

Tuscany



Laden with grand-slam sights and experiences, Tuscany (Toscana in Italian) offers the perfect introduction to Italy's famed *dolce vita* (sweet life). Despite incessant praise, its beauty and charm continues to defy description. It truly does have it all: extraordinary art and architecture; colourful festivals; a season-driven cuisine emulated the world over; and never-ending, picture-perfect landscapes of olive groves, vineyards and poplars.

There's an overabundance of things to do and see, because this part of Italy has been value-adding since Etruscan times. You can visit a World Heritage site in the morning (there are six), drive through a national park in the afternoon (there are three) and bunk down in stylish vineyard accommodation at night (we wouldn't dare hazard a guess how many there are). Medieval sculptures, Renaissance paintings and Gothic cathedrals? Check. Spectacular trekking and sensational Slow Food? Yep. Hills laden with vines, ancient olive groves...you've got the picture. Now all you have to do is go.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Transport yourself back to the Renaissance while marvelling at artistic treasures aplenty in Florence's **Uffizi Gallery** (p487)
- Indulge in some icon-spotting in Pisa's picture-perfect **Piazza dei Miracoli** (p523)
- Hear Puccini's arias soar to the heavens in Lucca's **Church & Baptistry of Sts Giovanni & Reparata** (p516)
- Embark on a scenic cycle along the **Strada del Vino Costa degli Etruschi** (see the boxed text, p531) from Livorno to Elba
- Eat, drink and sleep in style when exploring **Chianti** (p533), Tuscany's most sybaritic pocket
- Gorge on Gothic architecture and spiced panforte in sensational **Siena** (p536)



■ POPULATION: 3.5 MILLION

■ AREA: 22,990 SQ KM

FLORENCE

pop 364,710

Return time and again and you won't see it all. Stand on a bridge over the Arno several times in a day and the light, mood and view will always vary. Surprisingly small as it is, this city is like no other. Cradle of the Renaissance and home of Machiavelli, Michelangelo and the Medici, Florence (Firenze) is magnetic, romantic, unrivalled and – above all – busy. Its historic streets teem with tourists, who flock year-round to feast on the city's world-class art and extraordinary architecture.

Yet there's more to this intensely absorbing place than priceless masterpieces. Towers and palaces evoke a thousand tales of its medieval past; designer boutiques and artisan workshops stud its streets; there's a buzzing cafe and bar scene; and – when the summer heat simply gets too stifling – vine-laden hills and terrace restaurants are only a short drive away.

HISTORY

Controversy continues over who founded Florence. The most commonly accepted story tells us that Emperor Julius Caesar founded Florentia around 59 BC, making it a strategic garrison on the narrowest crossing of the Arno river and thus controlling the Via Flaminia linking Rome to northern Italy and Gaul (France). Archaeological evidence suggests the presence of an earlier village founded by the Etruscans of Fiesole around 200 BC.

In the 12th century Florence became a free *comune* (town council), ruled by 12 *priori* (consuls) assisted by the Consiglio di Cento (Council of One Hundred), drawn mainly from the merchant class. Agitation among differing factions led to the appointment of a foreign governing magistrate (*podestà*) in 1207.

The first conflicts between two of the factions, the pro-papal Guelphs (Guelfi) and the pro-imperial Ghibellines (Ghibellini), started in the mid-13th century, with power passing between the two groups for almost a century.

In the 1290s the Guelphs split into two: the Neri (Blacks) and Bianchi (Whites). When the Bianchi were defeated, Dante was among those driven into exile in 1302. As the nobility lost ground the Guelph merchant class took control, but trouble was never far away. The

plague of 1348 halved the city's population and the government was rocked by agitation from the lower classes.

In the 14th century Florence was ruled by a caucus of Guelphs under the leadership of the Albizi family. Among the families opposing them were the Medici, who substantially increased their clout when they became the papal bankers.

Cosimo il Vecchio (the Elder, also known simply as Cosimo de' Medici) emerged as head of the opposition to the Albizi in the 15th century and became Florence's ruler. His eye for talent saw a constellation of artists such as Alberti, Brunelleschi, Lorenzo Ghiberti, Donatello, Fra' Angelico and Fra' Filippo Lippi flourish.

The rule of Lorenzo il Magnifico (1469–92), Cosimo's grandson, ushered in the most glorious period of Florentine civilisation and of the Italian Renaissance. His court fostered a flowering of art, music and poetry, turning Florence into Italy's cultural capital. Not long before Lorenzo's death, the Medici bank failed and the family was driven out of Florence. The city fell under the control of Savonarola, a Dominican monk who led a puritanical republic, burning the city's wealth on his 'bonfire of vanities'. But his lure was short-lived and after falling from favour he was tried as a heretic and executed in 1498.

After the Spanish defeated Florence in 1512, Emperor Charles V married his daughter to Lorenzo's great-grandson Alessandro de' Medici, whom he made duke of Florence in 1530. Seven years later Cosimo I, one of the last truly capable Medici rulers, took charge, becoming grand duke of Tuscany after Siena fell to Florence in 1569 and ushering in more than 150 years of Medici domination of Tuscany.

In 1737 the grand duchy of Tuscany passed to the French House of Lorraine, which retained control, apart from a brief interruption under Napoleon, until it was incorporated into the Kingdom of Italy in 1860. Florence briefly became the national capital but Rome assumed the mantle permanently in 1870.

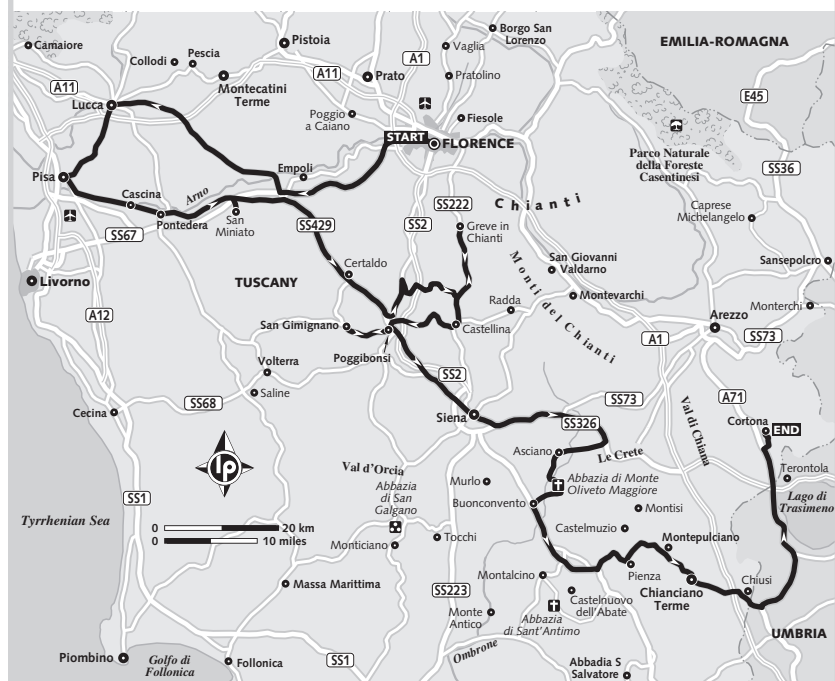
The city was severely damaged during WWII by the retreating Germans, who blew up all its bridges except the Ponte Vecchio. It was ravaged by floods in 1966; and in 1993 the Mafia exploded a massive car bomb, killing five, injuring 37 and destroying a part of Uffizi Gallery. A decade later, the gallery is undergoing its biggest-ever expansion.

REGIONAL ITINERARY

TUSCAN TREASURES

One Week / Florence / Cortona

The magnificent city of **Florence** (opposite) anchors any tour of Tuscany. Spend a day sampling its highlights before tearing yourself away and travelling to **Lucca** (p514), light on heavyweight museums but loaded with important churches, atmospheric cafes and top-notch restaurants. Make sure you take a bike ride around its historic **city walls** (p516) and pay homage to favourite son Giacomo Puccini at one of the nightly concerts staged in the **Church of Saints Giovanni and Reparata** (p516), where the great opera composer once played the organ. On day four, visit **Pisa** (p521) to admire the **Piazza dei Miracoli** (p523), scale the iconic **Leaning Tower** (p523), admire the 12th- to 14th-century paintings from the Tuscan school that form the core of the collection of the **Museo Nazionale di San Matteo** (p525) and enjoy some of the city's splendid, seafood-dominated regional cuisine. The next morning sees you heading towards the nearby hill-town of **San Miniato**, where you can embark on a truffle hunt or tour the town's gourmet produce shops before checking into an *agriturismo* (farmstay accommodation) in **Chianti** (p535) for two nights – many are idyllically located on historic wine estates. Spend the next day tasting Chianti and Chianti Classico in and around **Greve in Chianti** (p534) or day-tripping to the walled city of **San Gimignano** (p544) with its famous towers. On day six, move on to seductive **Siena** (p536), full of extraordinary art and architecture and known for its enticing eateries. Your final day should see you wending your way through the picture-perfect landscape of **Le Crete** (p550), stopping by World Heritage-listed **Pienza** (p551) to admire its Piazza Pio II before moving on to **Montepulciano** (p551), home of one of Tuscany's most famous wines, *Vino Nobile*. Your tour finishes in the captivating town of **Cortona** (p558) near the Umbrian border, which dates from Etruscan times.



ORIENTATION

Budget hotels are concentrated east of the central train station, Stazione di Santa Maria Novella, around Via Nazionale and south around Piazza di Santa Maria Novella. The main route to the centre is Via de' Panzani and Via de' Cerretani. Spot the Duomo and you're there.

Most major sights are within easy walking distance. From Piazza di San Giovanni around the baptistry, Via Roma leads to Piazza della Repubblica and beyond to Ponte Vecchio. From Piazza del Duomo follow Via de' Calzaiuoli for Piazza della Signoria, the historic seat of government. The Uffizi is on the piazza's southern edge, near the Arno. The less touristy area south of the river is known as the Oltrarno.

INFORMATION

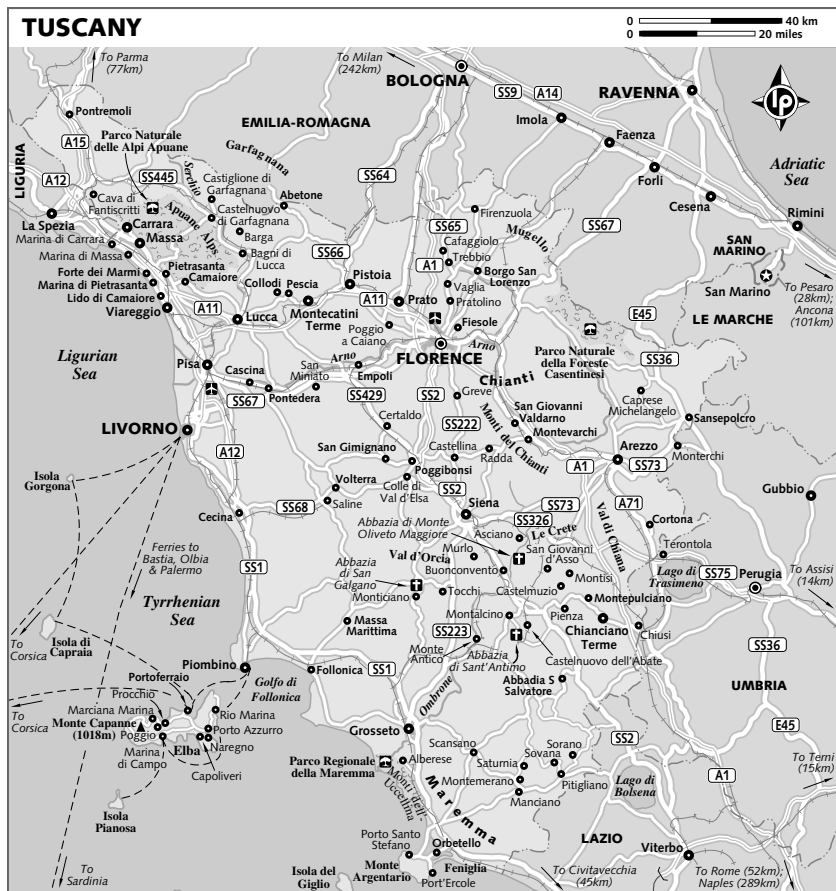
Bookshops

Paperback Exchange (Map p488; ☎ 055 29 34 60; www.papex.it; Via delle Oche 4r; ☏ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7.30pm Sat) Excellent Anglo-American bookshop stocking new and second-hand titles and offering a paperback swap scheme.

Emergency

Police station (Questura; Map pp480-1; ☎ 055 4 97 71; Via Zara 2; ☏ 24hr)

Tourist Police (Polizia Assistenza Turistica; Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 20 39 11; Via Pietrapianna 50r, Piazza dei Ciompi; ☏ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) English-speaking service for filing reports of thefts etc.



FLORENCE IN...

Two Days

Kick-start your day with a coffee in one of Piazza della Repubblica's historic **cafes** (p506) before visiting the masterpiece-packed **Uffizi** (p487). After lunch, head to **Piazza del Duomo** (p481) to visit the cathedral, baptistry and Museo dell'Opera del Duomo. After this, you'll deserve an *aperitivo* and dinner – join the locals at one of the city's many stylish **bars** (p505) and **restaurants** (p501). Next morning, follow the walk outlined in the Duomo to Palazzo Strozzi section on p482 and then head to San Marco to visit the **Galleria dell'Accademia** (p493) and **Museo di San Marco** (p492). For *aperitivo* and dinner, venture across the Arno to the Oltrarno, stopping to admire the sunset from the **Ponte Vecchio** (p494) or **Piazzale Michelangelo** (p496) on the way.

Four Days

On day three, explore Palazzo Pitti, the Giardino di Boboli and the Giardino di Bardini. Alternatively, visit the city's major basilicas – **San Lorenzo** (p492), **Santa Croce** (p493) and **Santa Maria Novella** (p491). For dinner, enjoy good food and entertainment at Teatro del Sale (see the boxed text, p507). On day four, take a guided tour of **Palazzo Vecchio** (p486) in the morning and investigate the city's specialist **shops** (p509) in the afternoon.

One week

With three extra days, you'll be able to fit in gems such as the **Cappella Brancacci** (p497), the Cappella di Benozzo at the **Palazzo Medici-Riccardi** (p492) and the **Museo del Bargello** (p490). You could also take a day trip to **Fiesole** (p510).

Internet Access

Cyberlink (Map p488; www.cyberlinkplus.com; Via Del Giglio 29r; per hr adult/student €4/3; ☎ 9.30am–12.30am; ☎) Also offers a left luggage service (€5 per 24 hours), FedEx shipping and mobile-phone rental.

Internet Train (www.internettrain.it; per hr adult/student €4.30/3.20; ☎ 9.30am–midnight Mon–Sat, 10am–midnight Sun; Via Porta Rossa 38 (Map p488); Via dell'Oriuolo 40r (Map p488); Via Guelfa 24a (Map pp484–5); Borgo San Jacopo 30r (Map p488; ☎ 055 265 79 35) Opening times are for the Via Porta Rossa branch; others may vary.

Internet Resources

APT Firenze (www.firenzeturismo.it) Official Florence tourism website.

Firenze Musei (www.firenzemusei.it) Online booking site for Florentine museums.

Firenze Spettacolo (www.firenzespettacolo.it) Online version of the city's definitive entertainment publication.

Florence for Fun (www.florenceforfun.org) Website for international students living in the city.

The Florentine (www.theflorentine.net) Useful English-language newspaper online.

Studentsville (www.studentsville.it) City life from a student perspective.

Laundry

Wash & Dry (8kg wash/dry per load €3.50/3.50, detergent €1; ☎ 8am–10pm) Via de' Serragli 87r (Map pp484–5); Via dei Servi 105r (Map pp484–5); Via del Sole 29r (Map

p488); Via della Scala 52–54r (Map pp484–5); Via Nazionale 129r (Map pp484–5)

Left Luggage

Stazione di Santa Maria Novella (Map pp484–5; per item for 5hr €4, each additional hr €0.60; ☎ 6am–11.50pm) Next to platform 16.

Medical Services

24-Hour Pharmacy (Map pp484–5; ☎ 055 21 67 61; Stazione di Santa Maria Novella) In the main train station.

24-Hour Dental Emergency (☎ 155 24 12 08)

Dr Stephen Kerr (Map p488; ☎ 055 28 80 55; www.dr-kerr.com; Piazza Mercato Nuovo 1; ☎ clinic open 3–5pm Mon–Fri, or by appointment) Resident British doctor.

Post

Central Post Office (Map p488; Via Pellicceria)

Tourist Information

APT Florence (www.firenzeturismo.it); Piazza Beccaria (Map pp484–5; ☎ 055 2 33 20; Via Manzoni 16; ☎ 9am–1pm Mon–Fri); San Lorenzo (Map p488; ☎ 055 29 08 32; Via Cavours 1r; ☎ 8.30am–6.30pm Mon–Sat, 8.30am–1.30pm Sun); A Vespucci Airport (Map pp480–1; ☎ 055 31 58 74; ☎ 8.30am–8.30pm).

Comune di Firenze Tourist Office (Map p488; ☎ 055 234 04 44; www.comune.fi.it, in Italian; Borgo Santa Croce 29r; ☎ 9am–7pm Mon–Sat, to 2pm Sun) Information on the city, run by Florence's city council.

FLORENCE



SOS Turista phoneline (☎ 055 276 03 82) Run by Provincia di Firenze Tourist Office for tourists in trouble (disputes over hotel bills etc).

Travel Agencies

CTS (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 28 95 70; www.cts.it, in Italian; Borgo La Croce 42r; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat) Florence branch of the

national youth travel organisation. Trips, flights, hotels etc.

SIGHTS

Florence swarms with sights, most of which are within convenient walking distance of each other. In usual Italian fashion, state museums and monuments (Uffizi and



Galleria dell'Accademia included) close on Monday.

Piazza del Duomo

Not only is Florence's **Duomo** (Map p488; ☎ 055 21 53 80; www.duomofirenze.it; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Wed & Fri, to 3.30pm Thu, to 4.45pm Sat, to 3.30pm 1st Sat of month, 1.30-4.45pm Sun, mass in English 5pm Sat) the

city's most iconic landmark, it's also one of Italy's 'Big Three' (with Pisa's Leaning Tower and Rome's Colosseum). Its famous red-tiled dome, graceful bell tower and breathtaking pink, white and green marble facade have the wow factor in spades.

Begun in 1296 by Siennese architect Arnolfo di Cambio, the cathedral took almost 150

years to complete. Its neo-Gothic facade was designed in the 19th century by architect Emilio de Fabris to replace the uncompleted original, torn down in the 16th century. The oldest and most clearly Gothic part of the cathedral is its south flank, pierced by **Porta dei Canonici** (Canons' Door), a mid-14th-century High Gothic creation (you enter here to climb up inside the dome).

Wander around the trio of apses, designed as flowers on a stem that is the nave of the church and so reflecting its proper name – Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore (St Mary of the Flower).

After the visually tumultuous facade, the sparse decoration of the cathedral's vast interior, 155m long and 90m wide, is surprising. It is also unexpectedly secular in places (a reflection of the sizeable chunk of the cathedral funded by the *comune* rather than the church).

Scaling the 463 steep stone steps up to the cathedral **dome** (adult/child under 6yr €8/free; ☎ 8.30am–7pm Mon–Fri, to 5.40pm Sat) – an incredible feat of engineering – is a must. No supporting frame was used in its construction (1420–36); it's actually two concentric domes built from red brick to designs by Filippo Brunelleschi. The climb rewards you with an unforgettable 360-degree panorama of one of Europe's most beautiful cities. Allow at least half an hour up here.

Equally physical is the 414-step climb up the neighbouring 82m-high **campanile** (Map p488; adult/child under 6yr €6.50/free; ☎ 8.30am–6.50pm), designed by Giotto in 1334. He died before the graceful bell tower was complete, leaving Andrea Pisano and Francesco Talenti to finish it.

Lorenzo Ghiberti designed the famous gilded bronze bas-reliefs adorning the eastern doors of the 11th-century Romanesque **baptistry** (battistero; Map p488; Piazza di San Giovanni; admission €4; ☎ 12.15pm–6.30pm Mon–Sat, 8.30am–1.30pm 1st Sat of the month & Sun), an octagonal striped structure of white and green marble. One of Florence's oldest buildings, it's dedicated to St John the Baptist and counts Dante among the famous who have been dunked in its baptismal font.

The baptistry has three sets of doors, conceived as a series of panels in which the story of humanity and the Redemption would be told. Andrea Pisano executed the southern doors (1330) illustrating the life of St John the

OUR TOP FIVE WINE TASTINGS

- Vernaccia in San Gimignano (p544)
- Brunello in Montalcino (p550)
- Chianti in – you guessed it – Chianti (p533)
- Vino Nobile in Montepulciano (p551)
- *Vin santo* (holy wine) anywhere in the region

Baptist, and Ghiberti won a public competition in 1401 to design the northern doors, but it is his gilded bronze doors at the eastern entrance, known as the Gate of Paradise (*Porta del Paradiso*), that are the most celebrated.

What you see today are copies of the panels; turn to the **Museo dell'Opera del Duomo** (Map p488; www.operaduomo.firenze.it; Piazza del Duomo 9; admission €6; ☎ 9am–6.50pm Mon–Sat, to 1pm Sun) for the originals, which occupy the glass-topped ground-floor courtyard. On the mezzanine floor is Michelangelo's *Pietà*, which he intended for his own tomb. Vasari recorded in his *Lives of the Artists* (see the boxed text on p55) that, dissatisfied with both the quality of the marble and of his own work, Michelangelo broke up the unfinished sculpture, destroying the arm and left leg of the figure of Christ. A student of Michelangelo's later restored the arm and completed the figure of Mary Magdalene.

Duomo to Palazzo Strozzi

From Piazza di San Giovanni walk south down Via Roma to reach **Piazza della Repubblica** (Map p488). Originally the site of a Roman forum and the heart of medieval Florence, this busy civic space was created in the late 1880s as part of a controversial plan of 'civic improvements' involving the demolition of the old market, Jewish ghetto and surrounding slums, and the relocation of nearly 6000 residents. Fortunately, Giorgio Vasari's lovely Loggia del Pesce (Fish Market) was saved and re-erected on Via Pietrapiana (Map pp484–5). Today, the piazza is known for its concentration of historic cafes (see p506).

Continue one block south and turn left (east) into Via Orsanmichele, where you'll find the **Chiesa di Orsanmichele** (Map p488; ☎ 055 2 38 85; Via Arte della Lana; admission free; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sun), the arcades of a grain market walled

in during the 14th century to create a church. Statues of the city guilds' patron saints adorn the exterior, representing the work of famous Renaissance artists including Pisano, Ghiberti and Donatello. What you see today are copies – the originals are found in museums throughout the city. The main feature of the interior is a splendid Gothic tabernacle by Andrea Orcagna.

Backtrack to Via Roma and continue walking south until you see a huge loggia. This is the **Mercato Nuovo** (New Market), a 16th-century market building commissioned by Cosimo I and called the New Market to differentiate it from the **Mercato Vecchio** (Old Market) that had occupied the site since the 11th century. In Cosimo's day it was used primarily for the sale of wool, silk and gold, so its current incarnation as an emporium for tacky merchandise is something of an affront. Florentines know the market as 'Il Porcellino' (The Piglet) after the bronze statue of a wild boar on its southern side. Local legend has it that rubbing its snout will ensure your return to Florence.

From the market, head west along Via Porta Rossa until you come to the magnificent **Museo di Palazzo Davanzati** (☎ 055 277 64 61; www.polomuseale.firenze.it/davanzati; Via Porta Rossa 13; admission free; ☒ 8.15am–1.50pm, closed 2nd & 4th Sun, 1st, 3rd & 5th Mon of month), a warehouse and residence built in the mid-14th century and occupied by the wealthy Davanzati merchant family from 1578. The piazza in front of the building was once edged with heavily fortified tower houses such as this one, but many were demolished in the 1880s 'civic improvements project'. Inside, don't miss the carved faces of the original owners on the pillars in the inner courtyard, the 1st-floor reception room with its painted wooden ceiling and the exquisitely decorated *sala dei pappagalli* (Parrot Room) and *camera dei pavoni* (Peacock Bedroom).

Continue along Via Porta Rossa until you reach **Via de' Tornabuoni**, the city's most legendary fashion street – often called the 'Salotto di Firenze' (Florence's Drawing Room). Turn right (north) to arrive at the magnificent **Palazzo Strozzi** (Map p488; cnr Via de' Tornabuoni & Via degli Strozzi; admission prices & opening hr vary according to exhibition). Built for wealthy merchant Filippo Strozzi, one of the Medicis' major political and commercial rivals, this impressive 15th-century palace has been reimagined over recent years and is now home to one of the city's most

exciting exhibition programs. The building – half palace, half fortress as befits its era and the Strozzi family history (Filippo's entire family was banished from Florence in 1434 and didn't return until 1466) – is built over three levels from large stone blocks. The design, in which Strozzi is thought to have been heavily involved, is incomplete, as he died two years after building commenced and his son soon ran out of money. Today it hosts blockbuster exhibitions in its upstairs spaces and contemporary work in both its basement gallery and imposing internal courtyard. There's always a buzz around this place, with young Florentines congregating in the courtyard cafe and on the benches built into the *palazzo's* eastern facade, which fronts Piazza Strozzi.

Piazza della Signoria

The hub of the city's political life and surrounded by some of its most celebrated buildings, this lovely cafe-lined piazza, pierced at its centre by an equestrian statue of Cosimo I by Giambologna, has witnessed more events in Florentine history than any other: it was here that preacher-leader Savonarola set light to the city's art – books, paintings, musical instruments, mirrors, fine clothes and so on – on his famous bonfire of vanities in 1497. A year later the Dominican monk was burnt as a heretic on the same spot, marked by a bronze plaque in front of Ammannati's monumental but ugly **Fontana di Nettuno** (Neptune Fountain).

Far more impressive are the equestrian statue of **Cosimo I** by Giambologna in the centre of the piazza, the much-photographed copy of Michelangelo's **David** that has guarded the western entrance to the Palazzo Vecchio since 1910 (the original stood here until 1873 but is now in the Galleria dell'Accademia; Map pp484–5) and two copies of important Donatello works – **Marzocco**, the heraldic Florentine lion (for the original see the Museo del Bargello; p490) and **Giuditta e Oloferne** (Judith and Holofernes, c 1455; original inside Palazzo Vecchio). Facing this line-up is the 14th-century **Loggia dei Lanzi** (Map p488), where works such as Giambologna's *Rape of the Sabine Women* (c 1583), Benvenuto Cellini's bronze *Perseus* (1554) and Agnolo Gaddi's *Seven Virtues* (1384–89) are displayed. The loggia owes its name to the *Lanzichenecchi* (Swiss bodyguards) of Cosimo I, who were stationed here, and the present day guards live up to this heritage, sternly monitoring crowd

TUSCANY





INFORMATION			Althea.....	30	B6	Casa del Vino.....	63	D2
24-Hour Pharmacy.....	1	C2	Consorzio ITA.....	31	C2	Deanna Bar.....	(see 85)	
APT Florence.....	2	H4	Continente.....	32	D5	La Dolce Vita.....	64	B5
CTS.....	3	H4	Hotel Casci.....	33	E2	Le Volpe e L'uva.....	65	D5
Internet Train.....	4	E2	Hotel Consigli.....	34	A3	Moyo.....	66	F5
Tourist Police.....	5	G4	Hotel Morandi alla			Negroni.....	67	F6
Wash & Dry.....	6	B6	Crocetta.....	35	G2	Rex Caffè.....	68	G3
Wash & Dry.....	7	B2	Hotel Silla.....	36	F6	Robiglio.....	69	F2
Wash & Dry.....	8	F2	Johanna & Johlea.....	37	F1	Sei Divino.....	70	C4
Wash & Dry.....	9	D2	Ostello Archi Rossi.....	38	D2			
			Ostello Santa Monaca.....	39	B5	ENTERTAINMENT		
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES			Palazzo Alfani.....	40	E2	Box Office.....	71	B2
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Basilica di Santa Maria del						Musicale Fiorentino.....	73	A3
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Basilica di Santo Spirito.....	13	C5	Accademia Ristorante.....	43	E2	Alessandro Dari.....	74	F6
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Chiesa della SS Annunziata.....	16	F2	Il Pizzaiuolo.....	46	G4	Officina		
Chiesa di San Marco.....	17	F2	La Mescita.....	47	F2	Profumo-Farmaceutica di		
Children's Playground.....	18	A4	L'Osteria di Giovanni.....	48	C4	Santa Maria Novella.....	77	C3
Children's Playground.....	19	A5	Mercato Centrale.....	(see 50)		Scuola del Cuocio.....	78	G5
City Sightseeing Firenze.....	20	C2	Mercato di Sant'Ambrogio.....	49	G4			
Florence by Bike.....	21	F4	Nerbone.....	50	D2	TRANSPORT		
Galleria dell'Accademia.....	22	F2	Olio & Convivium.....	51	C5	ATAF Bus Stop (7, 13, 28 &		
Giardino di Boboli (Boboli			Osteria dei Centopoveri.....	52	C3	70).....	79	C2
Gardens).....	23	D6	Pop Café.....	53	C5	ATAF Ticket & Information		
Grotta del Buontalenti.....	24	D5	Ristorante Cibrè.....	(see 58)		Office.....	(see 79)	
Museo Archeologico.....	25	F2	Ristorante del Fagioli.....	54	F5	Avis.....	80	B3
Museo dell'Opera di Santa			Ristorante Il Guscio.....	55	A5	Biciclette a Noleggio.....	81	C3
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Palazzo Pitti & Firenze			Trattoria La Casalinga.....	59	C5	Terravision Bus Stop.....	85	C3
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Spedale degli Innocenti.....	29	F2	Vestri.....	61	F4	Train Information Office.....	87	C2
						Vaubus.....	88	C2
SLEEPING			DRINKING					
Agenzie 365.....	(see 87)		Caffè Cibrè.....	62	G4			

behaviour and promptly banishing anyone carrying food or drink.

As much a symbol of the city as the Duomo is the striking 94m-tall **Torre d'Arnolfo** that crowns the **Palazzo Vecchio** (Map p488; ☎ 055 276 82 24; www.palazzovechio-museoragazzi.it; Piazza della Signoria; adult/child 3-17yr/18-25yr & over 65yr €6/2.4/5.0, family of 4/5 €14/16, visit & guided tour €8/3/6.50, each additional tour €1; ☎ 9am-7pm Fri-Wed, to 2pm Thu), the traditional seat of Florentine government. Built by Arnolfo di Cambio between 1298 and 1314 for the Signoria, the highest level of Florentine republican government, the palace became the residence of Cosimo I in the 16th century. It remains the mayor's office today.

The series of lavish apartments created for the Medici is well worth seeing, as is the **Salone dei Cinquecento** (16th-Century Room), created within the original building in the 1490s to accommodate the Consiglio dei Cinquecento (Council of Five Hundred) that ruled Florence at the end of the 15th century and expanded

and decorated in the mid-1500s. Sheer size aside, what impresses most are the swirling, floor-to-ceiling battle scenes by Vasari glorifying Florentine victories by Cosimo I over arch rivals Pisa and Siena: unlike the Sienese, the Pisans are depicted bare of armour (play 'Spot the Leaning Tower'). To top off this unabashed celebration of his own power, Cosimo had himself portrayed as a god in the centre of the exquisite panelled ceiling – but not before commissioning Vasari to raise the original ceiling 7m in height. Also in this room is Michelangelo's sculpture *Genius of Victory*, destined for Rome and Pope Julius II's tomb, but left unfinished in the artist's studio when he died.

The best way to see this building is by **guided tour** (☎ 9.30am, 12.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 9.30am & 12.30pm Thu, 10am, 1.30pm, 3pm & 6.30pm Sat & Sun). Around one hour long, these are conducted by English-speaking guides and take you into parts of the building that

are not otherwise accessible. The best of the adult bunch is probably the 'Secret Passages' tour, in which groups of 12 are led along the secret staircase built between the palace's super-thick walls in 1342 as an escape route for French Duke of Athens Walter de Brienne, who seized the palace and nominated himself Lord of Florence only to be sent packing back to France by the Florentines a year later. It follows this staircase to the *tesoretto* (little treasury) of Cosimo I – a tiny room no larger than a cupboard for his private collection, entered by one carefully concealed door and exited by another – and the equally intimate but substantially more sumptuous *studiolo* (study) of his introverted, alchemy-mad son Francesco I. Cosimo commissioned Vasari and a team of top Florentine Mannerist artists to decorate the study, with Francesco appearing in one of the 34 emblematic paintings covering the walls, not as a prince, but as an inconsequential scientist experimenting with gunpowder. The lower paintings concealed 20 cabinets in which the young prince hid his shells, stones, crystals and other curious treasures. The tour ends in the roof above the Salone dei Cinquecento, where you can see the huge wooden trusses that hold up Vasari's ornate ceiling.

For information about special tours for children, see p497. It is highly advisable to book all tours in advance by visiting the desk behind the ticket office on the day before your visit or by telephoning ☎ 055 276 82 24.

The Uffizi

The Palazzo degli Uffizi, designed and built by Vasari in the second half of the 16th century at the request of Cosimo I, originally housed the city's administrators, judiciary and guilds (*uffizi* means offices).

Cosimo's successor, Francesco I, commissioned the architect Buontalenti to modify the upper floor of the *palazzo* to house the Medici's growing art collection. Thus, indirectly, the first steps were taken to turn it into an art gallery.

