

FLORENCE

DESTINATION GUIDE



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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 *ge-lato* (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*

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David; explore the city on foot to visit the *Duo-mo*, 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 *Pon-te 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 terminal 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 Pis-aMover shuttle to Pisa Central and take a train to Florence's Santa Maria Novella train station (see below).

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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

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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.

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

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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.

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/ad-ministration/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 va-lidity 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

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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.

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 firenzemusei.it to reserve tickets online for a €4 fee. You can also call to reserve tickets +39-055-294-883. One benefit of call-

ing 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.

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

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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

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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 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

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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 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 Ton-do* (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 mid1300'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. A turn in any direction will take you off the main tourist route and into

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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 pi-azza...totally overwhelming your line of sight. The marble façade, quarried in nearby Carr-ara, 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

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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."

[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 un-

til 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. 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 under-

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stand 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

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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 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 Magnificent, 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](https://www.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

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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.

Mercato Centrale is located in the neighborhood of the San Lorenzo Market. The Merca-to 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 (*porchet-ta*), 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,

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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.

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 bian-co*, 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 eater-

ies that serve tasty and fresh fare.

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 & 19:00-21:30. Via della Spada, 62. T. 055 218757. <http://ristorantelaspada.it/it/>



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