided English tours are at 09:30 and 15:30 and require a mandatory extra fee of €3.50; however, you do not have to take the guided tour. I suggest obtaining any entrance that works for your schedule. It is open until 18:45, but show





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up 20 minutes before your scheduled entry. Reservations are accepted by phone and online up to 3 months in advance.

To book online visit <http://www.vivaticket.it> and choose *Cenacolo Vinciano*. To book by phone, from the USA dial 001-39-02-9280-0360. The number may be busy, but when you get through, choose option 2 to speak to someone in English. There is a better chance to snag a reservation here because cancellations typically do not show up on the online website.

Brief History of Milan

Milan's position on the trade routes between Rome and Western Europe ensured its prosperity. In 313, Emperor Constantine officially recognized Christianity, in the Edict of Milan, and converted to the religion himself. Through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the city was ruled by several family dynasties, who were great patrons of the arts. It was conquered by the Spanish and the Austrians before Napoleon declared it the capital of his Cisalpine Republic. After World War I, Mussolini, who worked as an editor for a socialist newspaper here, founded the Fascist party. During World War II, Allied bombs destroyed much of central Milan. After the war the city rebuilt quickly but corruption had become an issue. The scandal finally broke in 1992 with a large-scale investigation that led to the downfall of many influential members of Italy's political and industrial spheres. Silvio Berlusconi, elected prime minister in 2001 (with plenty of political scandals of his own), is also from Milan.

Tours and Tour Guides

River Cruises

You can take a mini cruise on the Navigli, the system of channels designed by Leonardo da Vinci. The cost is €15, with a 33 percent discount using the MilanoCard (see above). During Christmas, the streets are lined with Christmas lights and other decorations. In the spring, you can take the *Ville del Naviglio*,





Shopping

which includes tours of a nearby abbey and villa as well as lunch.

Shopping

Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II (see above) is full of stylish shops and cafés.

Located on the Piazza del Duomo. Open 24 hours.

Corso Como 10 (known by its address) includes a high-end superstore, decorated restaurants, a boutique hotel, an art gallery and a café garden.

Located near Porta Garibaldi train station and Garibaldi FS subway station. Open: Friday to Tuesday 10:30 AM to 7:30 PM, Wednesday and Thursday 10:30 AM to 9 PM. The café is open until midnight.

Via Montenapoleone is part of the city's famous fashion district. Here you will find high and designer clothing, jewelry and shoe stores. The Montenapoleone subway station is on the street.

Corso Buenos Aires is packed with over 350 shops. Here you can find many international stores mixed with Italian brands. Loreto and Lima subway stations are located on this street.

Corso de Porta Ticinese offers clothes and accessories by young designers as well as jewelry boutiques, vintage stores and record shops. The street runs in front of the Basilica San Lorenzo Maggiore. From the San Ambrogio subway station, it's a 10-minute walk down Via Edmondo de Amicis.

Markets

The **Viale Papiniano Market** offers fresh produce, flowers, clothes, shoes and household items. Open: Tuesday 7:30 AM to 2 PM and Saturday 7:30 AM to 6 PM. Located near the Sant'Agostino subway station.

Fiera di Sinigaglia is the oldest flea market in Milan. Here, you can find vintage clothes, furniture, books, records, handcrafted jewelry and other handicrafts.





Milan

Open: Every Saturday 8 AM to 6 PM. Located on Ripa di Porta Ticinese. Exit the Porta Genova FS subway station and headed south on Via Valenza until you cross the river.

Entertainment and Outdoor Activities

Sempione Park, near Castello Sforzesco, is a great place to stop and relax, maybe even have a picnic. There is also a playground for children.

Teatro alla Scala is probably the most famous opera house in the world. With operas, ballets, symphony concerts and recitals, there's something to see at any point in the year. There are half-priced performances and discounts for visitors under 30. There are even performances for children. See the website for more information <http://www.teatroallascale.org/en/index.html>







This guide has been prepared for you by:
David McGuffin's Exploring Europe