For hints about how to avoid the huge queues to enter, see the boxed text on p491.

THE GALLERY

Housed inside the vast U-shaped *palazzo*, the **Galleria degli Uffizi** (Uffizi Gallery; Map pp484-5; Piazza degli Uffizi 6; ☎ 055 238 86 51; adult/under 18yr with EU passport/18-25yr with EU passport €6.50/free/3.25, 85min

audioguide for 1/2 people €5.50/8; ☎ 8.15am-6.35pm Tue-Sun, to 9pm Tue Jul-Sep) is home to the Medici family's private collection, bequeathed to Florence in 1743 by the last of the family, Anna Maria Ludovica, on condition that it never leave the city.

The collection comprises 50-odd rooms and 1555 masterpieces. Allow at least four hours for your visit – many spend the entire day. The gallery's pleasant rooftop cafe is only accessible from inside the building and offers light snacks (pizza/panino €4.50/6.50, beer €6, cappuccino standing up/sitting down €1.60/4.50) and fabulous views. In the grand old days, this was the terraced hanging garden where the Medici clan gathered to listen to music performances on the square below.

THE COLLECTION

The collection spans the gamut of art history from ancient Greek sculpture to 18th-century Venetian paintings and is arranged in chronological order by school. Its core is the masterpiece-rich Renaissance collection. We identify highlights in the following paragraphs.

Works are displayed on the 3rd floor in a series of numbered rooms off two dramatically long corridors – the first (*primo corridoio*) and third (*terzo corridoio*). They are linked at one end by a loggia (*secondo corridoio*), from where you can enjoy the finest view in Florence of the crowded Ponte Vecchio and mysterious Corridoio Vasariano (see p494).

Tuscan Masters: 12th to 14th Centuries

The first room to the left of the staircase highlights 13th-century Siennese art and is dominated by three large altarpieces – *Madonna in Maestà* (Madonna Enthroned) by Tuscan masters Duccio di Buoninsegna, Cimabue and Giotto. These clearly reflect the transition from the Gothic to the nascent Renaissance style. Note the overtly naturalistic realism overtones in Giotto's portrayal of the Madonna and child among angels and saints, painted some 25 years after that of Buoninsegna and Giotto's master, Cimabue.

The next room stays in Siena but moves into the 14th century. The highlight is Simone Martini's shimmering *Annunciation* (1333), which was painted with Lippo Memmi and sets the Madonna in a sea of gold. Also of note is the triptych *Madonna with Child and Saints* by Pietro Lorenzetti, which demonstrates the same realism as Giotto; unfortunately both



Pietro and his artistic brother Ambrogio died from the plague in Siena in 1348.

Masters in 14th-century Florence paid as much attention to detail as their Siennese counterparts, as works in the next room demonstrate: savour the realism of *San Remigio Pietà* (1360–65), in the Uffizi since 1851, by gifted Giotto pupil, Giotto.

Renaissance Pioneers

A concern for perspective was a hallmark of the early 15th-century Florentine school (room 7) that pioneered the Renaissance. One panel (the other two are in the Louvre and London's National Gallery) from Paolo Uccello's striking *Battle of San Romano* shows the artist's efforts to create perspective

with amusing effect as he directs the lances, horses and soldiers to a central disappearing point. The painting celebrates Florence's victory over Siena.

In room 8, the highlights are Piero della Francesca's famous profile portraits of the crooked-nosed, red-robed Duke and Duchess of Urbino (1465) – the former always painted left-side after losing his right eye in a jousting accident and the latter painted a deathly white, reflecting the fact that the portrait was painted posthumously.

Carmelite monk Fra' Filippo Lippi had an unfortunate soft spot for earthly pleasures, scandalously marrying a nun from Prato (see the boxed text on p52). Search out his self-portrait as a podgy friar in *Coronation of*

INFORMATION		Museo di Santa Maria		Galeria dei Neri	
APT Florence	1 C1	Novella	32 A1	Galeria Vivoli	62 D3
Central Post Office	2 B3	Palazzo del Bargello	(see 29)	Grom	63 C2
Comune di Fidenza Tourist		Palazzo Medici-Riccardi	33 C1	I Due Fratellini	64 C3
Office	3 D3	Palazzo Strozzi	34 A2	Il Latini	65 A2
Cyberlink	4 A1	Palazzo Vecchio	35 C3	'Ino	66 B3
Dr Stephen Kerr	5 B3	Ponte Vecchio	36 B4	La Canova di Gustavino	67 C3
Internet Train	6 D2	Porta dei Canonici	37 C2	Oil Shoppe	68 D2
Internet Train	7 B4	Reproductions of		Osteria del Caffè Italiano	69 D3
Internet Train	8 B3	Famous Statues	38 C3	Pizzeria del Caffè Italiano	(see 69)
Paperback Exchange	9 C2	Statue of Cosimo I	39 C3	Tripe Cart	70 B3
UK Consulate	10 A3	Torre d'Arnolfo	40 C3	Tripe Cart	71 C2
Wash & Dry	11 A2	Torre dei Manelli	41 B4		
		Uffizi & Firenze Musei			
		Ticket Office	42 C3	DRINKING ☐☐	
		Uffizi Gallery	43 C3	Caffè Concerto Paszkowski	72 B2
				Caffè Giacosa	73 A2
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		SLEEPING ☐		Caffè Gilli	74 B2
Artiva	12 B2	Academy Hostel & Lodge		Chiaroscuro	75 C2
Baptistry	13 B2	House	44 C1	Colle Bereto	(see 17)
Basilica di San Lorenzo	14 B1	Borghese Palace Art		Giubbe Rosse	76 B2
Basilica di Santa Maria		Hotel	45 D3	JJ Cathedral Pub	77 B2
Novella	15 A1	Hotel Castelli	46 A3	La Terrazza	78 B2
Biblioteca		Hotel Dali	47 D2	Mayday Club	79 C2
Medicea-Laurenziana	16 B1	Hotel La Scaletta	48 A4	Proccacci	80 A2
British Institute of Florence	17 B2	Hotel Orchidea	49 D2	Rivoire	81 B3
CAF Tours	18 A1	Hotel Paris	50 A1	Slowly Café	82 B3
Campanile	19 C2	Hotel Perseo	51 B1		
Cappelle Medicee	20 B1	Hotel San Giovanni	52 B1	ENTERTAINMENT ☐	
Chiesa della Santa Trinità	21 A3	Hotel Santa Maria		Caruso Jazz Café	83 B3
Chiesa di Orsanmichele	22 B2	Novella	53 A1	Disco Club YAB	84 B3
Duomo	23 C2	Hotel Scoti	54 A3	Loonees	85 B3
Entrance to Basilica di San		Rais del Duomo	55 B2	Odeon Cinehall	86 B2
Lorenzo	24 B1			Tabasco Disco Gay	87 B3
Firenze Musei Ticket Booth	25 B2			Teatro della Pergola	88 D2
Fontana del Porcellino	(see 28)			Teatro Verdi	89 D3
Fontana di Nettuno	26 C3	EATING ☐			
Loggia dei Lanzi	27 C3	Antico Noè	56 D2	SHOPPING ☐	
Mercato Nuovo	28 B3	Caffè l'Italiano Sud	57 D3	Alberto Cozzi	90 A3
Museo del Bargello	29 C3	Cantinetta Antinori	58 A2	Letizia Fiorini	91 A2
Museo dell'Opera del		Cantinetta dei		Officina de'Tornabouni	92 A3
Duomo	30 C1	Verrazzano	59 C2	Pineider	93 B3
Museo di Palazzo		Cogninarius	60 C2		
Davanzati	31 B3				

the Virgin (1439–47) and don't miss his later *Madonna and Child with Two Angels* (1460–65), an exquisite work that clearly influenced his pupil, Sandro Botticelli.

Another related pair, brothers Antonio and Piero del Pollaiuolo, fill room 9, where their seven cardinal and theological values of 15th-century Florence – commissioned for the merchant's tribunal in Piazza della Signoria – ooze energy.

Botticelli Room

The spectacular Sala del Botticelli, numbered 10 to 14 but in fact one large hall, is one of the Uffizi's most popular rooms and is always packed. Of the 15 works by the Renaissance master, *Birth of Venus* (c 1484), *Primavera* (Spring; c 1478), the deeply spiritual *Cestello Annunciation* (1489–90), the *Adoration of the Magi* (1475, featuring the artist's self-portrait on the extreme right) and *The Madonna of the*

Magnificat (1483) are the best known, but true aficionados rate his twin set of miniatures depicting a sword-bearing Judith returning from the camp of Holofernes and the discovery of the decapitated Holofernes in his tent (1495–1500) as being among his finest works.

Leonardo Room

Room 15 displays two early Florentine works by Leonardo da Vinci: the incomplete *Adoration of the Magi* (1481–82), drawn in red earth pigment, and his *Annunciation* (c 1472).

La Tribuna

The Medici clan stashed away their most precious masterpieces in this exquisite octagonal-shaped treasure trove (room 18) created by Francesco I. Today their family portraits hang on the red upholstered walls and a walkway leads visitors around the edge.

The popular favourites here are the Bronzino portraits of the family of Cosimo I, including his wife Eleonora di Toledo (painted with their son Giovanni), the duke himself, young Giovanni holding a bird, daughter Bia and son Francesco.

High Renaissance to Mannerism

In the third corridor, Michelangelo dazzles with the *Tondo Doni*, a depiction of the Holy Family that steals the High Renaissance show in room 25. The composition is unusual – Joseph holding an exuberant Jesus on his muscled mother's shoulder as she twists round to gaze at him, the colours as vibrant as when they were first applied in 1504–06.

Raphael (1483–1520) and Andrea del Sarto (1486–1530) rub shoulders in room 26, where Raphael's charming *Madonna of the Goldfinch* (1505–06) holds centre stage.

Previous works by Tuscan masters can be compared with the greater naturalism inherent in the work of their Venetian counterparts in room 28, where 11 Titians are displayed. Masterpieces include the sensual nude *Venus of Urbino* (1538), the seductive *Flora* (1515) and the striking portrait of *Eleonora Gonzaga, Duchess of Urbino* (1536–37).

Room 29 is notable for Parmigianino's oddly elongated *Madonna of the Long Neck* (1534–40), and subsequent rooms feature works by Paolo Veronese, Tintoretto, Rubens and Rembrandt. Don't miss room 42, known as the Niobe Room, which was built to house a group of statues representing Niobe and her children. Discovered in a Roman vineyard in 1583 and brought to Florence in 1775, the works are 4th-century BC Roman copies of Greek originals.

Baroque & Neoclassicism

Downstairs on the 1st floor (something of a building site as the Uffizi undergoes its much-anticipated revamp) are an intense and dramatic group of works by Caravaggio (1573–1610) and his admirers. These include the artist's *Bacchus* (1595–97) and *Medusa* (1595–98) as well as Artemisia Gentileschi's gruesome *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (1620–21). One of the first female artists to be acclaimed in post-Renaissance Italy, Gentileschi (1593–1653), the victim in a highly scandalous seven-month rape trial, painted strong women seeking revenge on evil males. Like Caravaggio, she used *chi-*

aroscuro (contrast of light and dark) to full dramatic effect.

Palazzo del Bargello

It was behind the stark exterior of the Palazzo del Bargello, Florence's earliest public building, that the *podestà* meted out justice from the late 13th century until 1502. Today the building, which is northeast of the Uffizi, is home to the **Museo del Bargello** (Map p488; ☎ 055 238 86 06; Via del Proconsolo 4; €7; ☎ 8.15am–5pm Tue–Sun & 1st & 3rd Mon of the month), Italy's most comprehensive collection of Tuscan Renaissance sculpture.

Crowds clamour to see *David* in the Galleria dell'Accademia but few rush to see his creator's early works, many of which are on display in the Bargello's downstairs Sala di Michelangelo. The artist was just 21 when a cardinal commissioned him to create the drunken, grape-adorned *Bacchus* (1496–97) displayed here. Other Michelangelo works to look out for include the marble bust of *Brutus* (c 1539–40), the *David/Apollo* from 1530–32 and the large, uncompleted roundel of the *Madonna and Child with the Infant St John* (1503–05, aka the *Tondo Pitti*).

On the 1st floor, to the right of the staircase, is the Sala di Donatello. Here, in the majestic Salone del Consiglio Generale where the city's general council met, works by Donatello and other early 15th-century sculptors can be admired. Originally on the facade of Chiesa di Orsanmichele (p482) and now within a tabernacle at the hall's far end, Donatello's wonderful *St George* (1416–17) brought a new sense of perspective and movement to Italian sculpture.

Yet it is his two versions of *David*, a favourite subject for sculptors, which really fascinate: Donatello fashioned his slender, youthful, dressed image in marble in 1408 and his fabled bronze between 1440 and 1450. The latter is extraordinary – the more so when you consider it was the first freestanding naked statue to be sculpted since classical times.

Santa Maria Novella Area

From the Uffizi, walk west along the Lungarno, passing the Ponte Vecchio (p494), until you reach the **Ponte Santa Trinita** (Map p488), rebuilt after being destroyed during WWII. Michelangelo is believed to have drawn the original plan of the bridge, which was executed by Ammannati.

CUT THE QUEUE

In summer and in busy periods such as Easter, ridiculously long queues are a fact of life at Florence's major museums, leading to waits of up to four hours if you haven't booked a ticket in advance.

For a fee of €3 per ticket (€4 for the Uffizi and Galleria dell'Accademia), tickets to all 13 *musci statali* (state museums) can be reserved, including the Uffizi, Galleria dell'Accademia (where *David* lives), Palazzo Pitti, Museo del Bargello and the Medicean chapels (Cappelle Medicee). In reality, the only museums where pre-booking is necessary are the Uffizi and the Accademia – for these, prebooking is a *really* good idea. To organise your ticket, telephone **Firenze Musei** (Florence Museums; ☎ 055 29 48 83, 055 265 43 21; 📠 booking line 8.30am–6.30pm Mon–Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) or use the online booking facility at www.firenzemusei.it.

At the Uffizi, signs point prebooked-ticket holders to the building opposite the gallery where prebooked tickets can be collected; once you've got the ticket you go to Door One of the museum (for prebooked tickets only) and queue again to enter the gallery. It's annoying, but you'll still save hours of queuing time overall.

In Florence, tickets can easily be prebooked a day or two ahead of time at **Firenze Musei information desks** (📠 8.30am–7pm Tue–Sun) in the Galleria degli Uffizi (p487), Palazzo Pitti (p495) or the ticket window at the rear of the Chiesa di Orsanmichele (p482) – if you're in town for a few days, this is the savvy thing to do.

Many hotels and B&Bs also prebook museum tickets for guests.

Turning right (north) into Via de' Tornabuoni, you arrive at 14th-century **Chiesa della Santa Trinita** (Map p488; Piazza Santa Trinita), rebuilt in Gothic style and later graced with a mannerist facade. Eye-catching frescoes by Domenico Ghirlandaio depict the life of St Francis of Assisi in the south transept's Cappella Sassetti. Lorenzo Monaco, Fra' Angelico's master, painted the altarpiece in the fourth chapel on the south aisle and the frescoes on the chapel walls.

Further north again is the **Basilica di Santa Maria Novella** (Map p488; ☎ 055 21 59 18; Piazza di Santa Maria Novella; admission €2.50; 📠 9am–5pm Mon–Thu, 1–5pm Fri), begun in the late 13th century as the Dominican order's Florentine base. The lower section of the marble facade is transitional from Romanesque to Gothic, while the upper section (1470) and main doorway were designed by Alberti. The highlight of the Gothic interior, halfway along the north aisle, is Masaccio's superb fresco *Trinity* (1424–25), one of the first artworks to use the then newly discovered techniques of perspective and proportion. Close by, hanging in the nave, is a luminous painted *Crucifix* by Giotto (c 1290).

The first chapel to the right of the altar, **Cappella di Filippo Strozzi**, features lively frescoes by Filippo Lippi depicting the lives of St John the Evangelist and St Philip. Another important work is Ghirlandaio's series of fres-

coes behind the main altar, painted with the help of artists who may have included the young Michelangelo. Relating the lives of the Virgin Mary, St John the Baptist and others, the frescoes are notable for their depiction of Florentine life during the Renaissance.

To reach the **Museo di Santa Maria Novella** (Map p488; ☎ 055 28 21 87; adult/child/concession €2.70/1/2; 📠 9am–5pm Mon–Thu & Sat), exit the church and then follow signs for the *museo*. Arranged around the monastery's tranquil **Chiostro Verde** (Green Cloister; 1332–62), which takes its name from the green earth base used for the frescoes on three of the cloister's four walls, the museum's indisputable highlight is the spectacular **Cappellone degli Spagnoli** (Spanish Chapel) on the north side of the cloister, which is covered in extraordinary frescoes (c 1365–67) by Andrea di Bonaiuto. The vault features depictions of the *Resurrection*, *Ascension* and *Pentecost* and on the altar wall are scenes of the *Via Dolorosa*, *Crucifixion* and *Descent into Limbo*. On the right wall is a huge fresco of *The Militant and Triumphant Church* – look in the foreground (right) for a portrait of Cimabue, Giotto, Boccaccio, Petrarch and Dante. Other frescoes in the chapels depict the *Triumph of Christian Doctrine*, 14 figures symbolising the Arts and Sciences and the *Life of St Peter*.

End your stroll around Santa Maria Novella with a visit to the **Officina Profumo-Farmaceutica**

di Santa Maria Novella (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 21 62 76; Via della Scala 16; ☎ 9.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-8.30pm Sun), a perfumery-pharmacy in business since 1612. It's famed for the remedies it concocts – after a day spent queuing at the Uffizi or Galleria dell'Accademia you may want to stock up on its famous Acqua di Santa Maria Novella, which is said to be good for curing hysterics. Visit the free **museum** (☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) adjoining the shop to learn more.

San Lorenzo Area

In 1425 the Medici commissioned Brunelleschi to rebuild what would become the family's parish church and funeral chapter: 50-odd Medici are buried inside **Basilica di San Lorenzo** (Map p488; Piazza San Lorenzo; admission €3.50, joint ticket covering basilica & biblioteca €6; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1.30-5pm Sun), one of the most harmonious examples of Renaissance architecture. However, it looks nothing from the outside: Michelangelo was commissioned to design the facade in 1518 but his design in white Carrara marble was never executed, hence its rough unfinished appearance.

Inside, columns of *pietra serena* (soft grey stone) crowned with Corinthian capitals separate the nave from the two aisles. Donatello, who was still sculpting the two bronze pulpits adorned with panels of the Crucifixion when he died, is buried in the chapel featuring Fra' Filippo Lippi's *Annunciation* (c 1450). Left of the altar is the **Sagrestia Vecchia** (Old Sacristy), designed by Brunelleschi and decorated in the main by Donatello.

To the left of the basilica's entrance are peaceful cloisters, off which an extraordinary staircase designed by Michelangelo leads to the **Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana** (Map p488; ☎ 055 21 15 90; www.bml.firenze.sbn.it; Piazza San Lorenzo 9; admission €3, joint ticket covering basilica & biblioteca €6; ☎ 9.30am-1pm Sun-Fri), commissioned by Giulio de' Medici (Pope Clement VII) in 1524 to house the extensive Medici library that had been started by Cosimo the Elder and greatly added to by Lorenzo the Magnificent.

Nowhere is Medici conceit expressed so explicitly as in their mausoleum, the **Cappelle Medicee** (Medicean Chapels; ☎ 055 238 86 02; Piazza Madonna degli Aldobrandini; adult/concession €6/3; ☎ 8.15am-4.50pm Tue-Sat, 1st & 3rd Sun & 2nd & 4th Mon of month). Principal burial place of the Medici rulers, it's sumptuously adorned with granite, the most precious marble, semiprecious stones and some of Michelangelo's most

beautiful sculptures. Francesco I lies in the **Cappella dei Principi** (Princes' Chapel) alongside Ferdinando I and II and Cosimo I, II and III. From here, a corridor leads to the stark but graceful **Sagrestia Nuova** (New Sacristy), Michelangelo's first architectural work and showcase for three of his most haunting sculptures: *Dawn and Dusk*, *Night and Day* and *Madonna and Child*.

Just off Piazza San Lorenzo is the **Palazzo Medici-Riccardi** (Map p488; ☎ 055 276 03 40; www.palazzo-medici.it; Via Cavour 3; adult/concession €7/4; ☎ 9am-7pm Thu-Tue), principal Medici residence until 1540 and the prototype for other *palazzi* in the city. Inside, the **Capella di Benozzo** (Chapel of the Magi) houses one of the supreme achievements of Renaissance painting and is an absolute must-see for art lovers. The tiny space is covered in a series of wonderfully detailed and recently restored frescoes (c 1459-63) by Benozzo Gozzoli, a pupil of Fra' Angelico. His ostensible theme of *Procession of the Magi to Bethlehem* is but a slender pretext for portraying members of the Medici clan in their best light; try to spy Lorenzo il Magnifico and Cosimo the Elder in the crowd. Only 10 visitors are allowed into the chapel at a time for a maximum of just five minutes; reserve your slot in advance at the palace ticket desk.

San Marco Area

At the heart of Florence's university area sits the **Chiesa di San Marco** (Map pp484-5; Piazza San Marco) and the adjoining Dominican convent that houses the **Museo di San Marco** (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 238 86 08; Piazza San Marco 1; adult/concession €4/2; ☎ 8.15am-1.50pm Tue-Fri, to 4.50pm Sat, 2nd & 4th Sun & 1st, 3rd & 5th Mon of month), a showcase of the work of Fra' Angelico and one of Florence's most spiritually uplifting museums.

Enter the museum via Michelozzo's **Cloister of Saint Antoninus** (1440). Turn immediately right to enter the **Sala dell'Ospizio** (Pilgrims' Hospital), where Fra' Angelico's attention to perspective and the realistic portrayal of nature comes to life in a number of major paintings, including the *Deposition of Christ* (1432). On the 1st floor, Fra' Angelico's most famous work, *Annunciation* (c 1440), commands all eyes, and a stroll around the monks' living quarters reveals snippets of many more fine religious reliefs by the Tuscan-born friar, who decorated the cells between 1440-41 with deeply devotional frescoes to guide the meditation of his fellow friars. Most were executed

by Fra' Angelico himself; others are by aides under his supervision, including Benozzo Gozzoli. Among several masterpieces is the magnificent *Adoration of the Magi* in the cell used by Cosimo the Elder as a meditation retreat (No 38–39). Quite a few of the frescoes are extremely gruesome – check out the cell of San Antonino Arcivescovo, which features a depiction of Jesus pushing open the door of his sepulchre, squashing a nasty-looking devil in the process.

From Piazza San Marco, follow Via Cesare Battisti east to the beautiful **Piazza della SS Annunziata**, where Giambologna's equestrian statue of Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici overlooks the scene. During summer, the piazza hosts the popular Jazz & Co festival (see p498).

Chiesa della SS Annunziata (Map pp484–5; Piazza della SS Annunziata; ☎ 7.30am–12.30pm & 4–6.30pm), established in 1250 and rebuilt by Michelozzo and others in the mid-15th century, is dedicated to the Virgin Mary. It houses frescoes by Andrea del Castagno, Perugino, Andrea del Sarto and Jacopo Pontormo.

On the piazza's southeastern side, the **Spedale degli Innocenti** (Hospital of the Innocents; Map pp484–5; Piazza della SS Annunziata 12) was founded in 1421 as Europe's first orphanage (hence the 'innocents' in its name). Filippo Brunelleschi designed the portico, which Andrea della Robbia (1435–1525) decorated with terracotta medallions of babies in swaddling clothes. At the north end of the portico, the false door surrounded by railings was once a revolving door where unwanted children were left. A good number of people in Florence with surnames such as degli Innocenti, Innocenti and Nocentini can trace their family tree only as far back as this orphanage. Inside, the **Museo dello Spedale degli Innocenti** (☎ 055 203 73 08; www.istitutodegliinnocenti.it; adult/concession €4/2.50; ☎ 8.30am–7pm Mon–Sat, to 2pm Sun) on the 2nd floor is home to works by Florentine artists, including Marco della Robbia, Sandro Botticelli and Domenico Ghirlandaio.

About 200m southeast of the piazza is the **Museo Archeologico** (Map pp484–5; ☎ 055 23 57 50; Via della Colonna 38; adult/concession €4/2; ☎ 2–7pm Mon, 8.30am–7pm Tue & Thu, 8.30am–2pm Wed & Fri–Sun). Its rich collection of finds, including most of the Medici hoard of antiquities, plunges you deep into the past and offers an alternative to all that Renaissance splendour. On the 1st floor you can either head left into the ancient

Egyptian collection or right for the smaller section on Etruscan and Graeco-Roman art.

The **Galleria dell'Accademia** (Map pp484–5; ☎ 055 29 48 83; Via Ricasoli 60; adult/concession €6.50/3.25; ☎ 8.15am–6.50pm Tue–Sun) displays paintings by Florentine artists spanning the 13th to 16th centuries. But its main draw is Michelangelo's **David**, carved from a single block of marble when the artist was only 29. Reserve your ticket in advance (p491) if you don't want to queue for hours before entering.

Santa Croce Area

When Lucy Honeychurch, the heroine of E M Forster's *A Room With a View*, is stranded in the Santa Croce without a Baedeker, she first panics and then, looking around, wonders why the basilica is thought to be such an important building. After all, doesn't it look just like a barn?

On entering, many visitors to the massive Franciscan **Basilica di Santa Croce** (Map pp484–5; ☎ 055 246 61 05; adult/concession incl Museo dell'Opera €5/3; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat, 1–5.30pm Sun) share the same reaction. The austere interior can come as something of a shock after the magnificent neo-Gothic facade, which is enlivened by varying shades of coloured marble (both it and the *campanile* are 19th-century additions). The church itself was designed by Arnolfo di Cambio between 1294 and 1385 and owes its name to a splinter of the Holy Cross donated by King Louis of France in 1258.

Though most visitors come to see the tombs of famous Florentines buried inside this church – including Michelangelo, Galileo, Ghiberti and Machiavelli – it's the frescoes by Giotto and his school in the chapels to the right of the altar that are the real highlight. Some of these are substantially better preserved than others – Giotto's murals in the **Capella Peruzzi** are in particularly poor condition. Fortunately, those in the **Capella Bardi** depicting scenes from the life of St Francis (1315–20) have fared better. Giotto's assistant and most loyal pupil, Taddeo Gaddi, frescoed the neighbouring **Chapelle Majeure** and nearby **Capella Baroncelli**; the latter takes as its subject the life of the Virgin (1332–38).

Taddeo's son Agnolo painted the **Cappella Castellani** (1385) with delightful frescoes depicting the life of St Nicholas (later transformed into 'Santa Claus') and was also responsible for the frescoes above the altar.

From the transept chapels a doorway designed by Michelozzo leads into a corridor, off which is the **Sagrestia**, an enchanting 14th-century room dominated on the left by Taddeo Gaddi's fresco of the Crucifixion. There are also a few relics of St Francis on show, including his cowl and belt. Through the next room, the church bookshop, you can access the **Scuola del Cuoio** (☎ 055 24 45 33; www.scuoladelcuoio.com; Via San Giuseppe 5r; ☎ 10am-6pm), a leather school and shop where you can see the goods being fashioned and also buy the finished products. At the end of the corridor is a Medici chapel with a fine two-tone altarpiece in glazed terracotta by Andrea della Robbia.

The second of Santa Croce's two serene **cloisters** was designed by Brunelleschi just before his death in 1446. His unfinished **Cappella de' Pazzi** at the end of the first cloister is notable for its harmonious lines and restrained terracotta medallions of the Apostles by Luca della Robbia, and is a masterpiece of Renaissance architecture.

The **Museo dell'Opera di Santa Croce** (Map pp484-5; admission incl basilica adult/concession €5/3; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 1-5.30pm Sun) is located off the first cloister. It features a *Crucifixion* by Cimabue, restored to the best degree possible after flood damage in 1966 when more than 4m of water inundated the Santa Croce area. Other highlights include Donatello's gilded bronze statue *St Louis of Toulouse* (1424), originally placed in a tabernacle on the Orsanmichele facade; a wonderful terracotta bust of St Francis receiving the stigmata by the della Robbia workshop; and frescoes by Taddeo Gaddi, including *The Last Supper* (1333).

The Oltrarno

Literally 'Beyond the Arno', the atmospheric Oltrarno takes in all of Florence south of the river.

PONTE VECCHIO

This famous **bridge** (p488) has twinkled with the glittering wares of jewellers ever since the 16th century, when Ferdinando I de' Medici

MICHELE GIUTTARI

Why do you set your crime novels in Florence? Florence is a city with a double face. It has a beautiful side, but there's also a dark side. I know this because I worked with this dark side for many years...I saw what the tourists don't see.

How did you become familiar with this 'dark face'? I spent eight years as the head of Florence's Squadra Mobile (elite police investigative unit) and four years as the head of a special taskforce investigating the Monster of Florence case.

What was that? Between 1974 and 1985, seven couples were murdered while making love in cars parked in the hills around Florence. Despite our best efforts, the killer was never found; the case is now closed.

The main character in your novels, Michele Ferrara, is also the head of the Squadra Mobile. Are you and he one and the same? We're very similar in terms of character, so I suppose you could call him my alter ego. He can do things I couldn't, though...he gets his evidence together and solves cases quickly. It's easy to do this in a novel, but not so easy in real life!

The plot in A Florentine Death is about a serial killer on the loose in Florence and A Death in Tuscany is about a high-level conspiracy surrounding the murder of a girl just outside the city. Were you inspired by your work on the Monster case? I started writing as a release valve when I was working on the Monster case, so it must have had an influence.

Did you work on other high-profile cases? I was head of Florence's anti-Mafia squad when the Cosa Nostra bombed the Uffizi in 1993. It's still fresh in my mind, and I put it into my latest book, *La Donna della 'ndrangheta*.

And what about the beautiful side of Florence? I love to walk across the Ponte Vecchio (above), along the Lungarno and up to Piazzale Michelangelo (p496), where I sit on the terrace at La Loggia and enjoy the view. I will never get tired of how beautiful this city is. Even so, every now and then I see a place where crimes were committed and I am reminded of its dark heart...

Michele Giuttari is the author of the bestselling crime novels Scarabeo (published in English as A Florentine Death), La Loggia degli Innocenti (A Death in Tuscany) and La Donna della 'ndrangheta (Death of a Mafia Don).

ordered them here to replace the often malodorous presence of the town butchers, who were wont to toss unwanted leftovers into the river.

The bridge as it stands was built in 1345 and was the only one in Florence saved from destruction by the retreating Germans in 1944. Look above the shops on the eastern side and you will see the **Corridoio Vasariano**, an elevated covered passageway joining the Palazzo Vecchio, Uffizi and Palazzo Pitti that was designed by Vasari for Cosimo I in 1565. Its original design incorporated small windows to ensure the privacy of the Medici family members who used it, but when Hitler visited Florence in 1941, his mate and fellow dictator Benito Mussolini had new windows punched into the corridor walls over the bridge so that his guest could enjoy an expansive view down the Arno. The corridor is currently closed for restoration.

At the southern end of the bridge is the medieval **Torre dei Mannelli** (Map p488) which looks rather odd, as the Corridoio Vasariano was built around it, not simply straight through it as the Medici would have preferred.

PALAZZO PITTI

Begun in 1458 for the Pitti family, rivals of the Medici, the original nucleus of this **palace** (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 94 48 83; Piazza de' Pitti 1) took up the space encompassing the seven sets of windows on the 2nd and 3rd storeys. Cosimo I and Eleonora di Toledo acquired the palace in 1549 and it remained the official residence of Florence's rulers until 1919, when the Savoyes handed it over to the state.

The ground-floor **Museo degli Argenti** (Silver Museum; ☎ 8.15am-7.30pm Jun-Aug, to 6.30pm Mar-May & Sep, to 5.30pm Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Feb, closed 1st & last Mon of month) often has no silver on display. Go figure. Come instead to see the elaborately frescoed audience chambers, which host temporary exhibitions.

Raphael and Rubens vie for centre stage in the enviable collection of 16th- to 18th-century art amassed by the Medici and Lorraine dukes in the 1st-floor **Galleria Palatina** (☎ 8.15am-6.50pm Tue-Sun), reached via staircase from the palace's central courtyard. This gallery has retained the original display arrangement of paintings (squeezed in, often on top of each other) so can be visually overwhelming – go slow and focus on the works one by one.

Highlights include Filippo Lippi's *Madonna and Child with Stories from the Life of St*

Anne (aka the *Tondo Bartolini*; 1452–53) and Botticelli's *Madonna with Child and a Young Saint John the Baptist* (c 1490–95) in the Sala di Prometeo; Raphael's *Madonna of the Window* (1513–14) in the Sala di Ulisse; and Caravaggio's *Sleeping Cupid* (1608) in the Sala dell'Educazione di Giove. Don't miss the Sala di Saturno, which is full of magnificent works by Raphael, including the *Madonna of the Chair* (1511) and portraits of Anolo Doni and Maddalena Strozzi (c 1506). Nearby, in the Sala di Giove, the same artist's *Lady with a Veil* (aka *La Velata*; c 1516) holds court alongside Giorgione's *Three Ages of Man* (c 1500). The sentimental favourite, Tiberio Titi's charming portrait of the young Prince Leopoldo de' Medici, hangs in the Sala di Apollo and the Sala di Venere shines with Titian's *Portrait of a Lady* (c 1536).

Past the Sala di Venere is the **Appartamento Reali** (Royal Apartments; ☎ 8.15am-6.50pm Tue-Sun Feb-Dec), a series of rooms presented as they were c 1880–91, when they were occupied by members of the House of Savoy. The style and division of tasks assigned to each room is reminiscent of Spanish royal palaces, all heavily bedecked with drapes, silk and chandeliers.

Forget about Marini, Mertz or Clemente – the collection of the 2nd-floor **Galleria d'Arte Moderna** (Gallery of Modern Art; ☎ 8.15am-6.50pm Tue-Sun) is dominated by late-19th-century works by artists of the Florentine Macchiaioli school (the local equivalent of Impressionism), including Telemaco Signorini (1835–1901) and Giovanni Fattori (1825–1908).

PALAZZO PITTI TICKETING

There are two tickets on sale at the office to the far right of the main entrance. The first (adult/concession €6/3) gives you entrance to the Costume Gallery, Boboli Gardens, Silver Museum, Porcelain Museum and Bardini Gardens. The second (€8.50/4.25) covers the Royal Apartments, Palatine Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art. Note that tickets are more expensive if temporary exhibitions are being staged. If there are no temporary exhibitions, you may purchase a combined ticket (€11.50, valid three days), which gives access to all sights. To do everything here justice, you'll need a full day.

Few visitors make the effort to visit the Pitti's **Galleria del Costume** (Costume Gallery; ☎ 8.15am-7.30pm Jun-Aug, to 6.30pm Mar-May & Sep, to 5.30pm Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Feb, closed 1st & last Mon of month), thus missing its absolutely fascinating, if somewhat macabre, display of the semi-decomposed burial clothes of Cosimo I, his wife Eleonora di Toledo and their son Don Garzia. Considering their age and the fact that they were buried for centuries, Eleonora's gown and silk stockings are remarkably preserved, as are Cosimo's satin doublet and wool breeches and Garzia's doublet, beret and short cape.

Giardino di Boboli

The palace's expansive **Boboli Gardens** (Map pp484-5; ☎ 8.15am-7.30pm Jun-Aug, to 6.30pm Mar-May & Sep, to 5.30pm Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Feb, closed 1st & last Mon of the month) were laid out in the mid-16th century according to a design by architect Niccolò Pericoli, aka Il Tribolo.

Boboli is a prime example of a formal Tuscan garden and is fun to explore: skip along **Cypress Alley**; let the imagination rip with a gallant frolic in the walled **Giardino del Cavaliere** (Knights' Garden); dance around 170-odd statues; meditate next to the **Isoletto**, a gorgeous ornamental pond; discover species and birdsong in the garden along the signposted **nature trail**; or watch a fleshy **Venere** (Venus) by Giambologna rise from the waves in the **Grotta del Buontalenti** (Map pp484-5; ☎ visits at 11am, 1pm, 3pm, 4pm & 5pm).

At the upper, southern limit of the gardens, fantastic views over the palace complex and Florentine countryside fan out beyond the box-hedged **rose garden**, overlooked by the **Museo delle Porcellane** (Porcelain Museum; Map pp480-1), home to Sèvres, Vincennes, Meissen, Wedgwood and other porcelain pieces collected by Palazzo Pitti's wealthy tenants.

GIARDINO DI BARDINI

Florence's little-known **Bardini Gardens** (Map pp480-1; ☎ 055 29 48 83; Costa San Giorgio 4-6 via Boboli Gardens & Via de' Bardi 1r; adult/concession incl Boboli Gardens & Porcelain Museum €5/2.50; ☎ 8.15am-sunset) was named after art collector Stefano Bardini (1836-1922) who bought the villa and gardens in 1913. Accessible from Boboli or down by the Arno, it has all the features of a quintessential Tuscan garden – artificial grottoes, orangery, marble statues, fountains, loggia, amphitheatre and a monumental baroque stone staircase staggering up the beautiful

tiered gardens – but without the crowds of other gardens.

Its charming **Belvedere Caffé** (coffee €3, tea with biscotti €5, panino €3), which is set in a loggia overlooking the Florentine skyline, is a wonderful spot for a light lunch or afternoon tea.

Inside the villa is the **Museo Bardini** (☎ 055 263 85 99; www.bardinipeyron.it, in Italian; adult/concession €6/4; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun Apr-Sep, to 4pm Wed-Fri, to 6pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar), home to a collection of Roberto Capucci-designed haute couture and host to other temporary exhibitions.

From here, you can return to the Boboli Gardens on the same ticket or exit at Via de' Bardi.

PIAZZALE MICHELANGELO

Turn your back on the bevy of tacky-tacky souvenir stalls and take in the soaring city panorama from **Piazzale Michelangelo** (Map pp480-1), pierced by one of Florence's two *David* copies. The square is a 10-minute uphill walk along the winding route that scales the hillside from the river and Piazza Giuseppe Poggi.

Bus 13 links Stazione di Santa Maria Novella with Piazzale Michelangelo.

CHURCHES

The Oltrarno has a trio of churches worth seeking out.

The real point of your exertions up to Piazzale Michelangelo is five minutes further uphill, where the wonderful Romanesque **Chiesa di San Miniato al Monte** (Map pp480-1; Via Monte alle Croci; admission free; ☎ 8am-7pm May-Oct, 8am-noon & 3-6pm Nov-Apr) is found. The church is dedicated to St Minius, an early Christian martyr in Florence who is said to have flown to this spot after his death down in the town (or, if you want to believe an alternative version, to have walked up the hill with his head tucked underneath his arm).

The church dates to the early 11th century, although its typical Tuscan multicoloured marble facade was tacked on a couple of centuries later. Inside, 13th- to 15th-century frescoes adorn the south wall and intricate inlaid marble designs line the nave, leading to a fine Romanesque crypt. The **sacristy** (requested donation €1) in the southeast corner features frescoes by Spinello Arentino depicting the life of St Benedict. Slap bang in the middle of the nave is the bijou **Capella del Crocifisso**, to which Michelozzo, Agnolo Gaddi and Luca della Robbia all contributed.

The 13th-century **Basilica di Santa Maria del Carmine** (Map pp484-5; Piazza del Carmine) was all but destroyed by fire in the late 18th century. Fortunately the magnificent frescoes by Masaccio in its **Cappella Brancacci** (advance reservations 055 276 82 24, 055 76 85 58; admission €4; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Wed-Sat & Mon, 1-4.30pm Sun), entered next to the basilica on the square, were spared. A maximum of 30 visitors are allowed in the chapel at a time and visits are by guided tour; places *must* be prebooked. Unfortunately, visits are often marred by the belligerent attitude taken by the attendants, who strictly enforce the ridiculous 15-minute-visit rule that applies here. How the church authorities think that this is enough time to appreciate the magnificent frescoes on show is an absolute mystery.

Considered the painter's finest work, the frescoes with their vibrant colours had an enormous influence on 15th-century Florentine art. Masaccio painted them in his early 20s but interrupted the task to go to Rome, where he died aged only 28. Filippino Lippi completed the cycle some 60 years later. Masaccio's contribution includes the *Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise* and *The Tribute Money* on the chapel's upper left wall.

The **Basilica di Santo Spirito** (Map pp484-5; Piazza Santo Spirito; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 4-5.30pm Thu-Tue), one of Brunelleschi's last commissions, is beautifully planned, with a colonnade of 35 columns and a series of semicircular chapels. The chapels' works of art include a poorly lit *Madonna and Saints* (1493-94) by Filippino Lippi in the Cappella Nerli in the right transept. Ask an attendant to show you the **sacristy**, where you'll find a poignant wooden crucifix attributed by some critics to Michelangelo.

COURSES

Florence has zillions of schools running courses in Italian language and culture. Numerous others teach art, art history, film, dance, cooking and so on. Here are a few:

Accademia Italiana (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 28 46 16; www.accademiaitaliana.com; Piazza de' Pitti 15) Language, culture and a wide range of design programmes in Italian including graphics, textile and fashion.

British Institute of Florence (Map p488; ☎ 055 2677 8200; www.britishinstitute.it; Piazza Strozzi 2) Much-respected institution dating to 1917; language, art history, cooking and wine appreciation.

Centro Lorenzo de' Medici (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 28 31 42; www.lorenzodemedici.it; Via Faenza 43) Language

and huge variety of supplementary courses, including restoration and conservation, art history and jewellery design.

Divina Cucina (www.divinacucina.com) American-born, Florence-based chef Judy Francini offers food-lovers' walking tours of the Central Market and a three-day programme comprising the walking tour, a day in Chianti and a one-day Tuscan cooking course.

Lessons in Lunch (www.faithwillinger.com) American-born, Florence-based food writer Faith Willinger offers an eight-course meal limited to eight participants incorporating tastings and demonstrations, lunch and visits by special guests of gastronomic or cultural interest. She also offers hands-on 'market to table' sessions.

Scuola del Cuio (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 24 45 33; www.leatherschool.com; Via San Giuseppe 5r) Leather-working courses, from half a day to six months.

FLORENCE FOR CHILDREN

Several locally published books and games help children discover Florence – the bookshop in Palazzo Vecchio (p486) has a tip-top selection.

The **Palazzo Vecchio** (p486) offers wonderful guided tours for children. These involve actors dressed in Renaissance costume who rope young participants into the performance, imparting loads of interesting historical facts in the process and visiting secret places within the palace. A sumptuously attired Eleonora of Toledo, clearly shocked by the casual attire of today's children, has been known to give advice about proper grooming for young ladies, and Cosimo I is happy to lay down the law about the proper age for a Medici to take on duties as a cardinal (the answer is 14, the age of his son Ferdinando when he became a cardinal).

It is highly advisable to book the Palazzo Vecchio tours in advance by visiting the desk behind the ticket office on the day before your visit, by emailing info@museoragazzi@comune.fi.it or by telephoning ☎ 055 276 82 24.

The best **children's playgrounds** (Map pp484-5) for kids under six are in Oltrarno: the riverside space along Lungarno di Santa Rosa (cross the river using Ponte Amerigo Vespucci and turn right) and on Piazza Torquato Tasso. To give kids space to run around, head to the **Giardino di Boboli** (opposite).

A gelato stop always functions as an excellent bribe to ensure good behaviour; see the boxed text on p505 for a list of the best gelato joints in the city. For a gift to make little eyes

light up, visit **Letizia Fiorini** (Map p488; ☎ 055 21 65 04; Via del Parione 60r; ☎ Tue-Sat 10.30am-7.30pm), a tiny workshop selling reasonably priced and utterly adorable handmade puppets.

TOURS

Bus

CAF Tours (Map p488; ☎ 055 21 06 12; www.caftours.com; Via Sant'Antonino 6r) Half- and full-day city coach tours (€45 to €100), including designer-outlet shopping tours (€28, six hours).

City Sightseeing Firenze (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 29 04 51; www.firenze.city-sightseeing.it; Piazza Stazione 1; tickets incl audioguide adult/child 5-15yr/family €22/11/66) Those who are disabled or disinclined to walk may want to explore Florence by red open-top bus, hopping on and off at 15 bus stops around the city. Tickets are valid for 24 hours. There's also a tour to Fiesole for the same price.

Cycling

Florence by Bike (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 48 89 92; www.florencebybike.it; Via San Zanobi 120-122r) City bike rental (per hour/5 hours/day/three days €3/8/14.50/36 including self-guided city itineraries) and a 32km-long guided day tour of Chianti (€76 including lunch).

I Bike Florence (☎ 055 012 39 94; www.ibikeflorence.com; Via de' Lambertini 1) Two-hour guided city tours (adult/student €29/25) and guided day trips to Chianti (€70 including lunch).

Walking

Accidental Tourist (☎ 055 69 93 76; www.accidental-tourist.com) Become an Accidental Tourist (membership adult/under 16 years or 70-plus years €20/10) then sign up for a sunset stroll (€250 per couple), cooking class (€70 to €100), nature trail (€75), picnic (€70), walking tour (€90) or winery tour (€50).

Artviva (Map p488; ☎ 055 264 50 33, 329 6132730; www.italy.artviva.com; Via de' Sassetti 1) Marketed as 'The Original & Best Walking Tours of Florence', these excellent one- to three-hour walks of the city (€25 to €39) are led by historians or art history graduates; walks include a Classic Walk (€25, three hours) and an Evening Walk/Murder Mystery Tour (€30, two hours).

Frey's Florence (☎ 349 0748907; freysflorence@yahoo.com) Highly recommended tours by an Australian-born, Florence-based private tour guide introducing the art, history and magic of Florence. It costs €50 to €60 per hour for private tours of between one and 20 people, including two-hour 'Secret Florence at Twilight' and Uffizi Gallery tours (admission fees extra).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Festa di Anna Maria Medici (Feast of Anna Maria Medici) Marks the death in 1743 of the last Medici, Anna

Maria, with a costumed parade from Palazzo Vecchio to her tomb in the Cappelle Medicee; 18 February.

Scoppio del Carro (Explosion of the Cart) A cart of fireworks is exploded in front of the cathedral at 11am on Easter Sunday – get there at least two hours early to grab a good position.

Maggio Musicale Fiorentino (www.maggioflorentino.com, in Italian) This month-long arts festival held in Florence's Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino (see p508) is the oldest in Italy; it stages world-class performances of theatre, classical music, jazz and dance between late-April and June.

Festa di San Giovanni (Feast of St John) Florence celebrates its patron saint with a *calcio storico* match on Piazza di Santa Croce and fireworks over Piazzale Michelangelo; 24 June.

Sant'Ambrogio Summer Festival (www.firenzejazz.it, in Italian) The streets between Borgo La Croce and Piazza Beccaria become an evening stage for art, dance, jazz and theatre; June and July.

Jazz & Co (www.santissima.it, in Italian) On summer nights, Piazza Santissima Annunziata is filled with tables of people enjoying an *aperitivo* or dinner catered by Slow Food International while listening to live jazz musicians from Italy and overseas perform. It takes place late June to September.

Festival Firenze Classica The month of July sees Florence's highly regarded Orchestra da Camera Toscana (www.orcafi.it) performing classical music in the atmospheric settings of the Oratorio di San Michele a Castello and Palazzo Strozzi; between April and October, the orchestra performs in the Chiesa di Orsanmichele and in the courtyard of the Museo del Bargello.

Festa delle Rificolone (Festival of the Paper Lanterns) A procession of children carrying lanterns, accompanied by drummers, *sbandleratori* (flag throwers), musicians and others in medieval dress, winds its way from Piazza di Santa Croce to Piazza Santissima Annunziata to celebrate the Virgin Mary's birthday; 7 September.

SLEEPING

The city has hundreds of hotels, some excellent hostels and a burgeoning B&B scene. Places in this section have been selected for their good value for money; plenty more Florence options are reviewed online at www.lonelyplanet.com.

Tourist offices don't recommend or reserve places, but do carry lists of what is available, including *affittacamere* (rooms for rent in private houses).

ACCOMMODATION AGENCIES

These agencies – two of which have offices inside the main train station – can find/reserve a

hotel room in Florence for you, sometimes at no charge, sometimes for a small fee.

Agenzie 365 Hotel Reservation (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 28 42 01; firenze1.gb@agenzie365.it; Platform 5, Stazione di Santa Maria Novella; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm Sun) Works in association with hostelsclub.com; reservation fee is €10.

Associazione Bed & Breakfast Affittacamere (www.abba-firenze.it) Great one-stop shop for B&Bs.

Consorzio ITA (Informazione Turistiche Alberghiere; Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 28 28 93; ☎ 8am-7.30pm) In the main hall of Stazione di Santa Maria Novella next to the pharmacy; reservation fee is €3.

Florence Promhotels (☎ 055 55 39 41, 800 866022; www.promhotels.it) Online and telephone reservations for one- to five-star hotels.

Duomo & Piazza della Signoria

BUDGET

Hotel Castelli (Map p488; ☎ 055 21 42 13; www.hotelcastelli.com; Borgo SS Apostoli 25; s €40-60, d €50-80, d with bathroom €70-100; ☎ closed 2 weeks Jan, 3 weeks Aug) The scent of joss sticks and flicker of night lights add a soothing Zen air to this eight-room hotel on the 1st floor of a 12th-century *palazzo*. The location off Via de' Tornabuoni is wonderful and though the rooms are dark, they are attractively furnished, quiet and cool.

Hotel Dali (Map p488; ☎ 055 234 07 06; www.hoteldali.com; Via dell'Ortiolo 17; s €34-40, d €56-65, d with bathroom €68-80; ☎ closed 3 weeks Jan; ☎) This spruce, simple hotel on 'Clock Rd' is run with unrelenting energy and smiles by Marco and Samanta. Rooms overlooking the leafy inner courtyard are serene; those facing the street can be noisy. Doubles are big and easily sleep four or five (extra bed €25) and there's free parking for motoring guests – a rare occurrence in Florence.

Hotel Orchidea (Map p488; ☎ 055 248 03 46; www.telorchideaflorence.it; Borgo degli Albizi 11; s €30-60, d €50-80) This old-fashioned *pensione* in the mansion where the Donati family roosted in the 13th-century (Dante's wife, Gemma, was allegedly born in the tower) is charm itself. Its seven rooms with sink and shared bathroom are simple; Nos 5, 6 and 7 have huge windows overlooking a gorgeous garden while No 4 spills out onto a terrace. No credit cards.

Hotel San Giovanni (Map p488; ☎ 055 28 83 85; www.hotelsangiovanni.com; Via de' Cerretani 2; s with shared bathroom €30-58, d with shared bathroom €40-75, d with bathroom €65-95; ☎) Buzz to enter and ride the rattly old cage lift (forget jumbo-sized suitcases) up to what was once the bishop's private residence in this 14th-

century *palazzo*. Lofty ceilings top off nine light and spacious rooms, just two of which have a private bathroom: Nos 6, 7 and 8 look at the cathedral. Breakfast costs an extra €5.

MIDRANGE

Borghese Palace Art Hotel (Map p488; ☎ 055 28 43 63; www.borghesepalace.it; Via Ghibellina 174r; s €120, d €140-190, ste €230-240; ☎ ☎ ☎) A key address for art lovers, this stylish ode to design with a glass-topped courtyard and sculptures looming large in the reception showcases original works of art from the 18th century to present day. The location couldn't be more central, breakfast is on a terrace with magnificent views and there's an in-house spa.

Hotel Perseo (Map p488; ☎ 055 21 25 04; www.hotelperseo.it; Via de' Cerretani 1; s €68-125, d €88-165; ☎ ☎ ☎) This three-star hotel was overhauled in 2006 and is run by a trio hailing from Italy, Australia and New Zealand. The decor is light and modern – flatscreen TVs, walk-in showers and mellow natural hues. Doubles cleverly turn into bunk-bed quads, making it a great family choice.

Relais del Duomo (Map p488; ☎ 055 21 01 47; www.relaisdelduomo.it, in Italian; Piazza dell'Olio 2; s €50-70, d €80-100; ☎ ☎ ☎) Location is the prime selling point of this B&B on a quiet traffic-free street around the corner from the Duomo. The four elegant, pastel-coloured rooms are simple but comfortable.

TOP END

Continetale (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 2 72 62; www.lungaromohotels.com; Vicolo dell'Oro 6r; d €300-390, ste €1250-1550; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Owned by the Ferragamo fashion house and designed by fashionable Florentine architect Michel Bonan, this glamorous hotel references 1950s Italy in its vibrant decor, and is about as hip as Florence gets.

Santa Maria Novella Area

BUDGET

ostello Archi Rossi (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 29 08 04; www.hostelarchirossi.com; Via Faenza 94r; dm €18-26; ☎ closed 2 weeks Dec; ☎ ☎) Guests' paintings and graffiti pattern the walls at this ever-busy private hostel near Stazione di Santa Maria Novella. The bright dorms have three to nine beds; some are single-sex and all have private bathrooms. There are washing machines for guests to use (€6 wash and dry), keyed lockers and free internet and wi-fi. No curfew (knock to get in after 2am).

Ostello Gallo d'Oro (Map pp480-1; ☎ 055 552 2964; www.ostellogalloodoro.com; 1st fl, Via Cavour 104; dm €27-32, d €70; 📶 ☎) Dorms at this popular choice max at five beds, all have private bathroom and TV and three have a balcony. Internet and wi-fi are free, breakfast is buffet-style, there are free dinners with wine and beer two nights per week and there's no curfew.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Consigli (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 21 41 72; www.hotelconsigli.com; Lungarno Amerigo Vespucci 50; s €60-120, d €60-150; 📶 ☎) A short walk from town, this riverside Renaissance palace is perfect for guests who are travelling with their own car (it's easy to access and has its own parking). The flowery terrace with deck chairs is a stargazer's dream.

Hotel Paris (Map p488; ☎ 055 28 02 81; www.parishotel.it; Via dei Banchi 2; s €80-125, d €90-180; 📶 ☎) This pair of 15th-century palaces is linked on the 2nd floor by a glass walkway. Three-star rooms sport high ceilings, and window pelmets and bed-heads are adorned with rich, embroidered drapes. The painted ceiling in the breakfast room is breathtaking.

our pick Hotel Santa Maria Novella (Map p488; ☎ 055 27 18 40; www.hotelsantamarianovella.it; Piazza di Santa Maria Novella 1; d €135-200, ste €180-235; 📶 ☎) The bland exterior of this excellent four-star choice gives no hint of the spacious and elegant rooms within. All are beautifully appointed, featuring marble bathrooms, comfortable beds and toiletries from the nearby Officina Profumo-Farmaceutica di Santa Maria Novella (p492). The breakfast spread is lavish and the online booking rates (cited above) are generous.

Hotel Scoti (Map p488; ☎ 055 29 21 28; www.hotelscoti.com; Via de' Tornabuoni 7; s €40-75, d €65-125) Wedged between Dior, Prada and McQueen, this *pensione* is a splendid mix of old-fashioned charm and great value for money. Run with smiling aplomb by Australian Doreen and Italian Carmello, the hotel is enthroned in a 16th-century *palazzo* on Florence's smartest shopping strip. The 11 rooms are clean and comfortable, but the star of the show is the floor-to-ceiling frescoed living room (1780). Breakfast costs an extra €5.

San Lorenzo Area

BUDGET & MIDRANGE

Academy Hostel & Lodge House (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 23986 65; www.academyhostel.eu; Via Ricasoli 9; dm €35-

42, tw with bathroom €72-86; 📶 ☎) On the 1st floor of a 17th-century *palazzo*, this small and relatively new hostel has elicited rave reviews from some of our readers. Its philosophy is that cheap accommodation shouldn't compromise on comfort – dorms (sleeping between three and six) are bright and well set up, with lockers and single beds (no bunks). Internet and wi-fi are free.

Johanna & Johlea (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 463 32 92; www.johanna.it; s €70-120, d €80-170; 📶 ☎) One of the most established B&Bs in town, J&J has more than a dozen tasteful, individually decorated rooms split between five historic residences; some with wi-fi connections. Those desiring total luxury should ask about the suite apartments.

Hotel Casci (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 21 1686; www.hotelcasci.com; Via Cavour 13; s €50-110, d €80-150; ☎ closed 2 weeks Jan; 📶 ☎) This family-run place offers spick and span rooms with flatscreen satellite TVs, cramped but very clean bathrooms and a feisty breakfast buffet with a bottomless cappuccino. Pay cash and you'll usually get a 10% to 15% discount.

San Marco Area

MIDRANGE

Hotel Morandi alla Crocetta (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 234 47 47; www.hotelmorandi.it; Via Laura 50; s €70-90, d €90-170; 📶 ☎) This medieval convent-turned-hotel away from the madding crowds is a stunner. Rooms are refined, tasteful and full of authentic period furnishings and paintings. A couple of rooms have handkerchief-sized gardens to laze in, but the *pièce de résistance* is frescoed room 29 – the former chapel.

Palazzo Alfani (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 29 15 74, 346 0339931; www.palazzoalfani.com; Via Ricasoli 49; 4-person apt €120-300, 8-person €240-500; 📶 ☎) Close to the Galleria dell'Accademia, the five beautiful apartments inside this convent-turned-palace are decorated with original prints and richly upholstered furniture; some overlook a pretty internal garden.

TOP END

Residence Hilda (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 28 80 29; www.residencehilda.it; Via dei Servi; 2-person apt €200-400, 4-person €300-400; 📶 ☎) The super-stylish lounge foyer gives a strong clue as to what can be found in the 12 upstairs suites at this recently opened residence. Apartments are serviced daily and have equipped kitchenettes, excellent bathrooms, decent workbenches and wonderfully

comfy beds. The family suites are perfect if you have little ones in tow. Check the website for specials. No breakfast.

The Oltrarno

BUDGET

Campeggio Michelangelo (Map pp480-1; ☎ 055 681 1977; www.ecvacanze.it, in Italian; Viale Michelangelo 80; adult €9.30-10.60, car & tent €11.40-13; ☎ ☑) The closest campsite to the centre, just off Piazzale Michelangelo, south of the river Arno. Big and comparatively leafy with lovely city views and a bar-café, it's handy for the historic quarter, though it's a steep walk home. Solo backpackers with a tent can pitch up for €10.80 year-round and there are beds in tent dorms for €15.50. Take bus 13 from Stazione di Santa Maria Novella.

Ostello Santa Monaca (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 26 83 38; www.ostello.it; Via Santa Monaca 6; dm €15-20, d €40-48; ☎ ☑) Once a convent, this large Oltrarno hostel near San Spirito has been run by a co-operative since the 1960s. There's a kitchen, laundrette, safe deposits and free internet access and wi-fi. Mixed- and single-sex dorms sleep four to 22 and are locked between 10am and 2pm. Curfew is 2am.

Althea (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 233 53 41; www.florencealthea.it; Via delle Caldaie 25; s €39-65, d €65-90; ☎ ☑) The décor might be 1970s flower power with plenty of chintz, but the good value for money provided by these seven rooms is outstanding. Each is spotlessly clean, and has its own bathroom, fridge and computer terminal.

MIDRANGE

Hotel La Scaletta (Map p488; ☎ 055 28 30 28; www.hotellascaletta.it; Via Guicciardini 13; s €79-94, d €84-109; ☎ ☑ ☑) An austere air wafts through this maze of a hotel, hidden in a 15th-century palazzo near the Palazzo Pitti. But rooms are spacious and taking breakfast/aperitivo on the roof terrace overlooking Boboli is a rare opportunity; rooms with garden views are approximately 20% more expensive.

Hotel Silla (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 234 28 88; www.hotel.silla.it; Via dei Renai 5; s €90-128, d €75-180; ☎ ☎ ☑) Briefly headquarters of the Allied Forces in 1944 and a *pensione* since 1964, Silla sits in a palace well away from the crowds in one of the leafiest parts of Florence. Once the leaves fall in autumn, several rooms and the breakfast terrace enjoy beguiling views across the Arno; otherwise, the outlook is green.

Residenza Santo Spirito (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 265 83 76; www.residenzasspirito.com; Piazza Santo Spirito 9;

d €90-120; ☎) Located on Florence's most buzzing summertime square, this romantic trio of rooms with sky-high ceilings in Palazzo Guadagni (1505) is remarkable. The frescoed Gold Room is the first to go and the Green Room with two connecting double rooms is the family favourite. Breakfast is pricey, so it's best to hit the local cafés instead.

Out of Town

BUDGET

Ostello Villa Camerata (Map pp480-1; ☎ 055 60 14 51; firenzeaighostels.com; Viale Augusto Righi 2-4; dm €20, d/tr/q with bathroom €65/75/88; ☎ ☑) In a converted 17th-century villa surrounded by extensive grounds, and a 30-minute bus ride from town, this HI-affiliated hostel is among Italy's most beautiful. Bus 17 from Stazione di Santa Maria Novella stops 400m from the hostel. Non-HI members pay an extra €3 per night and there's lockout between 10am and 2pm.

EATING

Quality ingredients and simple execution are the hallmarks of Florentine cuisine. The best-known local dish is the juicy *bistecca alla fiorentina*, a slab of prime T-bone steak rubbed with olive oil, seared on the char grill, garnished with salt and pepper and served *al sangue* (bloody). Other dishes that you will regularly see on menus include *crostini* (toasts topped with chicken-liver pâté), *ribollita* (a thick vegetable, bread and bean soup), *pappa al pomodoro* (soup made with bread and tomatoes) and *trippa alla fiorentina* (tripe cooked in a rich tomato sauce).

Duomo & Piazza della Signoria

BUDGET

Oil Shoppe (Map p488; ☎ 055 200 10 92; www.oleum.it; Via Sant'Egidio 22r) Stand in line at this student favourite, an olive-oil shop and sandwich shop that builds huge and tasty sandwiches. Choose your fillings or let chef Alberto Scorzon take the lead with a 10-filling wonder. Queue at the back of the shop for hot subs; at the front for cold.

'Ino (☎ 055 21 92 08; Via dei Georgofili 3r-7r; panini €5-8; ☎ 11am-8pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) Short for *panino*, this stylish sandwich shop near the Uffizi sources its artisan gourmet ingredients locally and uses them in inventive and delicious ways. You can choose your own combination or select from the always-delectable house specials. Scoff on the spot with a glass of

FLORENCE'S FAVOURITE FAST FOOD: TRIPE

When Florentines fancy a fast munch on the move rather than a slow full lunch, they flit by a *trippaio* – a cart on wheels or mobile stand – for a juicy plate or sandwich of tripe. Think cow's stomach chopped up, boiled, sliced and served with seasoning. Yum! Or is it...yuk?

A bastion of good old-fashioned Florentine tradition, *trippai* are few and far between these days. Two old faithfuls still going strong are found on the southwest corner of the Mercato Nuovo (Map p488) and near Via Dante Alighieri close to Piazza della Signoria (Map p488). Pay under €3 for tripe doused in *salsa verde* (a pea-green sauce of smashed parsley, garlic, capers and anchovies) or garnished with salt, pepper and ground chilli. Alternatively, opt for a bowl of *lampredotto* (cow's fourth stomach chopped and simmered for hours).

wine (included in the price of the sandwich) or take away to picnic on the banks of the Arno.

Cantinetta dei Verrazzano (Map p488; ☎ 055 26 85 90; Via dei Tavolini 18-20; platters €4.50-12, focaccia €3-3.50, panini €1.70-3.90; ☒ noon-9pm Mon-Sat) Together, a *forno* (baker's oven) and *cantinetta* (small cellar) equal a match made in heaven. Come here for focaccia fresh from the oven, perhaps topped with caramelised radicchio or porcini mushrooms, washed down with a glass of wine (€2.50 to €8) from the Verrazzano estate in Chianti (p534). Other plates on offer include cheese and meat platters, *panini* filled with truffle or prosciutto, salads and bruschettas.

I Due Fratellini (Map p488; ☎ 055 239 60 96; www.iduefratellini.com; Via dei Cimatori 38; panini €2.50; ☒ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, closed Fri & Sat 2nd half Jun & all Aug) A legend since 1875, this hole in the wall whips out *panini* – sun-dried tomato with goat cheese, wild boar salami, truffled *pecorino* (sheep's milk cheese) and rocket etc – freshly filled as you order. Wash your choice down with a shot, glass or beaker of wine – it's the perfect pavement lunch.

La Canova di Gustavino (Map p488; ☎ 055 239 98 06; Via della Condotta 29; meals €24; ☒ noon-midnight) The rear dining room of this atmospheric *enoteca* (wine bar) is lined with shelves full of Tuscan wine – the perfect accompaniment to a bowl of soup, pasta dish or hearty main. The emphasis here is on Tuscan classics – *ribollita*, *trippa alla fiorentina*, *baccalà alla livornese* (salted cod in a tomato sauce) – but it's perfectly fine if you choose to limit yourself to a simple cheese and meat platter or a bruschetta.

Coquinarius (Map p488; ☎ 055 230 21 53; www.coquinarius.com; Via delle Oche 15; meals €32; ☒ noon-10.30pm) Nestled within the shadow of the Duomo, this *enoteca* is extremely popular with tourists, who respond well to its casually stylish decor and friendly vibe. The menu ranges from salads and crostini (a huge choice of

both) to an unusual array of pastas – try the justly famous ravioli with cheese and pear. Bookings essential.

Santa Maria Novella MIDRANGE

Osteria dei Centopoveri (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 21 88 46; Via Palazzuolo 31; meals €32, set menu €28; ☒ lunch & dinner) The 'hostel of the hundred poor people' is far from being a soup kitchen. Instead, it's a modern dining option serving creative variations on traditional Tuscan cuisine. Choose from decent pizzas, excellent pasta (the lasagnette of fresh porcini mushrooms is delicious) and a range of daily specials.

Il Latini (Map p488; ☎ 055 21 09 16; www.illatini.com; Via dei Palchetti 6; meals €42; ☒ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) You have two choices at this Florentine favourite: request a menu (as a tourist, you might not be offered one) or put yourself in the hands of the exuberant waiters and feast on a mixed antipasto of melt-in-your-mouth crostini and mixed Tuscan meats followed by a bowl of (indifferent) pasta and a hunk of roasted meat – rabbit, lamb, chicken or veal with white beans (the rabbit is particularly tasty). The wine and water flow and if you're lucky you might get a complimentary plate of *cantuccini* (a type of biscuit) and glass of moscato (an Italian dessert wine) with the bill. There are two dinner seatings (7.30pm and 9pm), seating is shared and bookings are mandatory.

our pick **L'Osteria di Giovanni** (Map p488; ☎ 055 28 48 97; Via del Moro 22; meals €49; ☒ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) Our number-one choice for Florentine dining is – insert drum roll – this wonderfully friendly neighbourhood eatery, where everything is delicious and where the final reckoning will be within most budgets. Many opt to start with the house antipasto (a plate of salami, fresh ricotta and crostini with liver pâté) and *lardo*

(marinated pork fat), move onto a plate of homemade pasta (perhaps with porcini mushrooms and black truffles) and then forge ahead with a milk-fed veal chop with roasted cherry tomatoes or a sensational *bistecca alla fiorentina*. Make sure you ask about daily specials, particularly desserts.

TOP END

Cantinetta Antinori (Map p488; ☎ 055 29 22 34; Via de' Tornabuoni 7; meals €60; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri) This *enoteca* is a 1960s creation of the city's most famous wine-making dynasty (www.antinori.it). Located in a *palazzo* dating from 1502, it's a *molto simpatico* spot to sample fine wine accompanied by classic Tuscan cuisine. You can pull up a bar stool and enjoy a glass of wine (the Cabernet Sauvignon-dominated Solaia and Marchese Antinori Chianti Classico DOCG Riserva are particularly highly regarded) with a cheese plate, or colonise a table and order from a limited but alluring menu.

San Lorenzo

BUDGET

Nerbone (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 21 99 49; Mercato Centrale, Piazza del Mercato Centrale; primi/secondi €4/7; ☎ 7am-2pm Mon-Sat) This unpretentious market stall has been serving its rustic dishes to queues of shoppers and stallholders since 1872. It's a great place to try local staples such as *trippa alla fiorentina* and *panini con bollito* (a boiled beef bun).

Trattoria Mario (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 21 85 50; www.trattoriario.com; Via Rosina 2; meals €22; ☎ noon-3.30pm Mon-Sat, closed 3 weeks Aug) Despite being in every guidebook, this jam-packed place retains its soul and allure with locals. A 100% family affair since opening in 1953, its chefs shop at the nearby Mercato Centrale and dish up tasty, dirt-cheap dishes with speed and skill. Get here right on the dot of noon to score a stool (tables are shared) and be aware that credit cards aren't accepted.

MIDRANGE

Ristorante Le Fonticine (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 28 21 06; www.lefonticine.com; Via Nazionale 79r; meals €37; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Named for the 16th-century fountain by Luca della Robbia that is just to the right of the entrance, this popular eatery features the same checked tablecloths, painting-filled walls, serving trollies and – dare we say it – waiters that have been here since it opened in 1959. The huge menu features

excellent homemade pasta and the best *crema di mascarpone* (mascarpone cream) in town.

San Marco

BUDGET

La Mescita (Map pp484-5; Via degli Alfani 70r; plates €4-7, panini €1.60-3.50; ☎ 10.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, closed Aug) Part *enoteca* and part *fiaschetteria* (simple wine bar), this unapologetically old-fashioned place (it opened in 1927) serves up Tuscan specialties such as maccheroni with sausage and *insalata di farro* (farro salad). Noontime tipplers and all-day drinkers mingle at the old marble-topped bar, where you'll find tasty *panini* and *crostini* to go with the daily pouring of Chianti.

MIDRANGE

Accademia Ristorante (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 21 73 43; www.ristoranteaccademia.it; Piazza San Marco 7r; meals €32; ☎ lunch & dinner) There aren't too many decent eateries in this area, which is one of the reasons why this family-run restaurant is perennially packed. Factors such as friendly staff, cheerful decor and consistently good food help, too. The set menu of *antipasto toscana*, a raviolo with porcini mushrooms or truffles, spaghetti in a spicy sauce, and *bistecca alla fiorentina* with oven-roasted potatoes (€30) is excellent value.

Santa Croce

BUDGET

Il Pizzaiuolo (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 24 11 71; Via dei Macci 113r; pizzas €5-10, pastas €6.50-12; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, closed Aug) Nearby Piazza Sant' Ambrogio is a popular drinking spot for young Florentines, who often kick on here to nosh on Neapolitan thick-crust pizzas hot from the wood-fired oven. Simplicity is the rule of thumb, from the name ('The Pizza Maker') to the house speciality, *pizza Margherita* (pizza with tomato, mozzarella and oregano). Bookings are essential for dinner (and even then you'll probably have to queue).

MIDRANGE

Ristorante del Fagioli (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 24 42 85; Corso Tintori 47r; meals €25; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri) This Slow Food favourite near the Basilica di Santa Croce is the archetypal Tuscan trattoria. It opened in 1966 and has been serving well-priced bean dishes, soups and roasted meats to throngs of appreciative local workers and residents ever since. Try the oven-roasted

pork, any of the soups or the *involtini di Gigi* (pan-fried beef slices stuffed with cheese, ham and artichokes). No credit cards.

Antico Noè (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 234 08 38; Volta di San Piero 6r; meals €26; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Sat) Don't be put off by the dank, rough-and-ready alley in which this legendary place (an old butcher's shop with white marble-clad walls and wrought-iron meat hooks) is found. The drunks loitering outside are generally harmless and the down-to-earth Tuscan fodder served in the *osteria* (wine bar serving some food) is a real joy. For a quick bite, choose from the 18 different types of imaginatively stuffed *panini* (€2.50 to €5) served at the adjoining *fiaschetteria*. No credit cards.

Caffè Italiano Sud (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 28 93 68; Via della Vigna Vecchia; meals €30; ☎ 7.30-11pm Tue-Sun) Chef Umberto Montano's ode to southern Italy brings a breath of fresh air into a local food scene that can suffer from being too inward-looking. Loads of homemade pasta – including unusual dishes from his native Puglia – and other typical dishes from the south can be eaten in or taken away. There are also plenty of vegetarian options (unusual in this meat-obsessed region) and pizzas from Osteria del Caffè Italiano's pizzeria (see below).

Trattoria Cibrèo (Map pp484-5; Via dei Macchi 122r; meals €30; ☎ 12.50pm-2.30pm & 6.50-11.15pm Tue-Sat Sep-Jul) Dine here and you'll instantly understand why a queue gathers outside each evening before it opens. Once in, revel in top-notch Tuscan cuisine and personable service. Arrive before 7pm to snag one of the eight tables, and remember: no advance reservations, no credit cards, no pasta and no coffee.

Ristorante Cibrèo (☎ 055 234 11 00; Via del Verrochio 8r; meals €85; ☎ 1-2.30pm & 7-midnight Tue-Sat Sep-Jul) Next door to Trattoria Cibrèo, this place serves some of the best cuisine in Florence, with prices to match.

Osteria del Caffè Italiano (Map p488; ☎ 055 28 90 20; www.caffeitaliano.it; Via dell'Isola delle Stinche 11-13r; meals €42, 5-course set menu €50; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) The menu here holds no surprises – it's full of simple classics such as buffalo mozzarella with parma ham, ravioli stuffed with ricotta and *cavalo nero* (black cabbage) and succulent skewered meats – and the service on our recent visits has been spectacularly bad, but there's still something satisfying about dining in this old-fashioned *osteria* occupying the ground floor of the 14th-century Palazzo Salviati. It's an excellent spot to

try the city's famous *bistecca alla fiorentina* (per kg €50).

Next door, the Pizzeria del Caffè Italiano has a simple dining space and offers a limited menu of three types of pizzas – Margherita, Napoli and Marinara.

The Oltrarno

To taste a different side of Florence, cross the river and make a beeline for the streets around busy Piazza Santo Spirito. The neighbouring quarter of San Frediano hides a couple of gems too.

BUDGET

Pop Café (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 21 38 52; www.popcafe.net; Piazza Santo Spirito 18r; meals €28; ☎ 12.30pm-2am Sep-Jul) Florentine students have adopted this pocket-sized space as their own. Grab a seat and tuck into a super-healthy breakfast, vegetarian buffet lunch (€6 to €8) or Sunday brunch (€8, from 12.30pm to 3pm). There's an all-vegetarian *aperitivo* buffet between 7.30pm and 9.30pm.

Trattoria La Casalinga (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 21 86 24; Via de' Michelozzi 9r; meals €20; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Family run and much loved by locals, this unpretentious and always busy place is one of the city's cheapest trattorias. You'll be relegated behind locals in the queue – it's a fact of life and not worth protesting – with the eventual reward being hearty peasant dishes such as *bollito misto con salsa verde* (mixed boiled meats with green sauce).

MIDRANGE

Olio & Convivium (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 265 81 98; www.conviviumfirenze.it; in Italian; Via di Santo Spirito 4; meals €37; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon, 10am-3pm & 5.30-10.30pm Tue-Sat) A key address on any gastronomy agenda: your tastebuds will tingle at the sight of the legs of hams, conserved truffles, wheels of cheese, artisan-made bread and other delectable delicatessen products sold in its shop. You can order a sandwich to go, or take advantage of the bargain lunchtime menu (cold mixed platter, wine, water and dessert for €15). Come dusk, a more sophisticated menu is on offer.

Ristorante Il Guscio (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 22 44 21; Via dell'Orto 49; meals €39; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) This family-run gem in San Frediano used to be one of the city's best-kept secrets, but recently the local foodie grapevine has been running hot with raves

TOP FIVE GELATERIE

Florentines take their gelato seriously. There's a healthy rivalry among the local *gelaterie artigianale* (makers of handmade gelato), who all strive to create the creamiest, most flavourful and freshest product in the city. Flavours change according to what fruit is in season, and a serve costs around €2/3/4/5 for small/medium/large/maxi. After extensive on-the-ground-research, we have narrowed down our favourites:

- **Carabé** (Map pp484-5; www.gelatocarabe.com; Via Ricasoli 60r; ☎ 10am-midnight, closed mid-Dec-mid-Jan) Traditional Sicilian gelato, granita (sorbet) and brioche (a Sicilian ice-cream sandwich).
- **Gelateria dei Neri** (Map p488; Via de' Neri 22r; ☎ 9am-midnight) Semifreddo-style gelato that is cheaper than its competitors; known for its coconut, gorgonzola (yes, you read that correctly), and ricotta and fig flavours.
- **Gelateria Vivoli** (Map p488; Via Isola delle Stinche 7; ☎ 9am-1am Tue-Sat) Choose a flavour from the huge variety on offer (both pistachio and chocolate with orange are crowd favourites) and scoff it in the pretty piazza opposite; tubs only.
- **Grom** (Map p488; www.grom.it; cnr Via del Campanile & Via delle Oche; ☎ 10.30am-11pm, till midnight Apr-Sep) This relative newcomer has taken the city by storm; the flavours are all delectable and many ingredients are organic.
- **Vestri** (Map pp484-5; www.vestri.it; Borgo degli Albizi 11r; ☎ 10.30am-8pm Mon-Sat) Specialises in chocolate; go for the decadent white chocolate with wild strawberries or the chocolate with pepper.

about the exceptional dishes coming out of its kitchen. Meat and fish are given joint billing, with triumphs such as white bean soup with prawns and fish joining superbly executed mains including guinea fowl breast in balsamic vinegar on the sophisticated menu. The lunchtime deal of a daily plate, wine, water and coffee costs a ludicrously low €12.

Self-Catering

For those looking to self-cater, there are some handy options.

Mercato Centrale (Map pp484-5; Piazza del Mercato Centrale; ☎ 7am-2pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat) Central food market inside an iron-and-glass structure dating to 1874.

Mercato di Sant'Amrogio (Map pp484-5; Piazza Sant'Amrogio; ☎ 7am-2pm Mon-Sat) Outdoor food market with intimate, local flavour.

Enoteca Vitae (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 246 65 03; vitae@email.it; Borgo la Croce 75r; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-8.30pm Mon-Sat) Fill your water bottle with wine for as little as €2 per litre at this wine shop near Mercato di Sant'Amrogio.

DRINKING

Cafes

Caffè Cibrè (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 234 58 53; Via del Verrochio 5r; ☎ 8-1am Tue-Sat Sep-Jul) This is the perfect spot for a mid-morning coffee and sugar-dusted *ciambella* (doughnut ring) after shopping at the Mercato di Sant'Amrogio.

The light lunches here (served from 1pm to 2.30pm) are also deservedly popular.

Caffè Giacosa (Map p488; ☎ 055 21 16 56; Via della Spada 10r) Owned by Florentine fashion designer Roberto Cavalli, whose flagship store is located next door, this super-stylish cafe offers good coffee, *panini* and pastries. Be prepared to have your outfit scrutinised by the elegant clientele.

Chiaroscuro (Map p488; ☎ 055 21 42 47; www.chiaroscuro.it; Via del Corso 36r; ☎ 7.30am-9.30pm) A casual cafe offering excellent coffee and a bustling international vibe.

La Terrazza (Map p488; Piazza della Repubblica 1; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-8pm Sun) For a bird's-eye view of the Duomo and Piazza della Repubblica, visit the rooftop cafe of central department store Rinascente.

Robiglio (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 21 45 01; www.robiglio.it; Via de' Servi 112r; ☎ 7.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, closed 3 weeks Aug) Conveniently located near the Galleria dell'Accademia and Piazza della SS Annunziata, Robiglio is known for its old-fashioned elegance and delicious pastries and cakes.

Bars

Like most Italian cities, Florence has wholeheartedly embraced the *aperitivo* trend over the past decade. Many of the bars listed here offer a snack buffet or plate with the price of a drink between 7pm and 9pm.

TOP FIVE HISTORIC CAFES

Piazza della Signoria and Piazza della Repubblica are the traditional homes of the city's cafe culture. A key fact to remember: it is substantially cheaper to drink standing up at the bar in these cafes; sit down and prices will be three to four times more expensive (the only exception is Procacci, where everyone orders at the bar and there are only a few tables).

- **Caffè Concerto Paszkowski** (Map p488; ☎ 055 21 02 36; www.paszkowski.com; Piazza della Repubblica 31-35; ☎ 7-2am Tue-Sun) Born as a brewery overlooking the city's fish market in 1846, this Florentine institution loved the literary set a century ago. Today it pulls a whole gamut of punters with its great cakes and live piano music.
- **Giubbe Rosse** (Map p488; ☎ 055 21 22 80; Piazza della Repubblica 13-14r; mains €15; ☎ 8-2am daily) Die-hard members of the early 20th-century Futurist artistic movement drank and debated here. The coffee is good, but the cakes are disappointing.
- **Caffè Gilli** (Map p488; ☎ 055 21 38 96; Piazza della Repubblica 3r; ☎ 8-1am Wed-Mon) Utterly delectable cakes, excellent coffee and a beautifully preserved Art Nouveau interior make this the best of Piazza della Repubblica's cafes. Its *millefoglie* (sheets of puff pastry filled with rich vanilla or chocolate chantilly cream) and fresh-fruit tartlets are beyond compare.
- **Rivoire** (Map p488; ☎ 055 21 44 12; Piazza della Signoria 4r; ☎ 8am-midnight Tue-Sun) Grab a table on its terrace facing Palazzo Vecchio and settle into a long people-watching session. Tourists and locals have been colonising tables on Rivoire's terrace ever since 1872, when Enrico Rivoire left the service of the Dukes of Savoy and began to seduce Florentines with his exquisite chocolate creations. Go for coffee or *aperitivo*.
- **Procacci** (Map p488; ☎ 055 21 16 56; Via de' Tornabuoni 64r; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat) The last remaining bastion of genteel old Florence on Via de' Tornabuoni, this tiny cafe was born in 1885 opposite the English pharmacy as a delicatessen serving truffles in its repertoire of tasty morsels. Bite-sized *panini tartufati* (truffle pâté rolls, €1.80) remain the thing to order, best accompanied by a glass of *prosecco* (€4.50).

Casa del Vino (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 21 56 09; www.casadelvino.it; Via dell'Ariento 16r; ☎ 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, closed Aug) This *enoteca* close to the San Lorenzo Market pours a good range of wines by the glass and offers plenty of rustic *panini* and *crostini* to accompany your drinks. You'll have to stand or squeeze onto a bench.

Colle Bereto (Map p488; ☎ 055 28 31 56; Piazza Strozzi 5r; ☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Sat summer, to 9pm winter) Dark oversized shades are vital at this hip bar, where fashionistas strike poses on a sleek, wood-decked terrace. Inside, pea-green neon and transparent Kartell chairs scream design. It's owned by a wine estate in Chianti, so *vino* is the tiple of choice.

JJ Cathedral Pub (Map p488; ☎ 055 265 68 92; www.jjcathedral.com; Piazza San Giovanni 4r; ☎ 10am-2.30am; ☎) JJ's is a magnet for foreign students on vacation, who come here to swill beer and admire the views of the Duomo. Try to snaffle the upstairs balcony table.

La Dolce Vita (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 28 45 95; www.dolcevitaflorence.com; Piazza del Carmine 6r; ☎ 5pm-2am Tue-Sun, closed 2 weeks Aug) Live Brazilian beats or jazz set

the mood during *aperitivo* on Wednesdays and Thursdays on the outdoor terrace of this popular bar. Inside, there's a more intimate feel, with a changing exhibition program and designer decor.

our pick Le Volpe e L'uva (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 239 81 32; Piazza dei Rossi 1; ☎ 11am-9pm Mon-Sat) Florence's best *enoteca* – bar none. Just over the Ponte Vecchio, this intimate bar has an impressive list of wines by the glass and serves a delectable array of accompanying antipasti, including juicy *prosciutto di Parma*, lardo-topped *crostini* and boutique Tuscan cheeses. There's a tiny outdoor terrace and a small number of bar stools.

Moyo (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 247 97 38; www.moyo.it; Via de' Benci 23r; ☎ 6pm-2am; ☎) A drinking establishment held in great esteem by the city's party-mad student crowd, Moyo also serves American-style breakfasts and light lunches. Come *aperitivo* time, the outdoor seating here is often packed. Wi-fi access is free.

Negroni (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 24 36 47; www.negroni-bar.com; Via dei Renai 17r; ☎ 8-2am Mon-Sat, 6.30pm-2am

Sun) Negroni shakes up a mean cocktail, including its namesake, made with gin, sweet vermouth and Campari and claimed as the bar's own invention. The 'ethnic *l'aperimundo*' (aperitivo buffet featuring foods from different cuisines) pulls in locals galore.

Plasma (Map pp480-1; ☎ 055 051 69 26; www.virtualplasma.it; Piazza Ferrucci 1r; ☎ 7pm-2am Wed-Sun) A hip set sips cocktails on Level 0, and gets lost in video art projected on eight 42in plasma screens on Level 1 at this minimalist fiber-optic-lit drinking space. DJs spin till late. Well worth the trek along the Lungarno.

Mayday Club (Map p488; ☎ 055 238 12 90; www.maydayclub.it; Via Dante Alighieri 16r; ☎ 8pm-2am Mon-Sat, closed Aug) Not just a bar, this alternative space markets itself as 'a laboratory and meeting place where it is possible to communicate and interact with open-minded people from other realities and backgrounds' – we're not sure whether they're all from the same planet. It hosts art exhibitions, serves good cocktails and has an eclectic decor.

Rex Caffè (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 248 03 31; Via Fiesolana 23r; ☎ 6pm-2.30am Sep-May) Gaudy decor, funky music and expertly concocted cocktails make this American-style bar a long-standing favourite.

Sei Divino (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 21 77 91; Borgo Ognissanti 42r; ☎ 8am-2am; ☎) This bar is known for many things – its great wine, mood music, DJs, video projections, wi-fi, no-fuss lunch deal and *aperitivo* spread. Most of the action is on the pavement.

Slowly Café (Map p488; ☎ 055 264 53 54; www.slowlycafe.com; Via Porta Rossa 63r; ☎ 9pm-3am Mon-Sat, closed Aug) Sleek and sometimes snooty, this bar is known for its fruit-garnished cocktails, glam

interior and Florentine Lotharios. Music is dominated by Ibiza-style lounge tracks.

ENTERTAINMENT

Newsstands sell *Firenze Spettacolo* (€1.80; www.firenzespettacolo.it, in Italian), the city's definitive entertainment publication, which is published monthly. Otherwise, a clutch of freebies, including *The Florentine* (www.theflorentine.net), *Informacittà Toscana 24ore* and *Florence Tuscany News* (www.informacittafirenze.it), list what's on. The city listings in the local edition of *La Repubblica* are also useful.

Tickets for cultural events are sold through **Box Office** (Map pp484-5; www.boxol.it, in Italian; Via Luigi Alamanni 39; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Tue-Fri, 3.30-7.30pm Mon) and **Ticket One** (www.ticketone.it, in Italian).

Live Music

Most venues for live music are outside the town centre and are closed in July and/or August.

Loonees (Map p488; ☎ 333 1335330; www.loonees.it; Via Porta Rossa 15; admission free; ☎ 9pm-3am Mon-Sat, closed Aug) A popular venue for the city's international students, this subterranean club hosts live tribute bands and spins reggae, blues and rock tracks.

Caruso Jazz Café (Map p488; ☎ 055 267 02 07; www.carusozjazzcafe.com; Via Lambertesca 14-16r; ☎ 9.30am-3.30pm & 6pm-midnight Mon-Sat) Thursday and Friday nights see jazz musicians take the stage at this popular bar.

Jazz Club (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 247 97 00; www.jazzclubfirenze.com; Via Nuovo de' Caccini 3; membership €8.50; ☎ 9pm-2am Mon-Fri, to 3am Sat, closed Jul & Aug) Live

A STANDING OVATION...

...is what this stunning dining space and stage created by famous Florentine chef Fabio Picchi and his equally famous comic actress wife, Maria Cassi, gets. Extraordinary value for money and with fabulous entertainment, **Teatro del Sale** (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 200 14 92; www.teatrodel-sale.com; Via dei Macchi 111r; breakfast/lunch/dinner €7/20/30; ☎ 9-11am, 12.30-2.15pm & 7-11pm Tue-Sat Sep-Jul), in an old Florentine theatre, steals the show. Join the club (annual membership fee €5) and make yourself at home in a leather armchair between bookshelves in the cosy wood-panelled library or in a director's chair around fold-up tables in the airy theatre space. Help yourself to water and wine, help yourself to antipasti, then wait for the chef to yell out what's cooking through the glass hatch and queue for a *primo* and *secondo*. *Dolce* (sweets) and coffee are also laid out buffet-style. Lunch is a laid-back affair, while dinner is followed by a performance (advance reservations required) at 9.30pm: clear away your table, line up your chair and sit back for an evening of drama, music or comedy.

jazz bands play from Tuesday to Saturday; on Mondays there's a free-for-all jam session.

Tenax (off Map pp480-1; ☎ 055 30 81 60; www.tenax.org; Via Pratese 46; admission varies; ☎ 10pm-4am Tue-Sun Oct-Apr) Northwest of town, this is the city's biggest venue for live bands and doubles as a house disco club; check online for details. Take bus 29 or 30 from Stazione di Santa Maria Novella.

Nightclubs

Florence's tame dance scene grinds to a halt in summer (June to September) when most clubs – bar Central Park and Meccanò Club, which have outdoor dance floors – relocate to the Versilian coast. Admission is often more expensive for males than females and is sometimes free if you arrive early (between 9.30pm and 11pm).

Central Park (Map pp480-1; ☎ 380 344 49 56; Via Fosso Macinante 1; admission varies; ☎ 11pm-4am Wed-Sat) Flit between five different dance floors in city park Parco delle Cascine, where everything from Latin to pop, house to drum and bass plays – many a top Ibiza DJ has spun tunes here. From May the dance floor moves outside beneath the stars.

Disco Club YAB (Map p488; ☎ 055 215160; www.yab.it, in Italian; Via de' Sassetti 5r; admission free Mon, Tue & Thu, €15 incl 1 drink Fri & Sat; ☎ 9pm-4am, closed Jun-Sep) It's been around since the 1970s, but You Are Beautiful remains a hit with locals and visiting students alike. Smoove on Monday is the hottest hip-hop/R&B night in town; Saturdays are always packed.

Meccanò Club (Map pp480-1; ☎ 380 3444956; Viale degli Olmi 10; admission varies; ☎ 11pm-5am Tue-Sat) Flo's other big-crowd disco, also in the city park, touts three dance spaces spinning house, funk and standard commercial music to a mainstream youthful set.

Tabasco Disco Gay (Map p488; ☎ 055 21 30 00; www.tabascogay.it, in Italian; Piazza Santa Cecilia 3; ☎ 10.30pm-late Tue-Sun) The city's most popular gay club welcomes both sexes and is still going strong after nearly four decades.

Cinemas

Few cinemas screen subtitled films (*versione originale*). The centrally located **Odeon Cinehall** (Map p488; ☎ 055 29 50 51; www.cinehall.it; Piazza Strozzi 2) is the notable exception.

Theatre, Classical Music & Dance

The month of July sees the Festival Firenze Classica, when Florence's highly regarded

Orchestra da Camera Toscana (www.orcafi.it) performs classical music in the atmospheric settings of the Oratorio di San Michele a Castello and Palazzo Strozzi (p483); between April and October, the orchestra performs in the Chiesa di Orsanmichele (p482) and in the courtyard of the Museo del Bargello (p490).

Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino (Map pp484-5; ☎ information & credit-card bookings 055 27 793 50, bookings 055 28 72 22; www.maggiomusicalefiorentino.com; Corso Italia 16) The curtain rises on opera, classical concerts and ballet at this lovely theatre, host to the **Maggio Musicale Fiorentina** (www.maggiomusicalefiorentino.com), an international concert festival held between late April and June.

Teatro Verdi (Map p488; ☎ 055 21 23 20; www.teatroverdifirenze.it; Via Ghibellina 99) Hosts drama, opera, concerts and dance.

Teatro della Pergola (Map p488; ☎ 055 2 26 41; www.teatrodellapergola.com, in Italian; Via della Pergola 18) Beautiful city theatre with stunning entrance that hosts classical concerts organised by the **Amici della Musica** (☎ 055 60 74 40; www.amicimusicafirenze.it, in Italian), October to April.

SHOPPING

Tacky mass-produced souvenirs are everywhere, but serious shoppers don't have to look far to identify the top-quality leather goods, jewellery, hand-embroidered linens, designer fashion, natural pharmaceuticals, handmade paper, wine and gourmet foods that Florence is famous for.

For a useful and authoritative guide to the city's fashion ateliers, go to www.florenceartfashion.com, a website put together by the City of Florence's Department of Tourism and Fashion. It lists fashion (men's, women's and children's), jewellery, footwear, leatherwear, textiles and perfume ateliers; shows their locations on maps; and advertises occasional free guided tours in its 'news' section.

Fashion

Designer fashion boutiques strut their stuff along Via de' Tornabuoni, Via della Vigna Nuova and Via Strozzi. Via Roma, Via de' Calzaiuoli, Via Porta Rossa and Via Por Santa Maria also host plenty of shops liable to lure cash and credit cards out of your wallet.

The tourist office has a list of designer outlet stores selling last season's collections at discounted prices, including **The Mall** (☎ 055 865 77 75; www.themall.it; Via Europa 8, Leccio; ☎ 10am-7pm), 35km from Florence; and the **Barberino Designer**

Outlet (☎ 055 84 21 61; www.barberino.mcarthurglen.it; A1 Florence-Bologna; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Fri, to 9pm Sat & Sun, 2-8pm Mon Jan, Jun-Sep & Dec), 40km north of the city in Barberino di Mugello.

Buses to The Mall (€3.10, four daily on weekdays, two daily on weekends) leave from the SITA bus station; check the timetable for details of return services (12.45pm and 7.05pm daily plus 4pm Monday to Saturday at the time of research). To get to Barberino, take an outlet shuttle bus (return €12) leaving from Fortezza da Basso and Piazza Stazione in Florence at 10am daily and returning at 1.30pm.

Markets

Piazza Santo Spirito hosts an antique/flea market from 8am to 6pm on the second Sunday of each month; and a food, wine and locally produced gift market on the third Sunday of the month.

Mercato de San Lorenzo (Map pp484-5; Piazza San Lorenzo; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Leather, clothing and jewellery of varying quality on and around Piazza San Lorenzo.

Mercato dei Pulci (Map pp484-5; Piazza dei Giompi; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) A flea market.

Mercato Nuovo (Map p488; Loggia Mercato Nuovo; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat) Tourist kitsch and leather.

Specialist Shops

Via de' Gondi and Borgo de' Greci, east of Piazza della Signoria, seethe with leather shops selling jackets, trousers, shoes and bags, as do the street markets (above). Otherwise, try Scuola del Cuio, adjoining the Basilica di Santa Croce (Map pp484-5).

For paper products, go to **Pineider** (Map p488; ☎ 055 28 46 55; www.pineider.com; Piazza della Signoria 13-14) or **Alberto Cozzi** (Map p488; ☎ 055 29 49 68; Via del Parione 35r; ☎ Mon-Fri).

For jewellery, head to **Alessandro Dari** (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 24 47 47; www.alessandrodari.com; Via San Niccolò 115r) and for natural pharmaceuticals and perfumes go to Officina Profumo-Farmaceutica di Santa Maria Novella (p492) or **Officina de' Tornabuoni** (Map p488; ☎ 055 21 10 06; www.officinadetornabuoni.com; Via de' Tornabuoni 19, ☎ Mon afternoon-Sun).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Amerigo Vespucci Airport (FLR; ☎ 055 306 13 00; www.aeroporto.firenze.it), 5km northwest of the city centre, caters for domestic and a handful of European flights. The much larger **Pisa International Airport Galileo Galilei** (☎ 050 84 93

00; www.pisa-airport.com) is one of northern Italy's main international and domestic airports. It is closer to Pisa (p528), but is well linked with Florence by public transport (see p510).

Bus

From the **SITA bus station** (Map pp484-5; ☎ 800 3737 60; www.sitabus.it, in Italian; Via Santa Caterina da Siena 17r; ☎ information office 8.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat), just west of Piazza della Stazione, there are *corse rapide* (express services) to/from Siena (€6.80, 1¼ hours, at least hourly between 6.10am and 9.15pm). To get to San Gimignano (€6) you need to go to Poggibonsi (50 minutes, at least hourly between 6.10am and 7.50pm) and catch a connecting service (30 minutes, at least hourly between 6.05am and 8.35pm). Direct buses also serve Castellina in Chianti, Greve in Chianti and other smaller cities throughout Tuscany.

Vaubus (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 21 51 55; www.vaibus.it, in Italian; Piazza della Stazione) and its partner buslines runs buses to/from Pistoia (€3, 50 minutes, four daily), Lucca (€5.10, 1½ hours, frequent) and Pisa (€6.10, two hours, hourly).

Car & Motorcycle

Florence is connected by the A1 northwards to Bologna and Milan, and southwards to Rome and Naples. The Autostrada del Mare (A11) links Florence with Prato, Lucca, Pisa and the coast, but locals use the FI-PI-LI – a *superstrada* (expressway, no tolls); look for blue signs saying FI-PI-LI (as in Firenze–Pisa–Livorno). Another dual carriageway, the S2, links Florence with Siena.

Train

Florence's central train station is **Stazione di Santa Maria Novella** (Map pp484-5; Piazza della Stazione). The **information counter** (☎ 7am-7pm) faces the tracks in the main foyer, as does Consorzio ITA (sign-posted Informazioni Turistiche Alberghiere), which sells tickets for shuttle buses to/from Pisa airport and for guided tours.

Florence is on the Rome–Milan line. There are regular trains to/from Rome (€16 to €40, 1¼ to 3¼ hours), Bologna (€5.40 to €24.70, one hour to 1¼ hours), Milan (€22.50 to €44.70, 2¼ to 3½ hours) and Venice (€19 to €53.20, 2¾ to 4½ hours).

Frequent regional trains run to Pistoia (€3, 50 minutes to one hour, four daily), Pisa (€5.60 to €11.40, one to 1½ hours, frequent) and Lucca (€5, 1½ to 1¾ hours, half-hourly).

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

A **Volainbus shuttle** (one-way/return €5/8, 25min) travels between Amerigo Vespucci Airport and Florence's Santa Maria Novella train station/SITA bus station every 30 minutes between 6am and 11.30pm.

Terravision (Map pp484-5; www.terravision.eu) runs services (adult single/return €10/16, child €5/9, 70 minutes, up to 13 daily) between the bus stop outside Florence's Stazione di Santa Maria Novella (Via Alamanni) and Pisa International Airport Galileo Galilei. In Florence get tickets at the Consorzio ITA in the train station and at the **Terravision desk** (Map pp484-5; Via Alamanni 9r; ☎ 6am-7pm) inside Deanna Bar opposite the Terravision bus stop; at Pisa airport, the Terravision ticket desk is in the arrival hall.

Regular trains link Florence's Stazione di Santa Maria Novella with Pisa International Airport Galileo Galilei (€5.60, 1½ hours, at least hourly from 4.30am to 10.25pm).

A taxi between Amerigo Vespucci Airport and central Florence costs a flat rate of €20, plus surcharges of €2 on Sundays and holidays, €3.30 between 10pm and 6am and €1 per bag. As you exit the terminal building, turn right and you will come to the taxi rank.

Bicycle

Bike-tour operator **Florence by Bike** (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 48 89 92; www.florencebybike.com; Via San Zanobi 120r; ☎ 9am-7.30pm) rents wheels (city bike €14.50 per day, scooter €68 per day), as does the open-air rental outlet **Biciclette a Noleggio** (Map pp484-5; Piazza della Stazione; per hr/day €1.50/8; ☎ 7.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-7pm Sun May-Sep, reduced hr Oct-Apr), in front of Stazione di Santa Maria Novella.

Car & Motorcycle

Most traffic is banned from the historic centre. See the boxed text below for details.

There is free street parking around Piazzale Michelangelo (park within blue lines; white lines are for residents only). Pricey (€18 per day) underground parking can be found in the area around the Fortezza da Basso (Map pp484-5) and in the Oltrarno beneath Piazzale di Porta Romana (Map pp484-5). Otherwise, many hotels can arrange parking for guests.

Car-rental agencies include the following:

Avis (Map pp484-5; ☎ 199 10 01 33; Borgo Ognissanti 128r)

Europcar (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 29 04 38; Borgo Ognissanti 53-57r)

Hertz (Map pp484-5; ☎ 199 11 22 11; Via Maso Finiguerra 33r)

Public Transport

ATAF (Azienda Trasporti Area Fiorentina; Map pp484-5; ☎ 800 42 4500; www.ataf.net, in Italian) buses and electric *bus-sini* (minibuses) serve the city and its periphery. Most – including bus 7 to Fiesole and bus 13 to Piazzale Michelangelo – start/terminate at the ATAF bus stops opposite the southeast exit of Stazione di Santa Maria Novella.

Tickets cost €1.20 (€2 on board) and are sold at the **ATAF ticket & information office** (Map pp484-5; Piazza Adua; ☎ 7.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, to 1.30pm Sat), next to the bus stops outside the train station. A carnet of 10/21 tickets costs €10/20, a *biglietto multiplo* (four-journey ticket) is €4.50 and a one-/three-day pass is €5/12. Passengers caught travelling without a time-stamped ticket (punch it on board) are fined €40.

Taxi

For a taxi call ☎ 055 42 42 or ☎ 055 43 90.

AROUND FLORENCE

FIESOLE

pop 14,119

This bijoux village perched in hills 9km north-east of Florence is the city's traditional get-

WARNING

There is a closely monitored Limited Traffic Zone (Zona Traffico Limitato; ZTL) in Florence's historic centre between 7.30am and 7.30pm Monday to Friday and 7.30am to 6pm Saturday for all nonresidents. The exclusion also applies on Friday, Saturday and Sunday between midnight and 4am mid-May to the end of October.

If you transgress, a fine of around €150 will be sent to you (or the car-hire company you have used). Many travellers have written to us to complain about credit-card charges from car-hire companies being levied months after their unknowing infraction of the ZTL occurred, often with administrative costs of up to €100 added to the fine. For a map of the ZTL, go to www.comune.fi.it/opencms/export/sites/retecivica/materiali/turismo/ztltnov.JPG.

away. Its cooler air, olive groves, scattering of Renaissance-styled villas and spectacular views of the plain below have seduced for centuries (victims include Boccaccio, Marcel Proust, Gertrude Stein and Frank Lloyd Wright) – and still do.

The **tourist office** (☎ 055 597 83 73; www.comune.fiesole.fi.it, in Italian; Via Portigiani 3; ☎ 9.30am–6.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–1pm & 2–6pm Sat & Sun Mar–Oct, 9.30am–6pm Mon–Sat, 10am–4pm Sun Nov–Feb) is just off the main square, a couple of doors down from the archaeological site. It can supply maps and information about walks in the area.

Sights & Activities

Make the **Area Archeologica** (☎ 055 5 94 77; www.fiesolemusei.it; Via Portigiani 1; adult/child under 6yr/concession €12/free/8; ☎ 10am–7pm Wed–Mon Apr–Sep, to 6pm Wed–Mon Oct & Mar, to 4pm Thu–Mon Nov–Feb) your first stop. A pretty spot to stroll, the archaeological area ensnares an Etruscan temple (Fiesole was founded in the 7th century BC by the Etruscans), Roman baths, an archaeological museum with exhibits from the Bronze Age to the Roman period, and a 1st-century-BC Roman theatre where live music and theatre is performed during the **Estate Fiesolana** (held June to August) and **Vivere Jazz Festival** (www.viverejazz.it; ☎ mid-July).

Your ticket to the Area Archeologica also gives admission to the tiny **Museo Bandini** (☎ 055 5 94 77; Via Dupré; ☎ 9.30am–7pm Apr–Sep, 9.30am–6pm Oct & Mar, 10am–5pm Wed–Mon Nov–Dec, 11am–5pm Thu–Mon Jan & Feb) next door. The collection of early Tuscan Renaissance works inside includes fine medallions by Giovanni della Robbia (c 1505–20) and Taddeo Gaddi's luminous *Annunciation* (1340–45).

From the museum, a 300m walk along Via Dupré will bring you to the **Museo Primo Conti** (☎ 055 59 70 95; www.fondazioneprimconti.org; Via Dupré 18; admission €3; ☎ 9.30am–1.30pm Mon–Sat), where the eponymous avant-garde 20th-century artist lived and worked. The views from the garden here are lovely, and there are more than 60 of his paintings inside. Ring to enter.

Backtrack to Piazza Mino di Fiesole, preceded over by the **Cattedrale di San Romolo** (Piazza della Cattedrale 1; ☎ 7.30am–noon & 3–5pm), and make your way up steep Via San Francesco. Your reward will be staggeringly beautiful views of Florence from a terrace next to the 15th-century **Basilica di Sant'Alessandro**, which hosts temporary exhibitions and has irregular opening hours. Further up the hill, you can also

visit the 14th-century **Chiesa di San Francesco** (☎ 9am–noon & 3–6pm).

Sleeping & Eating

Campeggio Panoramico (☎ 055 59 90 69; www.florencecamping.com; Via Peramonda 1; camping per person €9–10 plus €12–15 site cost; ☎ ☎) Larger and cooler than the camp sites in Florence and with panoramic views of the city. It offers laundry and kitchen facilities, and its mini-mart, cafe and restaurant operate between April and October.

Villa Aurora (☎ 055 5 93 63; www.villaaurora.net; Piazza Mino da Fiesole 39; s €135–185, d €120–245; ☎ ☎ ☎) Built right on the main square in 1860, Villa Aurora offers relatively bland standard rooms and far more impressive deluxe rooms featuring original frescoes – one has a spectacular panoramic view of Florence from its private balcony. The same view is enjoyed from the pagoda-covered terrace, where guests dine in style during the summer months.

Ristorante La Reggia degli Etruschi (☎ 055 5 93 85; www.lareggia.org; Via San Francesco; meals €37; ☎ 11am–3pm & 6–11pm) The cuisine – which features dishes such as homemade *tagliatelle* with guinea-hen sauce or risotto with porcini mushrooms and local *pecorino* – plays second fiddle to a stunning view at this terrace restaurant tucked up high in an old stone wall. If you don't feel like a large meal, platters of cheese or salami (€10 to €12) are available. On weekends, bookings are essential.

Trattoria Le Cave di Maiano (☎ 055 5 91 33; www.trattoriacavedimaiano.it; Via Cave di Maiano 16, Maiano; meals €36; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Mon winter) Florentines adore this terrace restaurant in Maiano, a neighbouring village five minutes from Fiesole by car, and flock here every fine weekend to enjoy leisurely lunches on the outdoor terrace. The food here is memorable – huge servings are the rule of thumb and everything is home-made, with pastas and vegetable dishes being particularly impressive. A taxi from Fiesole costs approximately €9 and the trip back will be double that (the meter starts ticking when the taxi leaves its base in Fiesole to collect you).

Getting There & Away

Take ATAF bus 7 (€1.20, 30 minutes) from Florence. If you want to be sure of a seat, it's best to get on the bus at Piazza dell'Unità Italiana, one stop east of Stazione di Santa Maria Novella. The bus travels via the station and Piazza San Marco, winds its way up the

hilly and winding road to Fiesole and terminates at Piazza Mino da Fiesole. If you're driving, Fiesole is signed from Florence's Piazza della Libertà, north of the cathedral.

NORTHERN & WESTERN TUSCANY

Travel through this part of Tuscany, and you will be left with a true understanding of what the term 'slow travel' really means. Linger over lunches of rustic regional specialties swiftly becomes the norm, as do activities such as meandering through medieval hill-top villages, taking leisurely bike rides along a coastal wine trail with spectacular scenery or trekking an island where Napoleon was once exiled. Even the larger towns here – including the university hub of Pisa and 'love at first sight' Lucca – have an air of tranquillity and tradition about them that positively begs the traveller to stay for a few days of cultural R&R.

PISTOIA

pop 89,418

Pleasant Pistoia sits snugly at the foot of the Apennines. As little as 45 minutes northwest of Florence by train, it deserves more attention than it normally gets. Although it has grown well beyond its medieval ramparts, its historic centre is well preserved and extremely pedestrian-friendly.

On Wednesday and Saturday mornings, the main square Piazza del Duomo and its surrounding streets become a sea of blue awnings and jostling shoppers as Pistoia hosts a lively **market**. The town's **produce market** (☎ Mon-Sat) occupies Piazza della Sala, west of the cathedral.

On 25 July each year, a medieval equestrian and jousting festival known as **Giostra dell'Orso** (Joust of the Bear) fills Piazza del Duomo in honour of Pistoia's patron saint, San Giacomo.

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 0573 2 16 22; www.pistoia.turismo.toscana.it, in Italian; cnr Piazza del Duomo & Via della Torre; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-6pm) supplies maps, brochures and advice.

Sights

Pistoia's visual wealth is concentrated on Piazza del Duomo – and is reason alone to

visit this humble city. The Pisan-Romanesque facade of **Cattedrale di San Zeno** (☎ 0573 2 50 95; Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-7pm) boasts a lunette of *Madonna col Bambino Fra Due Angeli* (Madonna and Child Between Two Angels) by Andrea della Robbia. The cathedral's other highlight – the silver **Dossale di San Giacomo** (Altarpiece of St James; adult/child €4/2), begun in 1287 and finished off by Brunelleschi two centuries later – is in the gloomy **Cappella di San Jacopo** off the north aisle.

Next to the cathedral is the **Museo Rospiigliosi e Museo Diocesano** (adult/concession €4/2; ☎ guided tours 10am, 11.30am & 3pm Mon, Wed & Fri), guardian of a wealth of artefacts that were discovered during restoration work of this former bishop's palace. Many treasures from the cathedral's collection are also on show here, including a 15th-century reliquary by Lorenzo Ghiberti supposedly housing a bone of St James and parts of his mother's and the Virgin's pelvic bones. Visits are strictly by guided tour (1¼ hours).

Across Via Roma is the 14th-century octagonal **baptistry** (Piazza del Duomo; admission free; ☎ uncertain, check with tourist office), elegantly banded in green-and-white marble to a design by Andrea Pisano. An ornate square marble font and soaring dome enliven the otherwise bare, red-brick interior.

The Gothic **Palazzo Comunale** on the eastern flank of the square is home to the **Museo Civico** (☎ 0573 37 12 96; www.comune.pistoia.it/museocivico, in Italian; Piazza del Duomo 1; adult/concession €3.50/2; ☎ 10am-5pm or 6pm Tue & Thu-Sat, 3-6pm or 7pm Wed, 11am-5pm or 6pm Sun), with works by Tuscan artists from the 13th to 20th centuries. Don't miss Bernardino di Antonio Detti's *Madonna della Pergola* (1498), with its extraordinarily modern treatment of St James, the Madonna and Baby Jesus; look for the mosquito on Jesus' arm.

The portico of the nearby **Ospedale del Ceppo** (Piazza Giovanni XXIII), with its detailed 16th-

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR EURO

When in Pistoia, consider purchasing a **cumulative ticket** (€6.50), which gives entrance to the Museo Civico, the Museo Rospiigliosi e Museo Diocesano and the Centro Documentazione e Fondazione Marino Marini. You can purchase it at the tourist office or any of these museums.



century polychrome terracotta frieze by Giovanni della Robbia, will stop even the most monument-weary in their tracks. It depicts the *Sette Opere di Misericordia* (Seven Works of Mercy), while the five medallions represent the *Virtù Teologali* (Theological Virtues), including a beautiful Annunciation.

The 12th-century **Chiesa di San Andrea** (☎ 0573 219 12; Via San Andrea; 🕒 8.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm) was built outside the original city walls, which explains its windowless state (it needed to be fortified). The facade is enlivened by a relief of the *Journey and Adoration of the Magi* (1166) and inside there is a magnificent marble pulpit carved by Giovanni Pisano between 1298–1301.

A short distance and a half-millennium away is the **Centro Documentazione e Fondazione Marino Marini** (☎ 0573 3 02 85; www.fondazionemarinomarini.it; Corso Silvano Fedi; adult/concession €3.50/2; ☒ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat), a museum-gallery devoted to Pistoia's most famous modern son, the eponymous sculptor and painter (1901-80).

Sleeping & Eating

If you're looking for a place to eat or drink, Via del Lastrone is the street to prowle.

Residenza d'Epoca Puccini (☎ 0573 2 67 07; www.puccini.tv; Vicolo Malconsiglio 4; s/d/tr €80/120/140; (P) (♿) (📺) Ten spacious rooms with stylish modern fittings are on offer at this recently renovated hotel, occupying an old *palazzo* close to the Duomo. Some have original

frescoes and all come with mod cons such as satellite TV.

Tenuta di Pieve a Celle (☎ 0573 91 30 87; www.tenutadipieveacelle.it; Via di Pieve a Celle 158; r €110-130; 📍 🚗 🚲) You'll find this peaceful 1850s country house in the hills 3km outside Pistoia. Set in expansive gardens, it offers five pretty bedrooms and elegant common areas. There's a lovely swimming pool and host Fiorenza will cook meals on request using produce from the estate's organic vegetable gardens.

Pasticceria Armando (☎ 0573 231 28; Via Curtatone Montanara 38; ☎ 6.30am-1pm & 3-8.30pm Tue-Fri, to 8pm Sat & Sun) Pistoia's best cafe-bar has been plying appreciative locals with delicious cakes, cocktails and coffees since 1947.

Trattoria dell'Abbondanza (☎ 0573 36 80 37; Via dell'Abbondanza 10; meals €22; ☎ lunch & dinner Fri-Tue, dinner Thu) Ask a local where they eat and the answer will often be this unassuming place behind the Duomo. The simple Tuscan dishes on its menu are extremely well priced and absolutely delicious. Choose between indoor or outdoor tables.

Osteria La BotteGaia (☎ 0573 36 56 02; www.labottegaia.it; Via del Lastrone 17; meals €27; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, dinner Sun & Mon) Dishes range from the staunchly traditional to experimental at this Slow Food-hailed *osteria*, known for its finely butchered cured meats and interesting wine list.

Getting There & Around

Trains link Pistoia with Florence (€3, 50 minutes, four daily), Lucca (€3.50, 45 minutes to one hour, half-hourly) and Pisa (€4.50 to €6.50, 1¼ hours, one daily or change at Lucca).

BluBus/Vaubus (☎ 800 570530, www.blubus.it) services connect Pistoia with Florence (€3, four daily) and local towns in Tuscany; buy tickets at the **ticket office** (☎ 0573 36 32 43; Via XX Settembre

71; ☎ 6.15am-8.15pm Mon-Sat, 7am-8.10pm Sun) opposite the train station.

Local buses 1 and 10 (€1) connect the train station with the cathedral, but it's easier to walk (15 minutes).

The city is on the A11 and the SS64 and SS66, which head northeast for Bologna and northwest for Parma, respectively.

Most hotels provide motoring guests with a pass ensuring free street parking in the centre; otherwise there is free parking in the Cellini car park on the city's eastern edge and cheap parking (€1 per day) at the Pertini car park near the train station.

LUCCA

pop 83,228

This beautiful old city elicits love at first sight with its rich history, handsome churches and excellent restaurants. Hidden behind imposing Renaissance walls, it is an essential stopover on any Tuscan tour and a perfect base for exploring the Apuane Alps and the Garfagnana.

Founded by the Etruscans, Lucca became a Roman colony in 180 BC and a free *comune* (self-governing city) during the 12th century, when it enjoyed a period of prosperity based on the silk trade. In 1314 it briefly fell under the control of Pisa but under the leadership of local adventurer Castruccio Castracani degli Antelminelli, the city regained its freedom and remained an independent republic for almost 500 years.

Napoleon ended all this in 1805, when he created the principality of Lucca and placed his sister Elisa in control. Twelve years later the city became a Bourbon duchy, before being incorporated into the Kingdom of Italy. It miraculously escaped being bombed during WWII, so the fabric of the historic centre has remained unchanged for centuries.

FATTORIA DI CELLE

A tea house, aviary and other romantic 19th-century follies mingle with cutting-edge art installations created *in situ* by the world's top contemporary artists at the **Fattoria di Celle** (☎ 0573 47 94 86, 0573 47 99 07; www.goricoll.it, in Italian; Via Montalese 7, Santomato di Pistoia; ☎ by appointment only Mon-Fri May-Sep), 5km from Pistoia. The extraordinary private collection and passion of local businessman Giuliano Gori, this unique sculpture park showcases 70 site-specific installations sprinkled around his vast family estate. Visits – reserved for serious art lovers – require forward planning (apply in writing at least five weeks in advance) and entail a three- to four-hour hike around the art-rich estate, led by the collection's curator, Miranda McPhail.



Information

APT Lucca (www.luccatourist.it); Piazza Napoleone (☎ 0583 91 99 41; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat); Piazza Santa Maria (☎ 0583 91 99 31; ☎ 9am-8pm Apr-Oct, 9am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm mid-Nov-mid-Dec, 9am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm Mon-Sat mid-Dec-Mar) The Piazza Santa Maria office offers pricey internet access (€5 per 30 minutes), though it sometimes charges less.

Città di Lucca (☎ 0583 58 31 50; www.luccaitineria.it; Piazzale Verdi; ☎ 9am-7pm) Operates an info point that rents bicycles (per hour €2.50) and excellent city audio-guides in English (1/2 persons €9/12); sells concert tickets and has a left-luggage service (per hour €1.50).

Lavanderia Niagara (Via Michele Rosi 26; wash €4; ☎ 8am-10pm)

Post office (Via Vallisneri 2)

www.luccagrapevine.com Online version of Lucca's English-language monthly mag; buy the fuller paper version (€2) from newsstands.

Sights

Lucca's biggest attraction is its 12m-high city walls, built snug around the old city in the 16th and 17th centuries, defended by 126 cannons and crowned with a wide, silky-smooth footpath just made for a leafy **Passeggiata della Mura**. Be it strolling, cycling, running or rollerblading, this legendary 4km-long circular footpath above the city proffers shot after shot of local Lucchesi life.

CATHEDRAL

Lucca's mainly Romanesque **Cattedrale di San Martino** (☎ 0583 95 70 68; www.museocattedralelucca.it, in Italian; Piazza San Martino; ☎ 9.30am-5.45pm Mon-Fri, to 6.45pm Sat, to 10.45am & noon-6pm Sun mid-Mar-Oct, to 4.45pm Mon-Fri, to 6.45pm Sat, to 10.45am & noon-5pm Sun Nov-mid-Mar), dedicated to San Martino, dates to the 11th century. The exquisite facade was constructed in the prevailing Lucca-Pisan style and designed to accommodate the pre-existing *campanile*. Each of the multitude of columns in its upper part is different. The reliefs over the left doorway of the portico are believed to be by Nicola Pisano.

The interior was rebuilt in the 14th and 15th centuries with a Gothic flourish. Lucca-born sculptor and architect Matteo Civitali designed both the pulpit and the 15th-century *tempietto* (small temple) in the north aisle that contains the **Volto Santo**. Legend has it that this simply fashioned image of a life-sized Christ on a wooden crucifix was carved by Nicodemus, who witnessed the Crucifixion. In fact, it has recently been dated to the 13th

century. A major object of pilgrimage, it's carried in procession through the streets every 13 September at dusk during the **Luminaria di Santa Croce**, a solemn torch-lit procession marking its miraculous arrival in Lucca.

The cathedral's many other artworks include a magnificent *Last Supper* by Tintoretto above the third altar of the south aisle; and the marble tomb of Ilaria del Carretto, a masterpiece of funerary sculpture, in the **sacristy** (adult/concession €2/1.50). Many more 15th- and 16th-century treasures from the cathedral are displayed in the adjacent **Museo della Cattedrale** (Cathedral Museum; ☎ 0583 49 05 30; Piazza Antelminelli; adult/concession €4/2.50; ☎ 10am-6pm mid-Mar-Oct, to 2pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun Nov-mid-Mar).

CHURCH & BAPTISTRY OF STS GIOVANNI & REPARATA

The 12th-century interior of the deconsecrated **Chiesa e Battistero dei SS Giovanni e Reparata** is a hauntingly atmospheric setting for early evening opera recitals staged by **Puccini e la sua Lucca** (☎ 340 8106042; www.puccinielasualucca.com; adult/concession €15/10), which are held at 7pm every evening from mid-March to October, and on every evening except Thursday from November to mid-March. Professional singers present a one-hour programme of arias and duets dominated by the music of Puccini. Tickets are available from the church between 10am and 6pm.

In the north transept of the church is a **baptistry** (☎ 0583 49 05 30; Piazza San Giovanni; adult/concession €2.50/1.50; ☎ 10am-6pm mid-Mar-Oct, to 5pm Sat, Sun & religious holidays Nov-mid-Mar) crowning an archaeological area comprising five building levels going back to the Roman period.

CHIESA DI SAN MICHELE IN FORO

This dazzling Romanesque **church** (☎ 0583 484 59; Piazza San Michele; ☎ 7.40am-noon & 3-6pm Apr-Oct, 9am-noon & 3-5pm Nov-Mar) was built on the site of its 8th-century precursor over a period of nearly 300 years, beginning in the 11th century. The exquisite wedding-cake facade is topped by a figure of the Archangel Michael slaying a dragon. Inside, don't miss Filippino Lippi's 1479 painting of Sts Helen, Jerome, Sebastian and Roch (complete with plague sore) in the south transept.

EAST OF VIA FILLUNGO

Lucca's busiest street, Via Fillungo, threads its way through the medieval heart of the old

€38-65, d with shared bathroom €48-80, s with bathroom €50-90, d with bathroom €65-110; ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓) This comfortable townhouse dates from the 17th century and is located just off Via Fillungo in the centre of Luccese action. It has meat hooks in the beams of reception, where butchers once strung their hams. Less expensive rooms share a bathroom. If full, ask about its sister guesthouse.

MIDRANGE

La Bohème (☎ 0583 46 24 04; www.boheme.it; Via del Moro 2; d €90-140; ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓) A hefty dark-wood door located on a peaceful back street marks the entrance to this five-room B&B, run with charm and style by former architect Ranieri. Rooms are furnished in antique Tuscan style; some have breathtaking high ceilings and all have decent-sized bathrooms. Breakfast is generous.

Villa Principessa (☎ 0583 37 00 37; www.hotelprincipessa.com; Via Nuova per Pisa 1616; d €99-129, ste €320-450; ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓) You will indeed feel like a *principessa* (princess) at this aristocratic country mansion, residence of Lucca duke Castruccio Castracani in the late 13th and early 14th century. Smothered with an abundance of foliage outside and full of fine chandeliers, period furnishings and rich wallpapers inside, it really is a stunner. Find it 3km south of Lucca.

La Corte degli Angeli (☎ 0583 46 92 04; www.allacortedegliangeli.com; Via degli Angeli 23; d €139-180; ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓) Occupying three floors of a 15th-century townhouse, this four-star boutique hotel oozes charm. Its frescoed rooms are named after flowers.

Eating & Drinking

BUDGET

our pick **Forno Giusti** (Via Santa Lucia 20; pizza & filled focaccia per kg €7-16; ☎ 7am-1pm & 4-7.30pm, closed Wed afternoon & Sun) Join the crowd queuing in front of this excellent bakery to purchase fresh-from-the-oven pizza and focaccia with a variety of fillings and toppings. It's the perfect place to buy picnic provisions.

Caffè Di Simo (☎ 0583 49 62 34; Via Fillungo 58; ☎ 9am-8pm & 8.30pm-1am) This atmospheric Art Nouveau cafe-bar-restaurant was once patronised by Puccini and his coterie (the maestro would tickle the ivories of the piano at the entrance to the dining area). These days, locals stand at the bar for coffee or *aperitivo* and sit at the tables to enjoy their selection from the daily €10 lunch buffet.

Taddeucci (☎ 0583 49 49 33; www.taddeucci.com; Piazza San Michele 34; ☎ 8.30am-7.45pm, closed Thu winter) This *pasticceria* (pastry shop) is where the traditional Luccese treat of *buccellato* was created in 1881. A ring-shaped loaf made with flour, sultanas, aniseed seeds and sugar, it's the perfect accompaniment to a mid-morning or -afternoon espresso (coffee and slice of *buccellato*, €3.50).

Trattoria da Leo (☎ 0583 49 22 36; Via Tegrini 1; meals €17; ☎ Mon-Sat) Ask a local to recommend a lunch spot, and they will inevitably nominate this bustling trattoria. The clientele of tourists, students, workers and ladies taking a break from shopping have one thing in common: an appreciation for the cheap food and friendly ambience on offer. The food ranges from acceptable to delicious, with stand-out dishes including the *vitello tonnato* (cold veal with a tuna and caper sauce) and *torta di fichi e noci* (fig and walnut tart). No credit cards.

La Corte dei Vini (☎ 0583 58 44 60; Corte Campana 6; meals €24, platters €7-12; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Strategically placed between Piazza Napoleone and Piazza San Michele, this friendly *enoteca e piccola cucina* (wine bar and small kitchen) is a great choice for an *aperitivo* or casual meal. It specialises in rustic dishes, including *tortelli Lucchesi* (meat ravioli) and *minestra di farro della Garbagnana* (soup made with spelt). Get here early to score a choice table on the front terrace.

MIDRANGE

Osteria Baralla (☎ 0583 44 02 40; www.osteriabaralla.it; Via Anfiteatro 5; meals €34; ☎ Mon-Sat) Dine beneath magnificent red-brick vaults at this busy *osteria*, inevitably packed to the rafters by noon. Rich in tradition (the place dates to 1860) and local specialities, its menu highlights include soup with new-season olive oil, salt cod and chickpeas, *bollito misto* on Thursday and roast pork on Saturday.

Buca di Sant'Antonio (☎ 0583 5 58 81; www.bucadi santantonio.com; Via della Cervia 3; meals €40; ☎ Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) This atmosphere-laden restaurant dates to 1782 and is an outstanding spot for tasting top-notch Italian wines. Its flattering lighting and banquette seating make it a favourite destination for romantic dinners, and its standards of service are unmatched in the city. Bookings essential.

Ristorante Olivo (☎ 0583 49 62 64; www.ristorante olivo.it/inglese; Piazza San Quirico 1; meals €47; ☎ lunch & dinner daily Apr-Nov, Thu-Tue Dec-Mar) Known for

its fresh fish, which is brought in every day from Viareggio, the Olivo epitomises old-fashioned Luccesi dining. The wine list is excellent (with Tuscan drops dominating) and the menu balances classic Tuscan choices with seafood specialities.

Getting There & Away

From the bus stops around Piazzale Verdi, Vaibus runs services throughout the region, including destinations in the Garfagnana such as Castelnuovo di Garfagnana (€4, 1½ hours, eight daily). It also runs buses to/from Florence (€5.10, 1½ hours, frequent), Pisa and Pisa Airport (€2.80, one hour, 30 daily) and Viareggio (€3.20, 50 minutes, five daily) via Torre del Lago (€2.80, 30 minutes, six daily).

The train station is south of the city walls, but only a short walk away – take the path across the moat and through the tunnel under Baluardo San Colombano. Regional train services connect Lucca with surrounding cities and towns. Destinations include Florence (€5, 1½ to 1¾ hours, frequent), Pisa (€2.40, 30 minutes, every 30 minutes) and Viareggio (€2.40, 25 minutes, hourly).

The A11 runs westwards to Pisa and Viareggio and eastwards to Florence. To access the Garfagnana, take the SS12 and continue on the SS445.

Getting Around

Most car parks within the city walls are for residents only, and are indicated by yellow lines. Blue lines indicate pay parks (€1 to €1.50 per hour) that are available to all motorists, but these are few and far between. If you are staying within the city walls, contact your hotel ahead of your arrival and enquire about the possibility of getting a temporary resident permit during your stay. The parks just outside the city walls have a time limit of one to two hours and are closely monitored. The easiest option is to park at Parcheggio Carducci, just outside Porta Sant'Anna.

Bike rental is offered by two shops – Cicli Bizzarri and Bicilette Bianchi – located on either side of the tourist information office on Piazza Santa Maria. These are both open from 9am to 7pm daily and charge €2.50 per hour.

THE GARFAGNANA

Nestled between the Apuane Alps and the Apennines are three stunning valleys formed by the Serchio river and its tributaries: the

low-lying Lima and Serchio Valleys and the higher Garfagnana Valley. These are often collectively referred to as the Garfagnana and are easily accessed from Lucca.

Many visitors to this relatively undiscovered area of raw beauty come to enjoy its hiking and biking. Others are attracted by the region's rustic cuisine, which utilises local fruits of the forest including chestnuts (often ground into flour), porcini mushrooms and honey. Enthusiasts for military history come to the area around Borgo a Mozzano to see remnants of fortifications from the *Linea Gotica* (Gothic Line), the last major line of defence mounted by the retreating German army in the final stages of WWII.

Castelnuovo di Garfagnana, the main town in the valley, is the best spot in the Garfagnana to source information about the neighbouring Apuane Alps. The extremely helpful **Centro Visite Parco Alpi Apuane** (☎ 0583 651 69; www.turismo.garfagnana.eu; Piazza delle Erbe 1; ☎ 9.30am–1pm & 3–7pm Jun–Sep, to 5.30pm Oct–May) can supply loads of information on walking, mountain biking, horse riding and other activities, as well as lists of local guides. It also has plenty of information about *agriturismi* (farm stay accommodation) and *rifugi* (mountain huts) off any beaten track and sells hiking maps. To meet up with hardened walkers, try your luck at the local branch of **Club Alpin Italiano** (☎ 0583 655 77; www.garfagnanacai.it; Via Vittorio Emanuele 3; ☎ 9–10pm Thu, 6–7pm Sat).

In Castelnuovo di Garfagnana, the characterful **Osteria Vecchio Mulino** (☎ 0583 6 21 92; www.ilvecchiomulino.com, in Italian; Via Vittorio Emanuele 12; ☎ Tue–Sun 7.30am–8.30pm; tasting menu €15–20 incl wine) is a great spot to stop for lunch. It specialises in regional dishes.

The Garfagnana's other major tourist destination is the picturesque hill-top town of **Barga**, presided over by a magnificent Romanesque **cathedral**. If you choose to stay overnight, **Casa Cordati** (☎ 0583 72 34 50; www.casacordati.it; Via di Mezzo 17, Barga Vecchia; d €40, 2-person apt €60; ☎ Mar–Oct), run by genial gallery owner Giordano Martinelli, offers excellent value. Rooms have lovely views, simple decor and good-sized bathrooms (some shared); the apartment is dark but well sized. There's no breakfast.

APUANE ALPS

Rearing up between the Versilian Riviera and the vast inland valley of the Garfagnana is

this mountain range protected by the **Parco Regionale delle Alpi Apuane** (www.parcapuane.it).

You'll find a good network of marked walking trails and *rifugi* in the park. To guide your steps, pick up *Alpi Apuane Settentrionali* (1:25,000) published by the Massa Carrara APT; or Edizione Multigraphic Firenze's *Parco delle Alpi Apuane* (1:25,000, €7) or *Versilia: Parco delle Alpi Apuane* (1:50,000, €7). *The Alps of Tuscany* by Francesco Greco contains many enjoyable multiday routes.

The main gateways into the Parco Regionale delle Alpi Apuane are Seravezza and Castelnuovo di Garfagnana. In Seravezza, the **information centre** (☎ 0584 7 58 21; Via Corrado del Greco 11; ☹ 9am-1pm & 3.30-7.30pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Wed-Mon Oct-May) can supply plenty of information.

Carrara

pop 65,443

Many first-time visitors assume that the snowy-white mountain peaks forming Carrara's backdrop are capped with snow. In fact, the vista provides a breathtaking illusion – the white is 2000 hectares of marble gouged out of the foothills of the Apuane Alps in vast quarries that have been worked since Roman times.

The texture and purity of Carrara's white marble (derived from the Greek *marmaros*, meaning shining stone) is unrivalled and it was here that Michelangelo selected marble for masterpieces including *David* (actually sculpted from a dud veined block). These days it's a multi-billion-euro industry.

The quarries, which are 5km north of town in Colonnata and Fantiscritti, have long been the area's biggest employers. It's hard, dangerous work and on Carrara's central Piazza XXVII Aprile a monument remembers workers who lost their lives up on the hills. These tough men formed the backbone of a strong leftist and anarchist tradition in Carrara, something that won them no friends among the Fascists or, later, the occupying German forces.

Bar the thrill of seeing its mosaic marble pavements, marble street benches, decorative marble *putti* (winsome cherubs) and marble everything else, the old centre of Carrara doesn't offer much to the visitor. The exception to this rule is in July to September in even-numbered years, when a contemporary sculpture biennale is staged here.

Opposite the stadium, halfway between Carrara and Marina di Carrara, there's a **tourist office** (☎ 0585 84 41 36; Viale XX Settembre; ☹ 8.30am-5.30pm Jun-Aug, 9am-4pm Sep-May) that offers maps and brochures detailing local attractions. Opposite the tourist office is the **Museo del Marmo** (Marble Museum; ☎ 0585 84 57 46; Viale XX Settembre; adult/child/concession €4.50/free/2.50; ☹ 9.30am-1pm & 3.30-6pm Mon-Sat May-Sep, 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr), which describes extraction from chisel-and-hammer days to the 21st century's high-powered industrial quarrying and has a fascinating audiovisual oral history presentation documenting the lives of quarry workers in the 20th century.

If you're interested in the techniques that artisans use to transform slabs of marble into works of art, make an appointment to visit the dust-filled **Studi di Scultura Carlo Nicoli** (☎ 0585 7 00 79; www.nicoli-sculptures.com; Piazza XXVII Aprile 8), the most atmospheric of Carrara's five marble workshops. This is where internationally acclaimed artists such as Louise Bourgeois and Anish Kapoor instruct the marble *laboratory* (workshop) on how they want their work executed, thus taking advantage of a centuries-old tradition of artisanship that has been handed down from generation to generation. Serious artists (as opposed to novices) can also apply to base themselves here for months at a time, learning techniques *in situ*. After visiting, make your way to the area around the Romanesque cathedral for a coffee at **Café Pasticceria Luzio Caffisch** (☎ 0585 7 16 76; Via Roma 2; ☹ 7am-7.30pm Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat, 2-7.30pm Sun).

After visiting the Museo del Marmo and Studi di Scultura Carlo Nicoli, make your way up the mountain to any of the three major marble quarries: **Cave di Colonnata**, **Cave di Torano** and **Cave di Fantiscritti**, all around 5km north of town – follow the signs '*cave de marmo*' (marble quarries). The Fantiscritti cave is the one best geared towards tourism; here, the hard graft is done in the morning, leaving the afternoons free for **tours** (☎ 339 765 7470; www.marmotour.com; 35min guided tour adult/child under 10 yr €7/3; ☹ noon-5pm Mon-Fri Mar, Apr, Sep & Oct, 11am-6.30pm Mon-Fri May-Aug, 11am-6.30pm Sat Mar-Oct) of the cathedral-like quarry hollowed out of the mountainside.

Carrara's cheap and cheerful coastline and resorts (**Marina di Carrara** and neighbouring **Marina di Massa**) are especially popular with holidaying Italians. **Ostello Apuano** (☎ 0585

78 00 34; ostelloapuan@hotmial.com; Viale delle Pinete, Partaccia 237; dm €12; (☎) mid-Mar–mid-Oct; (📺) is an HI-affiliated hostel slap bang next to the sand in a handsome house dating from the 1920s. Accommodation is in single-sex dorms only. Find it in Partaccia, which is just north of Marina di Massa. From the Carrara train station catch bus 53, marked Via Avenza Mare.

Pietrasanta

pop 24,609

This charming town is a perfect base for explorations into the Apuane Alps. Founded by Guiscardo da Pietrasanta, *podestà* (governing magistrate) of Lucca in 1255, it was seen as a prize by Genoa, Lucca, Pisa and Florence, all of whom jostled for possession of its marble quarries and bronze foundries. As was so often the case, Florence won out and Leo X (Giovanni de' Medici) took control in 1513. Leo put the town's famous quarries at the disposal of Michelangelo, who came here in 1518 to source marble for the facade of San Lorenzo in Florence (p492). The artistic inclination of Pietrasanta dates from this time, and today it is the home of many artists and artisans, including internationally lauded, Colombian-born sculptor Fernando Botero.

Pietrasanta was originally walled, and the historic centre is now a Limited Traffic Zone. If you are arriving by car, park in front of the town hall on Piazza Matteotti. There's a **tourist information point** (☎ 0584 28 32 84; info@pietrasantamarina.it; ☎ 9am–1pm & 4.30–7pm Mon–Wed & Fri, 4.30–7pm Thu, 9am–1pm & 4.30–7pm Sat, 9am–1pm & 4–7.30pm Sun) in nearby Piazza Statuto. From here, walk down the main shopping strip, Via Mazzini, which is book-ended by contemporary street sculptures. The **Chiesa della Misericordia** on this strip is home to frescoes of the *Gate of Paradise* and *Gate of Hell* by Botero (the artist portrays himself in hell). Nearby, **Pasticceria Dazzi** (☎ 0584 7 01 74; Via Mazzini 64) is known for its excellent coffee and sweet treats.

Arriving at sculpture-filled Piazza del Duomo, you can walk straight ahead into Via Garibaldi, home to commercial art galleries and a 17th-century **baptistry** with two beautiful marble fonts dating from 1389 and 1509–1612, respectively. Also here is Pietrasanta's best-loved *enoteca*, the atmospheric **L'Enoteca Marucci** (☎ 0584 79 19 62; Via Garibaldi 40; ☎ 10am–1pm & 5pm–1am Tue–Sun).

On the other side of the attractive **Duomo di San Martino**, which dates from 1256 and is notable for its fine interior marble carving, is the deconsecrated 13th-century **Chiesa di Sant'Agostino** (☎ 4–7pm Tue–Sun), now a wonderfully evocative venue for art exhibitions. The adjoining former convent dates from 1515–79 and houses a cultural centre and the **Museo dei Bozzetti** (☎ 0584 79 55 00; www.museodeibozzetti.it; Via S Agostino 1; admission free; ☎ 2–7pm Tue–Sat, 4–7pm Sun), which exhibits moulds of famous sculptures cast or carved in Pietrasanta.

Albergo Pietrasanta (☎ 0584 79 37 26; www.albergo.pietrasanta.com; Via Garibaldi 35; d €295–375, ste €375–420; (P) (24) (📺)) is an elegant art-filled *palazzo* close to Piazza del Duomo. After a day spent exploring the town or walking in the Apuane Alps, you can relax in the gorgeous courtyard or your beautifully appointed room.

PISA

pop 87,461

Once a maritime power to rival Genoa and Venice, Pisa now draws its fame from an architectural project gone terribly wrong. But the world-famous Leaning Tower is just one of many noteworthy sights in this compact and compelling city. Education has fuelled the local economy since the 1400s, and students from across Italy still compete for places in its elite university and research schools. This endows the centre of town with a vibrant and affordable cafe and bar scene, and balances what is an enviable portfolio of well-maintained Romanesque buildings, Gothic churches and Renaissance piazzas with a lively streetlife dominated by locals rather than tourists.

History

Possibly of Greek origin, Pisa became an important naval base under Rome and remained a significant port for many centuries. The city's so-called golden days began late in the 9th century when it became an independent maritime republic and a rival of Genoa and Venice. The good times rolled on into the 12th and 13th centuries, by which time Pisa controlled Corsica, Sardinia and most of the mainland coast as far south as Civitavecchia. Most of the city's finest buildings date from this period, when the distinctive Pisan-Romanesque architectural style flourished.

PISA

0 400 m
0 0.2 miles

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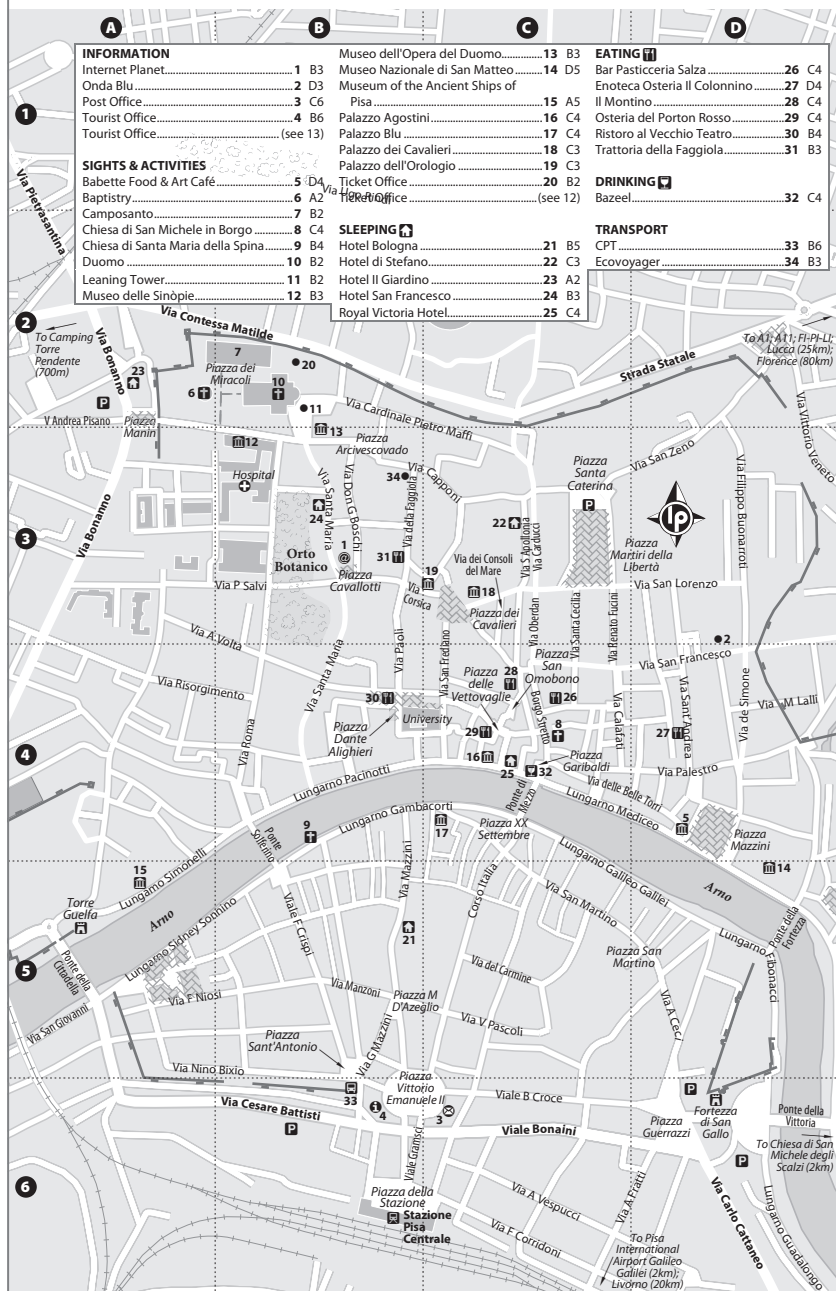
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Pisa's support for the Ghibellines during the tussles between the Holy Roman Emperor and the pope brought the city into conflict with its mostly Guelph Tuscan neighbours, including Siena, Lucca and Florence. The real blow came when Genoa's fleet defeated Pisa in devastating fashion at the Battle of Meloria in 1284. After the city fell to Florence in 1406, the Medici encouraged great artistic, literary and scientific endeavours and re-established Pisa's university. Galileo Galilei, the city's most famous son, later taught at the university.

Information

APT Pisa (www.pisaturismo.it); Airport (☎ 050 50 25 18; ☎ 11am-11pm); Piazza dei Miracoli (☎ 050 4 22 91; entrance foyer, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo; ☎ 10am-7pm); Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II (☎ 050 4 22 91; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 1.30pm Sat) Tourist information.

Internet Planet (☎ 050 83 07 02; Piazza Cavallotti 3-4; per hr €4; ☎ 9am-midnight Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat & Sun)

Onda Blu (☎ 800 861346; Via San Francesco 8a; ☎ 8am-10pm) Laundrette.

Post office (Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II)

Sights

Many visitors to Pisa limit their sightseeing to the Piazza dei Miracoli monuments, but those in the know tend to stay an extra day or two to explore the historic centre. This inclination to linger will become even more pronounced when the **Museum of the Ancient Ships of Pisa** (Museo Navi Antiche Romane di Pisa; www.cantiernavipisa.it, in Italian) on Lungarno Simonelli opens in early 2010. The museum will display a remarkable collection of nine Roman cargo ships excavated from Pisa's silted-up harbour in 1998 and restored over the past decade.

PIAZZA DEI MIRACOLI

No Tuscan sight is more immortalised in kitsch souvenirs than the iconic tower teetering on the edge of this famous piazza, which is also known as the Campo dei Miracoli (Field of Miracles) or Piazza del Duomo (Cathedral Square). The piazza's expansive green lawns provide an urban carpet on which Europe's most extraordinary concentration of Romanesque buildings – in the form of Cathedral, Baptistery and Tower – are arranged. Two million visitors every year mean that crowds are the norm, many arriving by tour bus from Florence for a whirlwind visit.

Leaning Tower

Yes, the **Torre Pendente** (☎ ticket reservations 050 387 22 10; www.opapisa.it/boxoffice/index; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Apr-mid-Jun & last 2 weeks Sep, 8.30am-11pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 9am-7pm Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb, 9am-6pm or 7pm Mar) really *does* lean; see the boxed text on p525 for some background as to how it ended up in its sorry state.

In 1160 Pisa boasted 10,000-odd towers – but had no bell tower for its cathedral. Loyal Pisan Berta di Bernardo righted this in 1172 when she died, leaving a legacy for construction of a *campanile* (bell tower). Work began in 1173 but ground to a halt a decade later, when the structure's first three tiers were observed to be tilting. In 1272 work started again, with artisans and masons attempting to bolster the foundations but failing miserably. Despite this, they keep going, compensating for the lean by gradually building straight up from the lower storeys and creating a subtle curve.

Over the centuries, the tower has tilted an extra 1mm each year. By 1993 it was 4.47m out of plumb, more than five degrees from the vertical. The most recent solution saw steel braces slung around the third storey that were then joined to steel cables attached to neighbouring buildings. This held the tower in place as engineers began gingerly removing soil from below the northern foundations. After some 70 tonnes of earth had been extracted from the northern side, the tower sank to its 18th-century level and, in the process, rectified the lean by 43.8cm. Experts believe that this will guarantee the tower's future (and a fat tourist income) for the next three centuries.

Access to the tower is limited to 40 people at one time, and children aged under eight are not admitted. If you don't want to wait for hours, book in advance (online or by telephone); otherwise go straight to a ticket office when you arrive at the piazza and book the first available slot.

Visits – a steep climb up 294 occasionally slippery steps – last 30 minutes; late evening visits in summer proffer enchanting views of Pisa by night. All bags, including handbags, must be deposited at the free left-luggage desk next to the central ticket office.

Duomo

Construction of Pisa's **Cathedral** (☎ 10am-8pm Apr-Sep, 10am-7pm Oct, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm 1 Nov-24 Dec & 8 Jan-28 Feb, 9am-6pm 25 Dec-7 Jan, 10am-6pm or 7pm Mar)

PIAZZA DEI MIRACOLI TICKETING

Ticket pricing for Piazza dei Miracoli sights is complicated. Tickets to the **Tower** (€15 at ticket office, €17 booked online) and **Duomo** (€2 Mar-Oct, free Nov-Feb) are sold individually, but for the remaining sights combined tickets are available. These cost €5/6/8/10 for one/two/three/five sights and cover the Baptistry, Camposanto, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo and Museo delle Sinópie. Children aged under 10 are free for all sights except the Tower. Any ticket will also give access to the multimedia and information areas located in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo and Museo delle Sinópie.

Tickets are sold at two **ticket offices** (www.opapisa.it) on the piazza: the central ticket office is located behind the tower and a second office is located in the entrance foyer of the Museo delle Sinópie. To ensure your visit to the tower, book tickets via the website at least 15 days in advance.

began in 1063 and continued until the 13th century, when the main facade was added. The elliptical dome, the first of its kind in Europe, dates from 1380. The building's striking cladding of alternating bands of green and cream marble became the blueprint for Romanesque churches throughout Tuscany.

The cathedral was the largest in Europe when it was constructed, its breathtaking proportions designed to demonstrate Pisa's domination of the Mediterranean. The main facade has four exquisite tiers of columns diminishing skywards, while the vast interior is propped up by 68 hefty granite columns. The wooden ceiling decorated with 24-carat gold is a legacy from the period of Medici rule of the city.

Inside, don't miss the extraordinary early 14th-century octagonal **pulpit** in the north aisle. Sculpted from Carrara marble by Giovanni Pisano and featuring nude and heroic figures, its depth of detail and heightening of feeling brought a new pictorial expressionism and life to Gothic sculpture. Pisano's work forms a striking contrast to the modern pulpit and altar by Italian sculptor Giuliano Vangi, which were controversially installed in 2001.

Baptistry

The unusual, round **Battistero** (☎ 8am-8pm Apr-Sep, 9am-6pm or 7pm Mar & Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb) has one dome piled on top of another, each roofed half in lead, half in tiles. Construction began in 1152, but it was notably remodelled and continued by Nicola and Giovanni Pisano more than a century later and was finally completed in the 14th century – hence its hybrid architectural style.

Inside, the beautiful hexagonal **pulpit** carved by Nicola Pisano between 1259–60 is the un-

disputed highlight. Inspired by the Roman sarcophagi in the Camposanto (see below), Pisano used powerful classical models to enact scenes from biblical legend. His figure of Daniel, who supports one of the corners of the pulpit on his shoulders, was clearly modelled on an ancient statue of Hercules and is one of the earliest heroic nude figures in Italian art, often cited as the inauguration of a tradition that would reach perfection with Michelangelo's *David*.

Every 30 minutes, a custodian demonstrates the double dome's remarkable acoustics and echo effects.

Camposanto & Museo delle Sinópie

Soil shipped from Calvary during the Crusades is said to lie within the white walls of the hauntingly beautiful **Camposanto** (Cemetery; ☎ 8am-8pm Apr-Sep, 9am-6pm or 7pm Mar & Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb), a cloistered quadrangle where prominent Pisans were once buried. Some of the sarcophagi here are of Graeco-Roman origin, recycled in the Middle Ages.

During WWII, Allied artillery destroyed many of the precious 14th- and 15th-century frescoes that covered the cloister walls. Among the few to survive was the *Triumph of Death* – a remarkable illustration of Hell attributed to 14th-century painter Buonamico Buffalmacco. A program of restoration of those frescoes damaged rather than totally destroyed by the bombs is currently underway and the *sinópie* (preliminary sketches) drawn by the artists in red earth pigment on the walls of the Camposanto before the frescoes were overpainted are now on display in the **Sinópie Museum** (☎ 8am-8pm Apr-Sep, 9am-6pm or 7pm Mar & Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb), on the opposite side of the square.

Museo dell'Opera del Duomo

Housed in the Cathedral's former chapter house, the **Museum of the Cathedral** (☎ 8am-8pm Apr-Sep, 9am-6pm or 7pm Mar & Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb) is a repository for works of art once displayed in the Cathedral and Baptistry. Highlights include Giovanni Pisano's ivory carving of the *Madonna and Child* (1299), made for the Cathedral's high altar, and his mid-13th-century *Madonna del Colloquio* (Madonna of the Colloquy), from a gate of the Duomo. Legendary booty includes various pieces of Islamic art, including the griffin that once topped the Cathedral and a 10th-century Moorish hippogriff.

THE CITY

From Piazza dei Miracoli, head south along Via Santa Maria and turn left at Piazza Cavallotti for the splendid **Piazza dei Cavalieri**, remodelled by Vasari in the 16th century. **Palazzo dell'Orologio**, located on the northern side of the piazza, occupies the site of a tower where, in 1288, Count Ugolino della Gherardesca, his sons and grandsons were starved to death on suspicion of having helped the Genovese enemy at the Battle of Meloria, an incident recorded in Dante's *Inferno*. **Palazzo dei Cavalieri**, on the northeastern side of the piazza, was redesigned by Vasari and features remarkable *sgraffito* (a surface covered with plaster which is then scratched away to create a three-dimensional trompe l'œil effect of carved stone or brick). It now houses the Scuolo Normale Superiore, considered by many to be the most prestigious university in Italy.

Wander south to the area around Borgo Stretto, the city's medieval heart. Investigate the shops and cafes tucked under the monumental arcades, and marvel at the survival of the graffiti on the facade of **Chiesa di San Michele in Borgo**, which dates all the way back to a 15th-century election for the rector of a local school. A daily food market is held in adjoining **Piazza delle Vettovaglie**, which is ringed with 15th-century porticoes. In the evening, the piazza's bars are popular spots for an *aperitivo*.

From Piazza Garibaldi, veer east along the Lungarno to visit the **Museo Nazionale di San Matteo** (☎ 050 54 18 65; Piazza San Matteo in Soarta, Lungarno Mediceo; adult/concession €5/2.50; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Tue-Sat, to 1.30pm Sun), a repository of medieval masterpieces housed in a 13th-century former Benedictine convent. This fine gallery has a notable collection of 14th- and 15th-century Pisan sculptures, including pieces by Nicola and Giovanni Pisano, Andrea and Nino Pisano, Francesco di Valdambrino, Donatello, Michelozzo and Andrea della Robbia, but its collection of paintings from the Tuscan school (c 12th to 14th centuries) is even better, with works by Berlinghiero, Lippo Memmi, Taddeo Gaddi, Gentile da Fabriano and Ghirlandaio on show. Don't miss Masaccio's *St Paul*, Fra' Angelico's *Madonna of Humility* and Simone Martini's *Polyptych of Saint Catherine*.

To view art from a different era, make your way to the nearby **Babette Food and Art Café** (☎ 050 991 33 02; Lungarno Mediceo 15; ☎ 9am-11pm Tue-Sun; ☎), a favourite haunt of the local bohemian set. Its exposed-brick walls play host to a changing programme of works by

THE LEANING CITY OF ITALY

Most people know that Pisa's famous tower leans, but not too many realise that a number of other historic buildings in the city follow its lead. The reason? The soil on which the city is founded is barely 2m above sea level, made up of a treacherous sand-and-clay mix atop a series of alternate strata of clay, moisture and sand that reaches a depth of more than 40m.

Unfortunately, the city's medieval architects didn't realise that this was the case and failed to compensate with adequate calculations matching the density and mass of structures with the city's precarious ground stability – if architect Bonanno Pisano had designed his tower to have a wider circumference, it probably wouldn't have tilted to the degree we now observe.

Bonanno wasn't the only one to fudge his calculations. In the Piazza dei Miracoli, the Duomo tilts 25cm to the north and the Baptistry inclines a considerable 51cm north. The grand Palazzo Agostini on the Lungarno Mediceo also displays a decided lean.

Additional tilting towers in town include the octagonal bell tower of Chiesa di San Nicola on Via Santa Maria and the tower of Chiesa di San Michele degli Scalzi on Via San Michele degli Scalzi.

local artists and its casual vibe encourages coffee-fuelled conversation.

ACROSS THE ARNO

Cross the Ponte di Mezzo to reach Pisa's major shopping boulevard, **Corso Italia**. West of the corso, facing the river, is the **Palazzo Blu** (☎ 050 2 85 15; www.palazzoblu.it; Lungarno Gambacorti 9; 20min tour in Italian free, pre-booked 1hr tour in English or French for up to 5 people €17; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun), a magnificently restored 14th-century building that sports over-the-top 19th-century interior decoration. Home to the Foundation CariPisa art collection, which comprises predominantly Pisan works from the 14th to the 20th century, the *palazzo* also hosts temporary exhibitions. Access is via a 20-minute guided tour only (at 4pm, 4.30pm and 5pm daily unless pre-booked).

Continuing west you'll come to one of Pisa's architectural gems, the **Chiesa di Santa Maria della Spina** (Lungarno Gambacorti; adult/concession €2/1.50; ☎ 10am–1.45pm & 3–5.45pm Tue–Fri, 10am–1.45pm & 3–6.45pm Sat Mar–Oct, 10am–2pm Tue–Sun Nov–Feb). A fine example of Pisan-Gothic style, this now-deconsecrated church was built between 1223 and 1230 to house a reliquary of a *spina* (thorn) from Christ's crown. Its ornately spired exterior is encrusted with tabernacles and statues but the interior is simple and perfectly suited to quiet reflection. Inside, the focal point is Andrea and Nino Pisano's *Madonna and Child* (aka Madonna of the Rose, 1345–48), a masterpiece of Gothic sculpture that still bears traces of its original colours and gilding. At the other end of the church is a copy of the graceful *Madonna del Latte* (Our Lady of Milk, 1343–47), sculpted by either Nino or Andrea Pisano and now occupying pride of place in the collection of the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo.

Festivals & Events

On 17 June, the Arno comes to life with the **Regata Storica di San Ranieri**, a rowing competition commemorating the city's patron saint. On the night preceding this event (16 June), Pisa celebrates the **Luminaria**, when some 70,000 candles illuminate the streets running along the Arno river in honour of San Ranieri.

For the **Gioco del Ponte** (Game of the Bridge), on the last Sunday in June, two groups in medieval costume battle it out over the Ponte di Mezzo.

The **Palio delle Quattro Antiche Repubbliche Marinare** (Regatta of the Four Ancient Maritime Republics) sees a procession of boats and a dramatic race between the four historical maritime rivals: Pisa, Venice, Amalfi and Genoa. The event rotates between the four towns: it's Pisa's turn in 2010 and 2014. Although usually held in June, it has on occasion been delayed till as late as September.

Sleeping BUDGET

There are no budget hotels or hostels in Pisa worthy of a recommendation.

Camping Torre Pendente (☎ 050 56 17 04; www.campingtorrependente.it; Via delle Cascine 86; camping 2 people, car & tent €20–71; ☎ Apr–mid-Oct; 🚻) Around 1km northwest of Piazza dei Miracoli, this camping ground isn't Tuscany's most attractive, but it has a supermarket, restaurant and small pool.

MIDRANGE

Hotel San Francesco (☎ 050 55 41 09; www.hotelfrancesco.com; Via Santa Maria 129; r €70–100; 🚻 📺 📶) On a busy street leading to the Leaning Tower, the San Francesco offers 13 clean but characterless rooms. Though quiet and relatively well equipped, the standard choices are slightly overpriced; go for one of the 1st-floor rooms (Nos 201 and 202), which share a terrace.

Hotel Il Giardino (☎ 050 56 21 01; www.hotelilgiardino.pisa.it; Piazza Manin 1; s/d €80/100; 🚻 📺 📶) A gaggle of souvenir traders might hit you the second you walk out the door, but the Garden Hotel – an old Medici staging post on the other side of the Cathedral square wall – does have the advantage of a peaceful garden terrace to breakfast on while enjoying the view of the Baptistery dome. Decor is contemporary, with original artworks in all rooms.

Hotel di Stefano (☎ 050 55 35 59; www.hoteldistefano.pisa.it; Via Sant'Apollonia 35–37; s with shared bathroom €45–65, d with shared bathroom €65–80, s with bathroom €65–140, d with bathroom €75–170; 🚻) There are three reasons to stay at this friendly three-star: its location in a quiet backstreet in the medieval quarter; its smart, simple rooms; and its terrace with views of the tower's top half. Deluxe rooms in the recently renovated Casa Torre (c 1045) feature wooden-beamed ceilings and exposed stone walls.

Hotel Bologna (☎ 050 50 21 20; www.hotelbologna.pisa.it; Via Mazzini 57; s €59–99, d €119–179; 🚻 📺 📶) This four-star choice on the south side of the

Arno offers quiet, well-equipped rooms, efficient service and a generous breakfast buffet. It's only a 1km walk to Piazza dei Miracoli.

Royal Victoria Hotel (☎ 050 94 01 11; www.royalvictoria.it; Lungarno Pacinotti 12; r with shared bathroom €80, r with bathroom €100-150; ☎ ☎) This doyen of Pisan hotels, run with love and tender care by the Piegaja family for five generations, offers old-world luxury accompanied by warm, attentive service. The central location overlooking the Arno couldn't be better.

Eating

Being a university town, Pisa has a good range of eating places, especially around Borgo Stretto, the university on Piazza Dante Alighieri and south of the river in the trendy San Martino quarter.

BUDGET

Il Montino (Vicolo del Monte 1; pizza slice €1.20-1.50, full pizza €3.80-7.20; ☎ 10.30am-3pm & 5-10pm Mon-Sat) Students and sophisticates alike adore the *cecina* (chickpea pizza) and *spuma* (a sweet, non-alcoholic drink) that are the specialties of this famous pizzeria. You can follow their lead or instead opt for a *focaccine* (flat roll) filled with salami, pancetta or *porchetta* (pork). Order to go or claim one of the outdoor tables. You'll find it in the laneway behind Caffetteria Ginostra.

Bar Pasticceria Salza (☎ 050 58 02 44; Borgo Stretto 44; ☎ 8am-8.30pm Apr-Oct, varies Tue-Sun Nov-Mar) Salza has been tempting patrons off Borgo Stretto and into sugar-induced wickedness ever since the 1920s. Claim one of the tables in the arcade, or save some money by standing at the bar – the excellent coffee and dangerously delicious cakes and chocolates will satisfy regardless of where they are sampled.

Trattoria della Faggiola (☎ 050 55 61 79; Via della Faggiola 1; primi €7-7.50, secondi €8-9.50; ☎ dinner Fri & Sat, lunch Mon-Thu) This popular trattoria recently changed hands, and its loyal clientele suffered a few sleepless nights before the new owners managed to convince them that standards wouldn't slip. Breathing sighs of relief, they continue to choose from the three or four daily specials per course, eaten in the homely interior or at streetside tables. No credit cards.

MIDRANGE

Enoteca Osteria Il Colonnino (☎ 050 313 84 30; Via S Andrea 37-41; meals €31; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun)

Located in the warren of medieval streets between Piazza San Francesco and the river, Il Colonnino is a great spot for lunch, *aperitivo* or dinner, with modern-accented Italian dishes providing perfect accompaniments to an impressive wine list. The weekday lunch deal of a daily plate, water and glass of 'good wine' (€10) is a steal.

Osteria del Porton Rosso (☎ 050 58 05 66; Vicolo del Porton Rosso 11; meals €32; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Two menus – one from the land and one from the sea – tempt at this old-fashioned but excellent *osteria* in a laneway behind the Royal Victoria Hotel. Here, Pisan specialties such as fresh ravioli with salted cod and chickpeas happily coexist with Tuscan classics such as grilled fillet steak.

ourpick **Ristoro al Vecchio Teatro** (☎ 050 2 02 10; Piazza Dante Alighieri; set menu €35; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Tue-Sat) The Vecchio Teatro's genial host is proud of his set menu, and for good reason. The four courses are dominated by local seafood specialties and diners will encounter delights such as *torta di ceci infranti con le arsele* (an unusual savoury cake of smashed chickpeas with mussels) and risotto with prawns and orange. The dessert finale includes a *castagnaccio* (sweet chestnut cake) that has been known to prompt diners to spontaneous applause.

Drinking

Most of the student drinking action is in and around Piazza delle Vettovaglie and Piazza Dante.

Bazeel (www.bazeel.it, in Italian; Lungarno Pacinotti 1; ☎ 5pm-2am) On the corner of centrally located Piazza Garibaldi, this bar draws a mixed clientele and is famous for its *aperitivo* spread. If you want to score one of the outdoor tables, get there a bit before 6pm. After 9pm there's usually live music or a DJ.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Pisa International Airport Galileo Galilei (PSA; ☎ 050 84 93 00; www.pisa-airport.com), 2km south of town, is Tuscany's main international airport and handles flights to most major European cities.

BUS

From its hub on Piazza Sant'Antonio, Pisan bus company **CPT** (Compagnia Pisana Trasporti; ☎ 800 012773; www.cpt.pisa.it, in Italian) runs buses to/from Volterra (€5, two hours, up to 10 daily) and

Livorno (€2.50, 55 minutes, half-hourly). To get to Florence or Lucca, take the train.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Pisa is close to the A11 and A12. The SCG FI-PI-LI is a toll-free alternative for Florence and Livorno, while the north-south SS1, the Via Aurelia, connects the city with La Spezia and Rome.

Parking costs between €0.50 and €2 per hour, but you must be careful that the car park you choose is not in the city's exclusion zone (see the boxed text, below). There's a free car park outside the zone on Lungarno Guadalongo near the Fortezza di San Gallo on the south side of the Arno, and well-located pay parking to the west of the Piazza dei Miracoli just outside the Porta di Manin, at the bus station north of the Piazza dei Miracoli, in Piazza Santa Caterina (access this via Porta San Zeno) and on Via Cesare Battisti near the train station on the south side of the river.

TRAIN

Pisa is connected by rail to Florence and is also on the Rome-La Spezia train line. Destinations include Florence (€5.60 to €11.40, one to 1½ hours, frequent), Rome (€17.65 to €37.10, 2½ to four hours, 16 daily), Livorno (€1.80, 15 minutes, frequent) and Lucca (€2.40, 30 minutes, every 30 minutes). To get to Volterra, catch a train to Cecina (€4.20 to €8.60, 40 to 70 minutes, 23 daily) and then a connecting CPT bus (€3.50, frequent).

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

For Pisa airport, take a train to/from Stazione Pisa Centrale (€1.10, five minutes, 33 per day) or the LAM Rossa (red) line (€1, 10 minutes, every 10 to 20 minutes), which is operated by CPT and passes through the city centre and train station on its way to/from the airport.

If you purchase your ticket on board the bus rather than from the airport information office or a newsstand, it will cost an extra €0.50. A taxi between the airport and the city centre will cost between €8 and €10.

Terravision (www.terravision.eu) runs buses between the airport and Florence's Stazione di Santa Maria Novella (adult €10/16 one-way/return, child €5/9, 70 minutes, up to 13 daily). Vaibus/Lazzi runs services between the airport and Lucca (€2.80, one hour, 30 daily). **TRAIN S.p.A.** (☎ 0577 20 42 46; www.trainspa.it) runs two services daily between the airport and Siena (€14/26 one-way/return).

Local company **Ecovoyager** (☎ 050 56 18 39, 339 7607652; www.ecovoyager.it; Via della Faggiola 41; ☎ 9am-midnight Mon-Fri) offers city bike hire for €12 per day and a 2½-hour Segway tour of the historic centre for €65 per person.

For a taxi call ☎ 050 54 16 00 (airport), ☎ 050 4 12 52 (Pisa railway station) or ☎ 050 56 18 78 (Piazza dei Miracoli).

LIVORNO

pop 160,949

Livorno is Tuscany's second-largest city and a quintessential port town with few apologies. Having been heavily bombed during WWII, the city was rebuilt with an unfortunate lack of aesthetics.

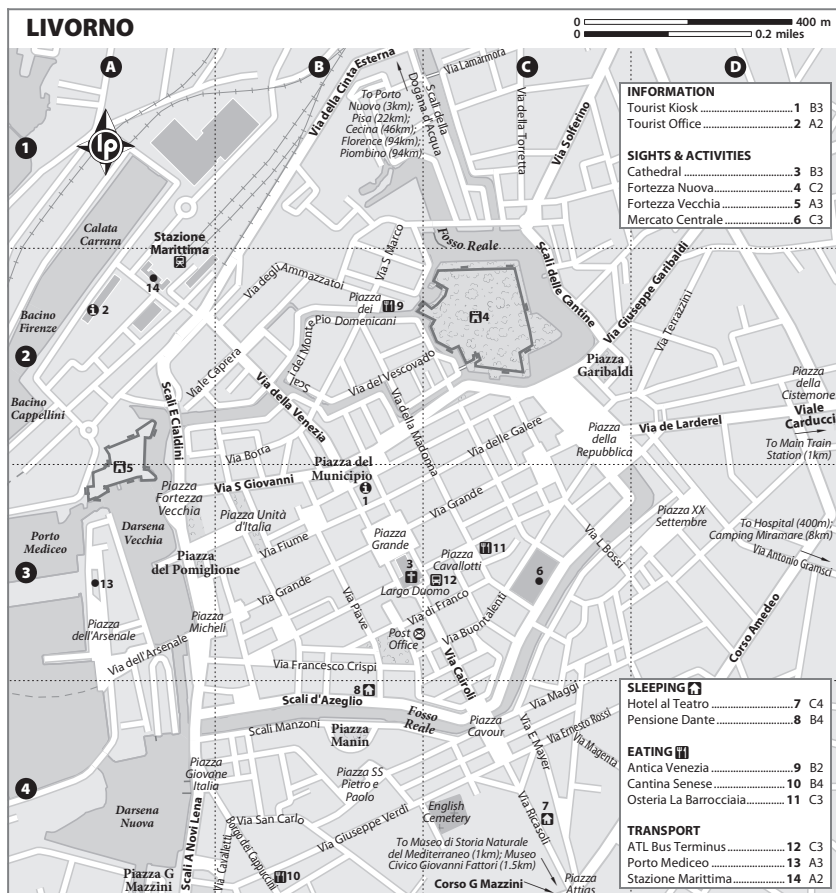
There's a **tourist kiosk** (☎ 0586 20 46 11; www.costadeglietruschi.it; Piazza del Municipio; ☎ 9am-5pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) in the centre of town; the **tourist office** (☎ 0586 89 53 20; ☎ Jun-Sep) is near the main ferry terminal at Stazione Marittima.

Sights

Mercato Centrale (Via Buontalenti; ☎ 6am-2pm Mon-Sat), Livorno's magnificent late-19th-century, 95m-long neoclassical food market, miraculously survived Allied WWII bombing. Arrive early to appreciate the wares on offer in the amazing fish section.

WARNING

There is a strict Limited Traffic Zone (ZTL) in Pisa's historic centre for all nonresidents, and this is rigorously enforced. If you drive into the zone, your car will be photographed and a fine of €76 plus administrative costs will be sent to you (or the car-hire company you have used). If you are staying at a hotel in the zone, you must supply the car's registration details to hotel staff as soon as you check in so that they can register you for a temporary permit; if you are disabled, call ☎ 800 086540 and you should also be able to obtain a free temporary permit. For maps of the ZTL, go to <https://secure.comune.pisa.it/tzi/info.jsp>.



The **Fortezza Nuova** (admission free), built for the Medici family in the late 16th century, is in an area known as *Piccola Venezia* (Little Venice) because of its small canals. The interior is now a park and little remains of the fort except for the sturdy outer walls.

Close to the waterfront is the city's other fort, the **Fortezza Vecchia** (Old Fort; admission free), constructed 60 years earlier on the site of an 11th-century building. With huge vertical cracks and bits crumbling away, it looks as though it might give up and slide into the sea at any moment.

Livorno's hands-on **Museo di Storia Naturale del Mediterraneo** (☎ 0586 26 67 11; www.provincia.livorno.it; in Italian; Via Roma 234; adult/child €10/5; ☎ 9am-1pm Tue-Fri, 3-7pm Tue, Thu & Sat, 3-7pm Sun) is

an exhaustive, first-rate museum experience for the natural sciences. Temporary exhibits rotate continually.

The **Museo Civico Giovanni Fattori** (☎ 0586 80 80 01; museofattori@comune.livorno.it; Via San Jacopo in Acquaviva 65; admission €4; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun), in a pretty park 1km south of the city, features works by the Livorno-based 19th-century Macchiaioli school.

Sleeping

Camping Miramare (☎ 0586 58 04 02; www.camping.miramare.com; Via del Littorale 220; camping per person €9-10, pitch €20-40; ☎ year-round; 🏠) This is a shady place with its own restaurant and pizzeria, right beside the beach in Antignano, about 8km south of town. There are three categories

of campsites, including some with sea views, sun chairs and umbrellas.

Pensione Dante (☎ 349 6260076; mihaela.b@hotmail.it; 1st fl, Scali d'Azeglio 28; s/d €30/40) New management has introduced new beds and vastly improved bathrooms and a kitchen here. Rooms are large and bare, some with a view of the canal, but everything is squeaky clean. The new breakfast room opens to the canal as well, and has a TV and coffee machine.

Hotel Al Teatro (☎ 0586 89 87 05; www.hotelalteatro.it; Via Enrico Mayer 42; s €95-110, d €130-150; (P) (X) (Q)) This popular eight-room boutique hotel has smallish, colour-themed rooms with understated, classic furniture and tapestry bedspreads. A few have views of the garden with a 200-year-old tree. Disabled access.

Eating

Cantina Senese (☎ 0586 89 02 39; Borgo dei Cappuccini 95; meals from €19; (X) Mon-Sat) Food- and value-conscious harbour workers are the first to fill the long wooden tables at this wonderfully unpretentious and friendly eatery, with neighbourhood families arriving later. Ordering is frequently done via faith in one's server, rather than by menu. The mussels are exceptionally good, as is the *cacciucco di pesce* (fish stew).

Antica Venezia (☎ 0586 88 73 53; Piazza dei Domenicani; meals €23; (X) Mon-Sat) A dog-eared, pen-written menu filled with tempting dishes can be produced, with difficulty, if requested, but servers prefer to launch straight into the catch-of-the-day specials, usually negating the need for further consideration. A giant *cacciucco* costs €16.

Osteria La Barrocciaia (☎ 0586 88 26 37; Piazza Cavallotti 13; meals €22; (X) Tue-Sat) The worst-kept dining secret in Livorno it may be, but locating Barrocciaia still takes a careful eye, what with it being the most inconspicuous facade and well-hidden sign in Piazza Cavallotti. Big sandwiches (€5) are sold out of the tiny front room, but with luck and timing you can score a table and enjoy the real reason every local speaks of this place with reverence.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

Livorno is a major port. Regular departures for Sardinia and Corsica leave from Calata Carrara, beside Stazione Marittima. Ticket prices vary wildly depending on date and time of travel. Ferries to Capraia and Gorgona de-

part from Porto Mediceo, a smaller terminal near Piazza dell'Arsenale. Some services to Sardinia depart from Porto Nuovo, about 3km north of the city along Via Sant'Orlando. Ferry companies operating from Livorno include:

Corsica Ferries & Sardinia Ferries (☎ 019 21 55 11; www.corsicaferries.com, www.sardiniaferries.com; Stazione Marittima) Heads to Bastia in Corsica (deck class €28 to €36, four hours, two or three services per week, daily summer) and Sardinia (deck class to Golfo Aranci, near Olbia, €32 to €40, six hours express, nine hours regular ferry, four services per week, daily summer).

Lloyd Sardegna (☎ 0565 22 23 00; www.lloyd Sardegna.it) Daily ferries to Sardinia (Olbia, €15 to €45, 11 hours).

Moby (☎ 199 30 30 40; www.moby.it) Services to Bastia, Corsica (€19 to €46, three to four hours) and Olbia, Sardinia (€16 to €83, eight to 12 hours).

Toremar (☎ 199 12 31 99; www.toremar.it, in Italian) Daily services to Isola di Capraia (€14.20, 2½ hours).

BUS

ATL (☎ 800 317700; www.atl.livorno.it) buses depart Pisa International Airport Galileo Galilei travelling to Livorno; they return via Pisa's Stazione Centrale (€2.90, one hour, hourly). CPT offers services to Pisa's Piazza Sant'Antonio (€2.50, 55 minutes, half-hourly).

TRAIN

Livorno is on the Rome-La Spezia line and is also connected to Florence and Pisa. Destinations include Rome (€16.65 to €30, three to four hours, 12 daily), Florence (€6.50, 1½ hours, 16 daily) and Pisa (€1.80, 15 minutes, frequent).

Trains are less frequent to Stazione Marittima, the station for the ports, but buses to and from the main train station run regularly.

Getting Around

ATL bus 1 runs from the main train station to Porto Mediceo. To reach Stazione Marittima, take bus 7 or electric bus PB1, PB2 or PB3. All pass through Piazza Grande.

ELBA

pop 31,000

Napoleon would think twice about fleeing from Elba were he exiled here today. Though it's a bit more congested now than when he arrived in 1814 (he engineered an escape in less than a year), the island is an ever-glorious setting of beaches, blue waters, mountain trekking and mind-bending views.

CYCLING THE ETRUSCAN COAST

The central coast is a favourite destination for cyclists, particularly along parts of the Strada del Vino Costa degli Etruschi (www.lastradadelvino.com), a 150km wine route running south from Livorno to Piombino and across to Elba.

If you're keen to explore on two wheels, a wonderfully conceived and detailed list of routes with maps designed by cycling journalist Enrico Caracciolo can be found at www.costadeglietruschi.it, including accommodation options that cater to cyclists. Enrico lives in Donoratico, on this part of the coast, and is full of tips for travellers keen to explore by bike: 'Go slow, look around, and be ready for hilly roads. Don't plan your itinerary by only studying a map. You must ask people about road conditions – the map will not tell you if that road is good for cyclists or busy with speeding trucks and cars. For example, the Cecina-Volterra (SS68) and Siena-Grosseto (SS223) roads can be very dangerous. Saturdays and Sundays, when there aren't any trucks on the roads, are the best times to cycle.'

Enrico also notes that many excellent organized bike tours are on offer in this part of Tuscany – he particularly recommends those run by Cinghiale Cycling Tours (www.cinghiale.com), an outfit run by ex-pro American racer Andy Hampsten.

Tourist offices in Tuscany stock free cycling information, including *Cycling on the Tuscan Coast and the Islands of the Archipelago*, a handy kit comprising a booklet and 48 glossy itinerary cards; the *Discovering Tuscany by Bike* booklet; and *Trekking Bike* magazine.

Over a million visitors a year take the one-hour ferry cruise out here, and in Portoferraio, the primary arrival point, it sometimes feels like they've all decided to turn up on the same weekend. Elba is the largest, most visited and most heavily populated island of the Tuscan Archipelago – which incorporates the **Parco Nazionale Arcipelago Toscano** (www.islepark.it), Europe's largest marine protected area – yet this 28km-long, 19km-wide island has plenty of quiet nooks, particularly if you time a visit for April, May or September. Avoid August at all costs.

ACTIVITIES

The multilingual tourist-office leaflet *Lo Sport Emerge dal Mare* has a useful map and lists walking and cycling trails plus where to sign on for scuba diving, windsurfing and other watery activities.

The **Centro Trekking Isola d'Elba** (☎ 0565 93 08 37; www.geniodelbosco.it), run by Il Genio del Bosco, leads trekking, biking and kayaking excursions around Elba, Capraia, Giglio and Pianosa.

Il Libraio (☎ 0565 91 71 35; Calata Mazzini 10, Portoferraio) stocks a variety of walking and biking maps for the island.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Elba is an agreeable one-hour ferry journey from Piombino. If you arrive in Piombino by train, take a connecting train on to the port. Boats to Portoferraio are the most frequent,

while some call in at Rio Marina, Marina di Campo and Porto Azzurro.

Boats are run by Moby and Toremar. Unless it is a summer weekend or the middle of August, when queues can form, simply buy a ticket at the port. Fares (€10 to €18 per person, €35 to €49 per small car) vary according to the season.

Toremar also operates a passenger-only hydrofoil service (€14 to €17, 40 minutes) year-round, and, between June and August, a fast vehicle and passenger service (two people and car from €69.20 return) to Portoferraio.

Portoferraio

Known to the Romans as Fabricia and later Ferraia (since it was a port for iron exports), this small harbour was acquired by Cosimo I de' Medici in the mid-16th century, when the fortifications took shape.

It can be a hectic place, but wandering the streets/steps of the historic centre and indulging in the exceptional eating options more than make up for the squeeze.

INFORMATION

Associazione Albergatori Isola d'Elba (☎ 0565 91 55 55; www.elbapromotion.it, in Italian; 2nd fl, Calata Italia 26) The island's professional hotel association can reserve accommodation.

Elba Link (www.elbalink.it) Carries lots of useful information about the island.

ELBA TREK

A dizzying network of walking and mountain-biking trails blanket Elba. Though some start right at Portoferraio, walkers can easily get to/from better, far-flung trailheads using the island's robust bus network. A few suggested outings are listed at www.elbalink.it, though the tourist office, Info Park Are@ and Il Libraio in Portoferraio have excellent trail maps for custom expedition planning.

Recommended walks include the following:

- **San Lucia to San Martino** A low-impact, 90-minute walk, starting just outside Portoferraio at the church of San Lucia, traversing meadows and former farmland being repossessed by nature for about 2.2km and terminating at Napoleon's villa in San Martino.
- **Marciana to Chiessi** A 12km trek starting on high in Marciana, dribbling downhill, past ancient churches, sea vistas and granite boulders for about six hours to the seaside in Chiessi.
- **The Great Elba Crossing** A three-to-four day, 60km east-west island crossing, including Monte Capanne, Elba's highest point (1019m), overnighing down on the coast as camping is not allowed on the paths. The highlight is the final 19km leg from Poggio to Pomonte, passing the Sanctuary of Madonna del Monte and the Masso dell'Aquila rock formation.

Info Park Are@ (☎ 0565 91 88 09; infoparkare@gmail.com; cnr Viale Elba & Calata Italia; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-7.30pm daily summer, Mon-Sat rest of year) Information office of the Parco Nazionale Arcipelago Toscano.

Tourist office (Agenzia per il Turismo dell'Archipelago Toscano; ☎ 0565 91 46 71; www.aptelba.it; Calata Italia 43; ☎ 9am-7pm Jun-Sep, 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun Apr & May, 9am-1pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 9am-1pm & 3-5pm Tue & Thu Feb & Mar) Near the ferry port, it has a list of the island's limited internet log-on options.

SIGHTS

From the ferry terminal, the old town, enclosed by a medieval wall and protected by a pair of brooding fortresses, is a bit less than a kilometre along the foreshore. Here you'll encounter the **Villa dei Mulini** (☎ 0565 91 58 46; Piazzale Napoleone; adult/child €3/1.50; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon & Wed-Sat, to 1pm Sun), Napoleon's home while he was emperor of this small isle, with its splendid terraced garden and library. During his Elban exile, he certainly didn't want for creature comforts – contrast his Elba lifestyle with the simplicity of his camp bed and travelling trunk when he was on the campaign trail. While the history lesson is nice, the dearth of actual Napoleonic artefacts is a tad disappointing.

The **Villa Napoleonica di San Martino** (☎ 0565 91 46 88; adult/child €3/1.50; ☎ 9am-7pm Wed-Sat, to 1pm Sun), where Napoleon occasionally dropped in, is set in hills about 5km southwest of town. Modest by Napoleonic standards, it is dominated by the overbearing mid-19th-century gallery at its base, built to house his memorabilia. A combined ticket for both villas is €5.

SLEEPING & EATING

In the height of summer many hotels operate a compulsory half-board policy.

Camping Village Rosselba le Palme (☎ 0565 93 31 01; www.rosselbalepalme.it; per person/tent/rooms €16/21/23-90) Set around a genuine botanical garden, and said to be one of the best campsites in Europe, this 'village' offers activities including tennis, archery and diving classes taught by Jean-Jacques Mayol, son of legendary free diver Jacques Mayol. A mini-market, bar and pizzeria are on-site.

Albergo Ape Elbana (☎ 0565 91 42 45; www.apelbana.it; Salita de' Medici 2; s €45-80, d €60-110; (P) (☎)) In the old town, overlooking Piazza della Repubblica (where guests can park for free), this butter-coloured building is the island's oldest hotel, where guests of Napoleon are reputed to have stayed. The position is its best feature as rooms, while large, are a little soulless. Ask for one of the larger ones overlooking the piazza.

Villa Ombrosa (☎ 0565 91 43 63; www.villaombrosa.it; Via De Gasperi 3; s €57-132, d €82-224; (P) (☎)) One of the very few hotels on the island that's open all year round. With a great location overlooking the sea and Spiaggia delle Ghaie, it also has its own small private beach. Half-board, considerably more creative than many hotels' bland buffet fare, is obligatory in summer.

Il Castagnaccio Pizzeria (☎ 0565 91 58 45; Via del Mercato Vecchio 5; half/whole pizzas €3/6) Down a narrow street from Piazza Cavour in the historic centre, this is a local institution for takeaway or sit-down pizza bliss. More than 20 different types of wood-fired pizza appear on the menu.

Cafescondido (☎ 340 3400881; Via del Carmine 65; meals €27; ☹ Mon-Sat) Way up the hill, towards Fortezza Falcone, with a raucous cafe at the front that gives no sign of the delicious food served in the impressionist art-festooned back room. Servers deftly explain Elba-centric culinary permutations on the chalkboard menu.

our pick La Libertaria (☎ 0565 91 49 78; Calata Matteotti 12; meals €30; ☹ Apr-Oct) Seating capacity and backdrops are meagre, but the food here is divine. The *linguine sarde e finocchietto* (pasta with sardines and fennel) is an unlikely treat, and the cooked-to-perfection *tonno in crosta di pistacchi* (tuna fillet with pistachio crust) may actually keep you in Portoferraio an extra night for a second helping.

GETTING AROUND

Scream around Elba by mountain bike or scooter. Typical high-season daily rates for city bikes are €15, mountain bikes €24, mopeds €28 and scooters (100 to 125cc) €40. Don't bother with a vehicle: the roads are already overlogged with cars in summer. **Two Wheels Network** (TWN; ☎ 0565 91 46 66; www.twn-rent.it; Viale Elba 32, Portoferraio) rents bikes, scooters and even kayaks.

ATL runs an efficient trans-island service. Pick up a timetable from the main **bus station** (Viale Elba, Portoferraio). From Portoferraio (the bus station is almost opposite the Toremar jetty), there are at least seven runs daily (all €2) to/from Marciana Marina, Marina di Campo, Capoliveri and Porto Azzurro. A day pass costs €7 and a six-day run-around pass is €19.

Marciana Marina

Unlike most cookie-cutter marinas, Marciana Marina, 20km west of Portoferraio, has character and history to complement its pleasant pebble beaches. It's a fine base for attacking the island's best walking trails.

Hotel Marinella (☎ 0565 9 90 18; www.elbahotelmarinella.it; Viale Margherita 38; B&B per person €45-92, half-board €53-100; ☹ Easter-mid-Oct; ☎ ☹ ☹), located 200m from the beach, has facilities including two tennis courts, sea-water pool, garden, restaurant and bar.

Osteria del Piano (☎ 0565 90 72 92; Via Provinciale 24; meals €29; ☹ Apr-Oct), about halfway between Portoferraio and Marciana Marina, is on the road just outside Procchio. It serves up astonishing concoctions such as black-and-white spaghetti served with a crab sauce.

Il Ristorante Scaraboci (☎ 0565 99 68 68; Via XX Settembre 29; meals €40; ☹ Thu-Tue) is a promising fish and seafood venue where all pastas and desserts are homemade. For something special, try the *spaghetti al sugo d'astice* (spaghetti with lobster sauce).

Porto Azzurro & Capoliveri

Dominated by its fort, which was built in 1603 by Philip III of Spain and is now a prison, Porto Azzurro is a pleasant resort town close to some excellent beaches. There's a **tourist office** (☎ 4-10pm Mon-Sat mid-Jul-Sep) on Via Vittorio Veneto.

Hotel Belmare (☎ 0565 9 50 12; www.elba-hotelbelmare.it; Banchina IV Novembre; per person €40-75; ☹ year-round; ☹ ☹) sits in an enviable location on the main promenade. It's nothing fancy, but rooms are comfy enough. There's a small bar and TV room for post-beach R&R. Only some rooms have air-con.

Osteria La Botte Gaia (☎ 0565 9 56 07; www.labottegaia.com; Via Europa 5-7; meals €34-38; ☹ dinner only, closed Mon winter) is Slow Food-featured and deservedly so. Homemade pasta supplements the ever-changing daily menu that runneth over with just-caught fish options and a few veggie plates.

From Porto Azzurro, take a short trip south to **Capoliveri**, one of the island's little hill-top surprise packets. Wander its narrow streets and enjoy the giddy views before trying out one of the nearby beaches such as Barabarca, accessible only by a steep track that winds down the cliff, and Zuccale, more easily reached and perfect for a family outing. For more information, go to the **tourist office** (☎ 0565 96 70 29; Piazza Matteotti; ☹ 9am-noon & 7-10pm Mon-Sat mid-Jun-Sep).

CENTRAL TUSCANY

This part of the region boasts famous wines, postcard-perfect landscapes and cultural gems galore, including the Gothic buildings of Siena, medieval towers of San Gimignano and the Renaissance town centre in Pienza.

CHIANTI

When people imagine classic Tuscan countryside, they usually conjure up images of Chianti – gentle hills, sun-baked farmhouses and lots of vines. This area between Florence and Siena produces some of the country's

most heavily marketed wine, the best known of which is Chianti Classico, a Sangiovese-dominated drop sold under the Gallo Nero (Black Cockerel/Rooster) symbol.

The area is split between the provinces of Florence (Chianti Fiorentino) and Siena (Chianti Senese). The lovely Monti del Chianti rising into the Apennines marks the area's eastern boundary and the scenic Strada Chiantigiana (the SS222) snakes from Florence to Siena. Vineyards and olive groves carpet much of Chianti, a wealthy pocket studded with Romanesque churches known as *pievi* and the historic castles of Florentine and Siennese warlords.

Bus-hopping is feasible, but having your own wheels – two or four – is the only real way to discover the region. You can rent wheels from **Ramuzzi** (☎ 055 85 30 37; www.ramuzzi.com; Via Italo Stecchi 23; bike/50cc scooter per day €20/30; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) in Greve in Chianti. **Florence by Bike** (Map pp484-5; ☎ 055 48 89 92; www.florencebybike.it; Via San Zanobi 120-122r) offers a 32km-long day tour of northern Chianti (including lunch and wine tasting, €76) leaving Florence at 9.30am and returning by 4pm. Other companies offering guided bike tours of the region include **I Bike Florence** (☎ 055 012 39 94; www.ibikeflorence.com), **I Bike Italy** (☎ 055 234 23 71; www.ibikeitaly.com) and **I Bike Tuscany** (☎ 335 812 07 69; www.ibiketuscany.com).

Greve in Chianti

pop 14,087

This small town, 20km south of Florence on the SS222 and the only one in Chianti easily accessible from Florence by SITA bus (€3.10, one hour, half-hourly), has two claims to fame. They are the historic *macelleria* (butcher shop) **Antica Macelleria Falorni** (☎ 055 85 30 29; www.falorni.it; Piazza Matteotti 71; ☎ closed Wed pm & daily 1-4pm), known for its mean cuts since 1729; and Giovanni da Verrazzano (1485–1528). Local-boy-made-good and discoverer of New York harbour, Verrazzano was commemorated there by the Verrazzano Narrows bridge linking Staten Island to Brooklyn (the good captain lost a 'z' from his name somewhere in the mid-Atlantic).

In the first or second week of September, the town's main square, Piazza Matteotti, hosts **Greve's annual wine fair**. At other times, head to **Le Cantine di Greve in Chianti** (☎ 055 854 64 04; www.lecantine.it; Piazza delle Cantine 2; ☎ 10am-7pm),

a vast commercial *enoteca* stocking more than 1200 varieties of wine. To indulge in some of the 140 different wines available for tasting here (including Super Tuscans, top DOCs and DOCGs, *Vin Santo* and grappa), buy a prepaid wine card costing €10 to €25 from the central bar, stick it into one of the many taps and out trickles your tippie of choice. Any unused credit will be refunded when you return the card. It's fabulous fun, though somewhat distressing for designated drivers. To find it, look for the supermarket on the main road – it's down a staircase opposite the supermarket entrance.

Three kilometres north of the town is the ancestral home of Greve's New York pioneer, **Castello di Verrazzano** (☎ 055 85 42 43; www.verrazzano.com; ☎ guided tours 10am & 11am Mon-Fri), the castle of an estate where Tuscan produce – Chianti Classico, *Vin Santo*, grappa, honey, olive oil and balsamic vinegar – has been produced for centuries. You can tour its historic wine cellar and gardens and enjoy a tasting of its wines (1½ hours, €14, Monday to Friday only) or go the whole hog and lunch on five estate-produced courses in the company of five different wines (three hours, €48, Monday to Friday only). On Saturdays, there's a 2½-hour 'Chianti Tradition' option including a tour, tasting and light repast (€28).

In the nearby 11th-century abbey of **Badia di Passignano**, another famous wine estate can be visited. The historic cellars here contain the viticulture stash of the Antinori family (www.antinori.it), one of Tuscany's oldest and most prestigious wine-making families. Guided **wine tours** (2hr visit €25; ☎ 3.30pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat) visit the estate's cellar and vineyard and you taste four Antinori wines; bookings must be made in advance at the **Osteria di Passignano** (☎ 055 807 12 78; www.osteriadipassignano.com; Via Passignano 31; ☎ wine shop 10am-11pm Mon-Sat), the Antinori wine shop and restaurant situated below the abbey. You don't need to make a reservation to enjoy a **wine-tasting** (€15, €20 or €30 for three wines depending on what you taste) in the *osteria*.

The **tourist office** (☎ 055 854 62 87; Piazza Matteotti 11; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, & on Sat May-Sep) stocks a mine of electronic info on wineries to visit and trails to cycle or stroll. Particularly popular is the 3km-long walk west (1½ to two hours) to **Castello di Montefioralle**, a medieval fortified hill-top village with a 10th-century Romanesque church and a couple of restaurants to lunch at.

Note that a popular open-air market is held in Piazza Matteotti every Saturday morning – do not leave your car there the night before as it may be towed away.

SLEEPING

Ostello del Chianti (☎ 055 805 02 65; www.ostellodelchi anti.it; Via Roma 137, Tavernelle Val Di Pesa; dm €14.50, d with shared bathroom €35, d with bathroom €45; ☎ reception 8.30am–11am & 4pm–midnight mid-Mar–Oct; ☎) One of Italy's oldest hostels (it's been going strong since the 1950s), this recently renovated hostel oozes dynamism. The dorms max out at six beds (those in the original wing even have two bathrooms), bike hire can be arranged and it has a great garden for *aperitivi*. Breakfast costs €1.70. Tavernelle is around 14km southwest of Greve.

Agriiturismo (☎ 339 5019849; www.agriturismo .com; Strada San Silvestro 11, Barberino Val d'Elsa; 2-/4-/6-bed apt €70/100/120; ☎) Woods filled with oak, juniper, cypress and pine trees sit next to ancient terraces of olive trees on this farm estate 13km southwest of Greve. All cultivation is pesticide-, herbicide- and fertilizer-free, and sustainable features such as solar panels, rain collection and recycling are utilised. The apartments are charming, with a strong and attractive design ethos. All have kitchens. No credit cards.

Fattoria di Rignana (☎ 055 85 20 65; www.rignana .it; Val di Rignana 15, Rignana; d in fattoria €95–105, d in villa €130–140; ☎) This old farmstead and noble villa 3.8km from Badia di Passignano offers a textbook Chianti experience – namely, great views, wine and food in a tranquil and comfortable vineyard environment. Two accommodation options are on offer: utterly gorgeous frescoed rooms in the 17th-century villa and more rustic rooms in the adjoining *fattoria* (farmhouse).

Villa Vignamaggio (☎ 055 85 46 61; www.vig namaggio.it; Via Petriolo 5; d €135–450; ☎) A location in Kenneth Branagh's film *Much Ado About Nothing*, this vast 15th-century complex 5km south of Greve makes wine and grappa, and has self-catering apartments and cottages to rent. From Greve, follow the SS222 south for 2km and turn left towards Lamole.

EATING

L'Antica Macelleria Cecchini (☎ 055 85 20 20; http://darioceccchini.blogspot.com; Via XX Luglio 11; ☎ 9am–2pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Sun, to 6pm Fri & Sat) The small town of Panzano southwest of Greve is known

throughout Italy for the *macelleria* owned and run by extrovert butcher, Dario Cecchini. This Tuscan celebrity has carved out a niche for himself as a poetry-spouting guardian of the *bistecca* and other Tuscan meaty treats. He's even opened a burger joint, Mac Dario, above the shop (€10 for a burger, potatoes and vegetables).

Osteria Le Pazanelle (☎ 0577 73 35 11; Lucarelli; meals €25; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue–Sun) Perfect for a light lunch beneath trees, this roadside inn makes a great lunch stop en route from Greve to Siena. Swiss-born chef Angelo cooks up a straightforward choice of around six dishes per course. Don't miss his crostini topped with *lardo* and orange peel, or his pasta dressed in a *pecorino* and pear sauce. Find it 5km south of Panzano on the SP2 to Radda in Chianti.

La Cantinetta di Rignana (☎ 055 85 26 01; www.lacantinettadirignana.it; Rignana; meals €30; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed–Mon) Idyllically nestled in the old oil mill on the Rignana estate (left), this eatery offers quintessential Tuscan views from its large terrace. Rustic dishes on offer include wild boar carpaccio (thin slices of fish or meat), truffle-stuffed ravioli, warm gooey oven-baked *tomino* (a type of cheese) with locally gathered mushrooms or a simple grilled slab of meat. Service is friendly, but we were perplexed by the fact that the *cantinetta* doesn't serve wine by the glass – a real problem for diners who need to get back behind the wheel. It's a 15-minute drive from Badia di Passignano, between Panzano and Mercatale Val di Pesa.

our pick Osteria di Passignano (☎ 055 807 12 78; www.osteriadipassignano.com; Via di Passignano 33; meals €65, degustation menus €60 & €100; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon–Sat) This elegant dining room on the Antinori Estate is one of Tuscany's most impressive restaurants. The delectable food utilises local produce and is decidedly Tuscan in inspiration, but its execution is refined rather than rustic.

Castellina

The cylindrical silos at Castellina's entry brim with Chianti Classico, the wine that brought wealth to this old frontier town between warring Siena and Florence.

From the southern car park, take Via Ferruccio, then turn almost immediately right to walk into town beneath the tunnel-like **Via del Volte**. This medieval street, originally open to the elements, then encroached upon by shops and houses, is now a long, vaulted, shady

tunnel, particularly welcome in the summertime. Nearby, the area's Etruscan roots form the focus of the modern **Museo Archeologico del Chianti Senese** (☎ 055 74 20 90; www.museoarcheologicochianti.it; Piazza del Comune 18; adult/concession €3/2; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Thu-Tue).

The privately run **tourist office** (☎ 0577 74 13 92; www.essenceoftuscany.it; Via Ferruccio 26; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-6pm daily Mar-Nov, 10am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Sat Dec & Feb) can help with maps, tours, accommodation and information.

Down a valley at the end of a 1.5km dirt road, **Locanda La Capannuccia** (☎ 0577 74 11 83; www.lacapannuccia.it; Borgo di Pietrafitta; d €95-125; ☎ Mar-mid-Oct; (P) (Q)) is a charming Tuscan getaway. Its five rooms are furnished with antiques and hosts Mario and Daniela couldn't be more welcoming. Reserve in the morning for one of Daniela's very special dinners (€24 to €28, Monday to Saturday). To get there, head north along the SS222 from Castellina and turn left to Pietrafitta.

Radda in Chianti

Shields and escutcheons add a dash of drama to the facade of 16th-century **Palazzo del Podestà** (Piazza Ferrucci), facing the church on the main square of this popular tourist spot 11km east of Castellina. The volunteer-staffed **Ufficio Pro Loco** (☎ 0577 73 84 94; Piazza Castello 6; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-1pm Sun mid-Apr-mid-Oct, 10.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat mid-Oct-mid-Apr) supplies tourist information, including ample info on walking in the area, such as several pretty half-day walks. **Enoteca Toscana** (☎ 0577 73 88 45; Via Roma 29) is the place to taste and buy local wine and olive oil.

Alternatively, head 6km north to the gorgeous old-stone hill-top hamlet of **Castello di Volpaia** (☎ 0577 73 80 66; www.volpaia.it; Piazza della Cisterna 1, Volpaia), where particularly lovely wines, olive oils and vinegars have been made for aeons. Book ahead to enjoy a tour or take a cooking class, or pop into the *enoteca*, which is inside the main tower of the castle, to stock up on a few bottles.

Continuing south to Siena, take a walk on the wild art side at the **Parco Sculture del Chianti** (☎ 0577 35 71 51; www.chiantisculpturepark.it; adult/child €7.50/5; ☎ 10am-sunset Apr-Oct, by appointment Nov-Mar), a vast green wooded area studded with contemporary sculptures and art installations in Pievasciata, 20km south of Gaiole and 13km north of Siena.

SIENA

pop 53,881

The rivalry between historic adversaries Siena and Florence continues to this day, and every traveller seems to strongly identify with one over the other. It often boils down to aesthetic preference: while Florence saw its greatest flourishing during the Renaissance, Siena's enduring artistic glories are largely Gothic – though there's also the eternal question of who has the best patron saint (Siena's Santa Caterina, obviously).

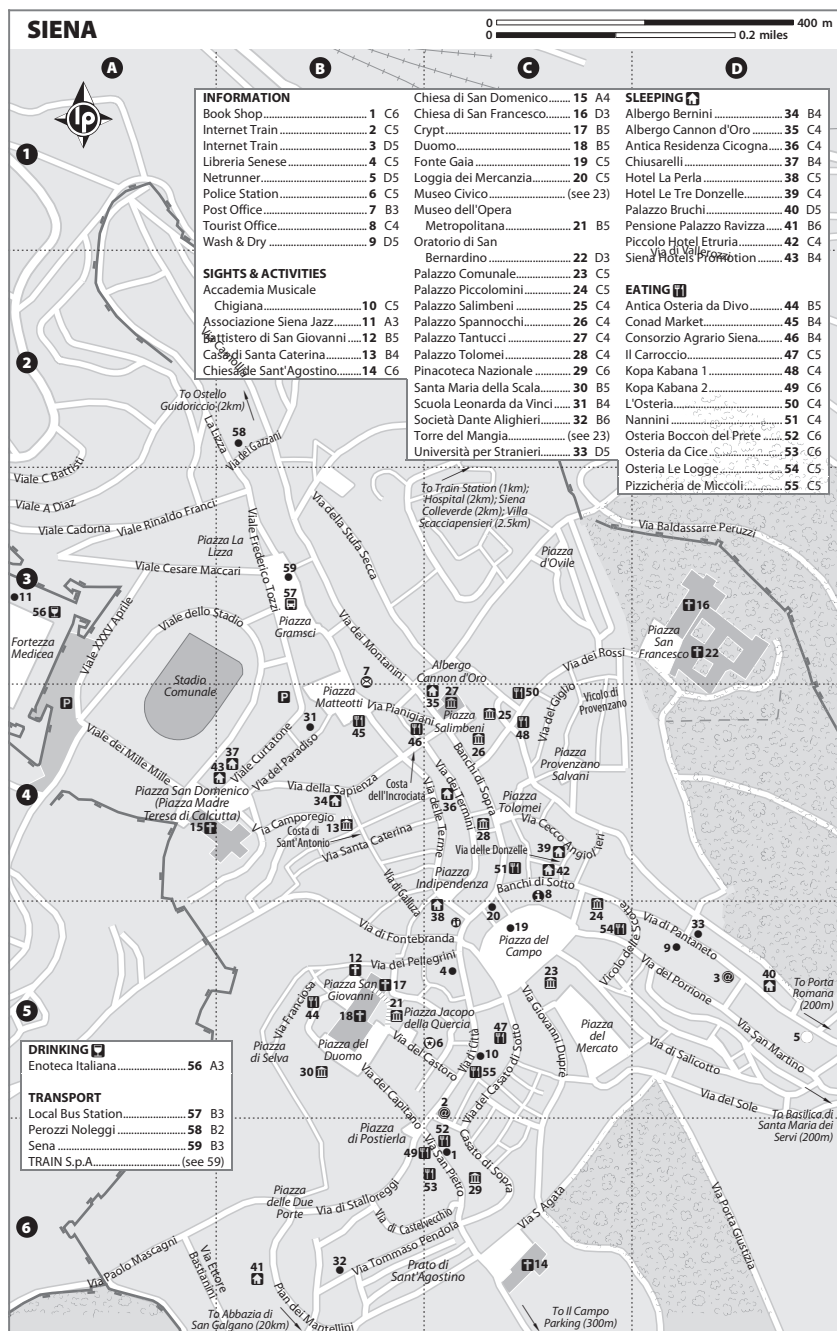
One of Italy's most enchanting cities, Siena's medieval centre is chock-full of majestic buildings and its profusion of churches and small museums harbour a wealth of artwork. Make sure you allow enough time to wander the snarled lanes of the historic centre, a Unesco World Heritage site.

History

According to legend, Siena was founded by the son of Remus, and the symbol of the wolf feeding the twins Romulus and Remus is as ubiquitous in Siena as in Rome. In reality the city was probably of Etruscan origin, although it didn't begin to grow into a proper town until the 1st century BC, when the Romans established a military colony here called *Sena Julia*.

In the 12th century, Siena's wealth, size and power grew along with its involvement in commerce and trade. Its rivalry with neighbouring Florence also grew proportionately, leading to numerous wars during the first half of the 13th century between Guelph Florence and Ghibelline Siena. In 1230 Florence besieged Siena and catapulted dung and donkeys over its walls. Siena's revenge came at the Battle of Montaperti in 1260 but victory was short-lived. Only 10 years later, the Tuscan Ghibellines were defeated by Charles of Anjou and for almost a century Siena was allied to Florence, the chief town of the Tuscan Guelph League (supporters of the Pope).

This was when Siena, ruled by the Council of Nine (a bourgeois group constantly bickering with the aristocracy), enjoyed its greatest prosperity. It was the Council that directed the construction of so many of the fine buildings in the Siennese-Gothic style that give the city its striking appearance, including lasting monuments such as the cathedral, the Palazzo Comunale and Il Campo.



The Siennese school of painting had its origins at this time and reached its peak in the early 14th century, when artists such as Duccio di Buoninsegna and Ambrogio Lorenzetti were at work.

A plague outbreak in 1348 killed two-thirds of the city's 100,000 inhabitants and led to a period of decline.

At the end of the 14th century, Siena came under the control of Milan's Visconti family, followed in the next century by the autocratic patrician Pandolfo Petrucci. Under Petrucci the city's fortunes improved somewhat until the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V conquered it in 1555 after a two-year siege that left thousands of people dead. He handed the city over to Cosimo I de' Medici, who barred the inhabitants from operating banks and thus severely curtailed Siena's power.

Though the hapless residents that endured it may not agree, Siena's centuries-long economic downturn in the wake of the Medici takeover was a blessing that resulted in the city's present-day, matchless allure. Its predominantly Gothic surroundings have survived largely intact as no one could be bothered to undertake (or fund) demolition or new construction. Furthermore, unlike the poundings endured by neighbouring cities in WWII, the French took Siena virtually unopposed, sparing it discernible damage.

Orientation

Historic Siena, still largely surrounded by its medieval walls punctuated by the eight original city gates, is small and easily tackled on foot, although the way streets swirl in semi-circles around Piazza del Campo (known as Il Campo) can be confusing. At the city's heart is this gently sloping square, around which curve its main streets: the Banchi di Sopra, Via di Città and Banchi di Sotto.

Information

Book Shop (☎ 0577 22 65 94; www.bookshopsiena.com; Via San Pietro 19) Restock your suitcase library at this emporium of English-language books.

Hospital (☎ 0577 58 51 11; Viale Bracci) Just north of Siena at Le Scotte.

Internet Train (Via di Città 121; per hr €4; ☎ 10am–10pm Sun–Fri) A popular cafe with cables for laptop hook-ups. Another branch is at Via di Pantaneto 57.

Libreria Senese (☎ 0577 28 08 45; Via di Città 62-6) Stocks English, French and German books. Also sells international newspapers.

Netrunner (☎ 0577 4 49 46; www.netrunnersiena.net; Via di Pantaneto 132; per hr €6; ☎ 10am–11pm Mon–Sat, 3–9pm Sun)

Police station (☎ 0577 20 11 11; Via del Castoro 23)

Post office (Piazza Matteotti 1)

Tourist office (☎ 0577 28 05 51; www.terresiena.it; Piazza del Campo 56; ☎ 9am–7pm) Reserves accommodation and sells direct bus tickets to Pisa airport (€14/26 one-way/return).

Wash & Dry (Via di Pantaneto 38; ☎ 8am–10pm) Laundrette.

Sights

PIAZZA DEL CAMPO

Sloping Piazza del Campo (Il Campo) has been Siena's civic and social centre ever since it was staked out by the Council of Nine in the mid-14th century. It's paving is divided into nine sectors, representing the members of the Council of Nine. In the upper part of the square is the 15th-century **Fonte Gaia** (Happy Fountain), now clad in reproductions of the original panels by Jacopo della Quercia.

At the lowest point of the square (or the tap of the above mentioned metaphorical sink), the spare, elegant **Palazzo Comunale** is also known as the Palazzo Pubblico, or town hall. Entry to the ground-floor central courtyard is free. From the *palazzo* soars its graceful bell tower, the **Torre del Mangia** (admission €7; ☎ 10am–7pm mid-Mar–Oct, to 4pm Nov–mid-Mar), 102m high, completed in 1297.

The lower level of the *palazzo*'s facade features a characteristic Siennese-Gothic arcade. Inside is the **Museo Civico** (☎ 0577 29 22 63; adult/student €7.50/4.50, museum & tower €12; ☎ 10am–7pm mid-Mar–Oct, to 5.30pm or 6.30pm Nov–mid-Mar), occupying rooms richly decorated by artists of the Siennese school. Of particular note is Simone Martini's famous *Maestà* (Virgin Mary in Majesty), on display in the Sala del Mappamondo. Completed in 1315, it features the Madonna beneath a canopy surrounded by saints and angels and is Martini's first known canvas. In the Sala dei Nove are Ambrogio Lorenzetti's didactic frescoes depicting *Allegories of Good and Bad Government*, contrasting the harmony of good government with the – alas, much deteriorated – depiction of the privations and trials of those subject to bad rule.

DUOMO

Siena's **cathedral** (☎ 0577 4 73 21; www.operaduomo.siena.it; Piazza del Duomo; admission €3; ☎ 10.30am–7.30pm Mon–Sat, 1.30–6.30pm Sun Mar–Oct, 10.30am–6.30pm Mon–Sat,

IL PALIO

Dating from the Middle Ages, this spectacular event stages a series of colourful pageants and a wild horse race around Il Campo on 2 July and 16 August. Ten of Siena's 17 *contrade* (town districts) compete for the coveted *palio* (silk banner). Each *contrada* has its own traditions, symbol and colours plus its own church and *palio* museum.

Il Campo becomes a racetrack, with a ring of packed dirt around its perimeter serving as the course. From about 5pm, representatives from each *contrada* parade in historical costume, all bearing their individual banners. For scarcely one exhilarating minute, the 10 horses and their bareback riders tear three times around Il Campo with a speed and violence that makes spectators' hair stand on end.

Join the crowds in the centre of Il Campo at least four hours before the start (7.45pm in July, 7pm in August) if you want a place on the rails.

A day or two earlier, you might see jockeys and horses trying out in Il Campo – almost as good as the real thing.

1.30-5.30pm Sun Nov-Feb) is one of Italy's greatest Gothic churches. Begun in 1196, it was completed by 1215, although work continued on features such as the apse and dome well into the 13th century. The magnificent facade of white, green and red polychrome marble was begun by Giovanni Pisano – who completed only the lower section before his death – and finished towards the end of the 14th century. The mosaics in the gables are 19th-century additions. The statues of philosophers and prophets by Pisano above the lower section are copies; the originals are in the adjacent Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana (see right).

In 1339 the city's leaders planned to enlarge the cathedral and create one of Italy's biggest churches. Known as the Nuovo Duomo (New Cathedral), the remains of this project are on Piazza Jacopo della Quercia, on the eastern side of the cathedral. The daring plan, to build an immense new nave with the present church becoming the transept, was scotched by the plague of 1348.

The most precious feature of the cathedral's interior is the inlaid marble floor, decorated with 56 panels depicting historical and biblical subjects. The earliest ones are graffiti designs in simple black-and-white marble, dating from the mid-14th century. The latest, panels in coloured marble, were created in the 16th century. The most valuable are kept covered and are revealed only from 21 August through 27 October each year (admission is €6 during this period).

Other drawcards include the exquisitely crafted marble and porphyry pulpit by Nicola Pisano, aided by his equally talented son, Giovanni.

Through a door from the north aisle is another of the cathedral's jewels, the **Libreria Piccolomini**, built to house the books of Enea Silvio Piccolomini, better known as Pius II. The walls of the small hall have vividly coloured narrative frescoes by Bernardino Pinturicchio, depicting events in the life of Piccolomini.

MUSEO DELL'OPERA METROPOLITANA

This **museum** (☎ 0577 28 30 48; www.operaduomo.siena.it Piazza del Duomo 8; admission €6; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mar-May & Sep-Nov, to 8pm Jun-Aug, 10am-5pm Dec-Feb), also known as Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, is in what would have been the southern aisle of the nave of the Nuovo Duomo.

Inside, formerly adorning the cathedral, are the 12 statues of prophets and philosophers by Giovanni Pisano that decorated the facade. The highlight is Duccio di Buoninsegna's striking early 14th-century *Maestà*, which is painted on both sides as a screen for the cathedral's high altar. The front and back have now been separated and the panels depicting the story of the Passion hang opposite the *Maestà*. Other artists represented are Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Simone Martini and Taddeo di Bartolo, and there's also a rich collection of tapestries and manuscripts.

For a great panoramic view, haul yourself up the 131-step, narrow corkscrew stairway to the **Panorama del Facciato** (admission €6) at the top of the facade of the putative Nuovo Duomo. A combined ticket for the museum and panorama costs €10 and is valid for three days.

CRYPT

Just north of the cathedral and down a flight of steps is the **crypt** (admission incl audioguide €6;

SAFE COMBINATIONS

Siena has a bewildering permutation of combined tickets. The distribution when we last visited was as follows:

- Museo Civico and Torre del Mangia (€12)
- Museo Civico, Santa Maria della Scala and Palazzo delle Papesse (€11, valid for two days)
- Museo Civico, Palazzo delle Papesse, Santa Maria della Scala, Museo dell'Opera & Battistero di San Giovanni (€14, valid for seven days, 1 November to 14 March)
- Museo Civico, Palazzo delle Papesse, Santa Maria della Scala, Museo dell'Opera & Battistero di San Giovanni (€17, valid for seven days, 15 March to 31 October)
- Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana, Battistero di San Giovanni, Crypt, Oratorio di San Bernardino, Museo Diocesano (€10, valid for three days)
- Museo Civico, Santa Maria della Scala, SMS Contemporanea, Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana, Battistero di San Giovanni (€14, valid for seven days)
- Museo Civico, Santa Maria della Scala, SMS Contemporanea, Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana, Battistero di San Giovanni, Museo Diocesano, Chiesa di Sant'Agostino and Oratorio di San Bernardino – the bumper bundle though it doesn't include Torre del Mangia (€17, valid for seven days)
- 'Siena's Renaissance Trail': Museo Civico, Santa Maria della Scala, National Gallery, Duomo and Libreria Piccolomini, State Archive (€13.50)

🕒 9.30am–7pm Mar–May, to 8pm Jun–Aug, to 7pm Sep–Oct), a room below the cathedral's pulpit discovered in 1999. Its walls are completely covered with *pittura a secco* ('dry painting') dating back to the 1200s. There's some 180 sq metres' worth, depicting several biblical stories, including the Passion of Jesus and the Crucifixion.

BATTISTERO DI SAN GIOVANNI

Opposite the crypt is the **Battistero di San Giovanni** (Piazza San Giovanni; admission €3; 🕒 9.30am–7pm Mar–May, to 8pm Jun–Aug, to 7pm Sep–Oct).

While the baptistery's Gothic facade has remained unfinished, the interior is richly decorated with frescoes. The centrepiece is a marble font by Jacopo della Quercia, decorated with bronze panels in relief and depicting the life of St John the Baptist. Artists include Lorenzo Ghiberti (*Baptism of Christ* and *St John in Prison*) and Donatello (*Herod's Feast*).

SANTA MARIA DELLA SCALA

In the basement of this former **pilgrims' hospital** (☎ 0577 22 48 11; Piazza del Duomo 2; admission €6; 🕒 10.30am–6.30pm Apr–Oct, to 4.30pm Nov–Mar) is the Sala dei Pellegrinaio clad in vivid secular frescoes (quite a relief after so much spirituality all around town) by Domenico di Bartolo, lauding the good works of the hospital and its

patrons. There's also a collection of Roman and Etruscan remains.

PINACOTECA NAZIONALE

Within the 15th-century Palazzo Buonsignori, this **art gallery** (☎ 0577 28 11 61; Via San Pietro 29; adult/child €4/free; 🕒 10am–6pm Tue–Sat, 9am–1pm Sun, 8.30am–1.30pm Mon) is a showcase for the greatest of Siennese artists. Look for the *Madonna col Bambino* (Madonna with Child) by Simone Martini, and a series of Madonnas by Ambrogio Lorenzetti.

CHIESA DI SAN DOMENICO

Santa Caterina di Siena took her vows within this imposing **church** (Piazza San Domenico; 🕒 7.30am–1pm & 3–6.30pm). In the **Cappella di Santa Caterina** are frescoes by Sodoma depicting events in her life – as well as the saint's head, held in a 15th-century tabernacle above the altar. St Catherine died in Rome, where most of her body is preserved, but, in line with the bizarre practice of collecting relics of dead saints, her head was returned to Siena. In a small window box to the right of the chapel are her desiccated thumb and the nasty-looking whip that she flogged herself with for the wellbeing of the souls of the faithful.

For more of Santa Caterina – figuratively speaking – visit **Casa di Santa Caterina** (☎ 0577 22 15 62; Costa di Sant'Antonio 6; admission free; 🕒 9am–6.30pm

Mar–Nov, 10am–6pm Dec–Feb), where the saint was born and lived with her parents plus, says the legend, 24 siblings. The rooms, converted into small chapels in the 15th century, are decorated with frescoes and paintings by many Sienese artists, including Sodoma.

OTHER CHURCHES & PALAZZI

Loggia dei Mercanzia, the 15th-century triple-arched balcony where merchants used to plot deals, is just northwest of Il Campo. From here, strike east along Banchi di Sotto until you pass **Palazzo Piccolomini**, a Renaissance *palazzo* housing the city's archives. Further east are the 13th-century **Basilica di Santa Maria dei Servi** (Via dei Servi), with frescoes by Pietro Lorenzetti in a chapel off the north transept, and 14th-century **Porta Romana**.

Return to Piazza del Campo and head north on Banchi di Sopra, past Piazza Tolomei, which is dominated by the 13th-century **Palazzo Tolomei**. Further along, Piazza Salimbeni is bound to the north by **Palazzo Tantiucci**, Gothic **Palazzo Salimbeni** (the prestige head office of Monte dei Paschi di Siena bank) to the east and, on the third flank, Renaissance **Palazzo Spannocchi**, from where 29 finely carved busts stare down at you from beneath the eaves.

Northeast of here, along Via dei Rossi, is the **Chiesa di San Francesco**, with its vast single nave. It has suffered over the years from a devastating 17th-century fire and use as army barracks. Beside the church is the **Oratorio di San Bernardino** (☎ 0577 28 30 48; www.operaduomo.siena.it; Piazza San Francesco 9; admission €3; ☞ 10.30am–1.30pm & 3–5.30pm mid–Mar–Oct) with its small museum of religious artworks.

Courses

LANGUAGE & CULTURE

Scuola Leonardo da Vinci (☎ 0577 24 90 97; www.scuolaleonardo.com; Via del Paradiso 16) Italian-language school with supplementary cultural and culinary options.

Società Dante Alighieri (☎ 0577 4 95 33; www.dantealighieri.com; Via Tommaso Pendola 37) Language and cultural courses southwest of the city centre.

Università per Stranieri (University for Foreigners; ☎ 0577 24 01 15; www.unistrasi.it) Offers various courses in Italian language and culture. It's off Via di Pantaneto 45.

MUSIC

Accademia Musicale Chigiana (☎ 0577 2 20 91; www.chigiana.it; Via di Città 89) Offers classical-music courses every summer, as well as seminars and concerts

performed by visiting musicians, teachers and students as part of the **Settimana Musicale Senese** (see below).

Associazione Siena Jazz (☎ 0577 27 14 01; www.sienajazz.it; Piazza Libertà) One of Europe's foremost institutions of its type offering courses in jazz.

Festivals & Events

The **Accademia Musicale Chigiana** (left) mounts the **Settimana Musicale Senese** in July and the **Estate Musicale Chigiana** in July and August. Concerts in these series are frequently held in the magnificent settings of the **Abbazia di San Galgano** (p544), about 20km southwest of the city, and **Abbazia di Sant'Antimo** (p550), near Montalcino. For information, call ☎ 0577 2 20 91.

In November, the **Festa di Santa Cecilia**, a series of concerts and exhibitions, takes place to honour Cecilia, patron saint of musicians.

Sleeping

Vacanze Senesi (☎ 0577 4 59 00; www.vacanzesenesi.it) has a representative in the tourist office who can arrange all forms of accommodation, or book on its website. **Siena Hotels Promotion** (☎ 0577 28 80 84; www.hotelsiena.com; Piazza Madre Teresa di Calcutta 5; ☞ 9am–8pm Mon–Sat) offers online booking, or you can book in person (in-person fee €2).

BUDGET

Siena Colleverde (☎ 0577 28 00 44; www.campingcolleverde.com; Via Scacciapensieri 47; per person/site/tw mobile home €9.50/5.70/45; ☞ mid–Apr–mid–Oct; ☞) This recently renovated campsite, 2km north of the historical centre, rents mobile homes that sleep two to five people (some have full kitchens) and standard campsites. There's an onsite restaurant and mini-market. To get there take bus 3 from Piazza Gramsci, direction Siena Due Ponti (last bus 11.45pm) or bus 8 from Piazza del Sale (to 9.10pm).

Ostello Guidoriccio (☎ 0577 5 22 12; www.ostelloguidoriccio.com; Via Fiorentina 89, Località Stellino; per person €20; ☞ ☞) All rooms are doubles at Siena's HI-affiliated youth hostel, about 2km northwest of the city centre. Take bus 10 or 15 from Piazza Gramsci, or bus 77 from the train station.

Albergo Bernini (☎ 0577 28 90 47; www.albergobernini.com; Via della Sapienza 15; s €50, d with shared bathroom €30–65, d with bathroom €45–85; ☞) A welcoming, family-run hotel with a tiny terrace sporting views across to the cathedral and the Chiesa di San Domenico. For space and views, choose room 11.

Hotel Le Tre Donzelle (☎ 0577 28 03 58; www.tre-donzelle.com; Via delle Donzelle 5; s/d with shared bathroom €38/49, d with bathroom €60) Central and popular, this hotel was originally constructed as a tavern in the 13th century. Rooms are clean and simple and the shared bathrooms are spotless. Ask for a room facing away from the noisy street.

Hotel La Perla (☎ 0577 22 62 80; www.hotellaperla-siena.com; Piazza Indipendenza 25; s €40-60, d €70-85; ☑ ☎) A very friendly and well-run budget option. Bathrooms are small and a few rooms are musty, but that's a small price to pay when the location, seconds from Piazza del Campo, is considered.

MIDRANGE

Albergo Cannon d'Oro (☎ 0577 4 43 21; www.cannonoro.com; Via dei Montanini 28; s €45-85, d €66-105; ☑ ☎ ☎) A trim, attractive and excellent-value hotel. Don't be deterred by the golden cannon (the very one that gave the place its name) trained upon you as you face the otherwise amicable reception desk. Only a few rooms have air-con.

Antica Residenza Cicogna (☎ 0577 28 56 13; www.anticaresidenzacicogna.it; Via dei Termini 67; s €70-75, d €90, ste €130; ☑ ☎ ☎) Springless beds, soundproof windows, ornate frescoes, antique furniture and a lavish buffet breakfast make this central option justifiably popular. Reception has limited core hours (8am to 1pm), so arrange your arrival in advance.

Piccolo Hotel Etruria (☎ 0577 28 80 88; www.hotel-etruria.com; Via delle Donzelle 3; s without bathroom €40-50, s with bathroom €45-55, d with bathroom €80-110; ☎) A welcoming family hotel, just off Il Campo. The rooms are rather plain with zero soundproofing, but there's a central light, airy sitting area and the location is outstanding. There's a 1am curfew. Breakfast costs €6.

Chiusarelli (☎ 0577 28 05 62; www.chiusarelli.com; Viale Curtatone 15; s €65-91, d €88-132; ☑ ☎ ☎) Functioning continuously since 1870, this hotel has a pleasant, spacious breakfast room and attractive, though somewhat dark, bedrooms. It has a popular restaurant (meals €20) where you'll be dodging elbows to find a seat among the locals.

Palazzo Bruchi (☎ 0577 28 73 42; www.palazzobruchi.it; Via di Pantaneto 105; s €80-90, d €90-150; ☑ ☎) The six rooms in the 'ancient and noble' Landi-Bruchi family home may be the only place in Siena where one wakes up to church bells and chirping birds, rather than street noise. The

hospitality of Maria Cristina and her daughter Camilla is warmly consistent. There's a shared kitchen and a peaceful inner courtyard.

Villa Scacciapensieri (☎ 0577 4 14 41; www.villa-scacciapensieri.it; Via Scacciapensieri 10; s €75-140, d €110-265; ☑ ☎ ☎ ☎) Around 2.5km north of Siena is this 19th-century villa with carved wooden ceilings, oil paintings, antiques, formal gardens, tennis courts and an old family chapel. Access for disabled guests.

Pensione Palazzo Ravizza (☎ 0577 28 04 62; www.palazzoravizza.com; Pian dei Mantellini 34; s €95-150, d €115-200; ☑ ☎ ☎) *Pensione* is a far too modest title for this intimate, sumptuous place. Occupying a delightful Renaissance *palazzo*, frescoed ceilings and antique furniture co-exist with flatscreen TVs and comprehensive wi-fi coverage. Service is courteous and efficient, and there's a small, leafy garden.

Eating

According to the Sieneese, most Tuscan cuisine has its origins here. Among many traditional dishes are *panzanella* (summer salad of soaked bread, basil, onion and tomatoes) and *pappardelle con lepre* (ribbon pasta with hare). *Panforte* (a rich cake of almonds, honey and candied fruit) was originally created as tucker for crusaders to the Holy Land.

BUDGET

Kopa Kabana (Via dei Rossi 54) Flout the places with enviable locations and be rewarded with absurd mountains of Siena's freshest gelato, starting at €1.70. A second location is at Via San Pietro 20.

Nannini (Banchi di Sopra 22) Always crowded, Nannini is something of a Sieneese institution, baking its finest cakes and serving up good coffee with speed and panache.

MIDRANGE

L'Osteria (☎ 0577 28 75 92; Via dei Rossi 79-81; meals €27) We promised a local we wouldn't put this one in the book. We lied. It was just too good. Plus the place was half-filled with tourists when we visited, so it's not exactly a secret. No nonsense, but savoury dishes at prices locals will pay.

Osteria da Cice (☎ 0577 28 80 26; Via San Pietro 32; meals €28; ☎ Tue-Sun) In the hands of a friendly team, reflecting its mainly youthful clientele, this is the place for an informal, relaxed meal. The menu has plenty of vegetarian options among its *primi piatti*.

Osteria Boccon del Prete (☎ 0577 28 03 88; Via San Pietro 17; meals €30) A small, hectic, typical Siennese place, offering a daily changing menu. Dishes are largely composed of lighter fare such as smoked swordfish and salmon salad. There's downstairs seating, so don't back out if the place appears to be full.

Il Carroccio (☎ 0577 4 11 65; Via del Casato di Sotto 32; meals €34; ☒ closed Tue dinner & Wed) Exceptional pasta and exceptionally busy, so arrive early for lunch and call ahead for dinner. Try the *pici*, a thick spaghetti typical of Siena, followed by the *tegamate di maiale* (pork with fennel seeds). It's a member of the Slow Food Movement – always a good sign.

Osteria Le Logge (☎ 0577 4 80 13; www.osterialelogge.it; Via del Porriano 33; meals €45; ☒ Mon-Sat) This place changes its menu of creative Tuscan cuisine almost daily. In the downstairs dining room, once a pharmacy, bottles are arranged in cases, floor to ceiling, like books in a library; there are over 18,000 more in the cellars so you won't go thirsty. There's also a large streetside terrace.

our pick **Antica Osteria da Divo** (☎ 0577 28 43 81; www.osteriadadivo.it; Via Franciosa 29; meals €50) This place plays background jazz that is as smooth as the walls are rough-hewn. At the lower, cellar level you're dining amid Etruscan tombs. The inventive menu includes dishes such as cannelloni with ricotta, spinach, grilled sweet peppers, tomatoes and Tuscan pesto sauce.

SELF-CATERING

Conad Market (Galleria Metropolitana, Piazza Matteotti; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Sun) Self-caterers can stock up on piazza picnic provisions here.

Consorzio Agrario Siena (Via Pianagini 13) An enticing emporium of local food and wines.

Pizzicheria de Miccoli (☎ 0577 28 91 84; Via di Città 93-95) Richly scented, de Miccoli has windows festooned with sausages, piled-up cheeses and porcini mushrooms by the sackful.

Wednesday market (☎ 7.30am-1pm) Spreads all around Fortezza Medicea and seeps towards the Stadio Comunale. One of Tuscany's largest markets, it's great for foodstuffs, cheap clothing or just aimless browsing.

Drinking

Enoteca Italiana (☎ 0577 28 84 97; Fortezza Medicea; ☎ noon-1am Tue-Sat, to 8pm Sun) Within the fortress walls, the former munitions cellar has been artfully transformed into a classy *enoteca* that carries over 1500 labels.

Getting There & Away

BUS
TRAIN S.p.A. (☎ 0577 20 42 46; www.trainspa.it) runs two services daily between Pisa airport and Siena (one-way/return, €14/26).

The local bus station is on Piazza Gramsci. Both TRAIN S.p.A. and SITA have ticket offices underneath the piazza, where there's also a left-luggage office (per day €5.50). Express buses race up to Florence (€6.80, 1¼ hours, at least hourly). Other regional TRAIN S.p.A. destinations include San Gimignano (€5.30, one to 1½ hours, 10 daily either direct or changing in Poggibonsi), Montalcino (€3.30, 1½ hours, six daily), Poggibonsi (€3.80, one hour, up to 10 daily), Montepulciano (€4.70, 1¼ hours) and Colle di Val d'Elsa (€2.60, 30 minutes, hourly), with connections for Volterra. Other destinations in the area include Pienza (€3.80) and Grosseto (€6.60).

Sena (☎ 0577 28 32 03; www.sena.it) buses run to/from Rome (€20, three hours, eight daily) and Milan (€29, 4¼ hours, three daily) and there are seven buses daily to Arezzo (€5.20, 1½ hours).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

For Florence, take the SS2, the *superstrada*, or the more attractive SS222, also known as the Strada Chiantigiana, which meanders its way through the hills of Chianti.

TRAIN

Siena isn't on a major train line so buses are generally a better alternative. By train, change at Chiusi for Rome and at Empoli for Florence.

Getting Around

TRAIN S.p.A. operates city bus services (€0.90). Buses 8, 9 and 10 run between the train station and Piazza Gramsci.

Perozzi Noleggi (☎ 0577 28 83 87; www.perozzi.it; Via dei Gazzani 16-18; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 3-7pm) rents mountain bikes (per day/week €10/50) and 125cc scooters (per day/week €45/260). If there's no-one in the showroom, pop round the corner to Via del Romitorio 5.

Cars are banned from the town centre, though visitors can drop off luggage at their hotel, then get out (don't forget to have reception report your licence number or risk receiving a 'souvenir' fine). Park illegally inside the city and you'll be towed away in a flash. Try the large car parks at the Stadio Comunale

DETOUR

About 20km southwest of Siena on the SS73 is the 13th-century **Abbazia di San Galgano** (☎ 0577 75 67 00; admission free; ☒ 8am-7.30pm), in its day one of the country's finest Gothic buildings.

On a hill overlooking the abbey is the tiny, round Romanesque **Cappella di Monte Siepi**, home to badly preserved frescoes by Ambrogio Lorenzetti depicting the life of local soldier and saint, San Galgano, who lived his last years here as a hermit.

and around the Fortezza Medicea, both just north of Piazza San Domenico, or the one at Il Campo, south of the centre.

There are large car parks at the Stadio Comunale and around the Fortezza Medicea, both just north of Piazza San Domenico. There's also another big one at Il Campo, south of the centre.

SAN GIMIGNANO

pop 7735

As you crest the hill coming from the east, the 14 towers of this walled town look like a medieval Manhattan. And when you arrive you might well feel that half of Manhattan has moved in. Within easy reach of both Siena and Florence, San Gimignano is a tourist magnet. Come in winter or early spring to indulge your imagination a little; in summer you'll spend your time dodging fellow visitors. Even then, though, you'll discover a different, almost peaceful San Gimignano once the last bus has pulled out.

There's good reason for such popularity. The towers, which once numbered 72, were symbols of the power and wealth of the city's medieval families. San Gimignano delle Belle Torri (meaning 'of the Fine Towers' – though they're actually almost devoid of design and rather dull unless sheer height impresses you) is surrounded by lush, productive land and the setting is altogether enchanting.

Originally an Etruscan village, the town was named after the bishop of Modena, San Gimignano, who is said to have saved the city from Attila the Hun. It became a *comune* in 1199, but continually fought with Volterra. Internal battles between the Ardinghelli (Guelph) and Salvucci (Ghibelline) families over the next two centuries caused divisions. Most of the towers were built during this pe-

riod; in the 13th century, one *podestà* forbade the building of towers higher than his own 51m pile. In 1348 plague wiped out much of the population and weakened the nobles' power, leading to the town's submission to Florence in 1353. Today, not even the plague would deter the summer swarms.

Orientation

From the main gate, Porta San Giovanni, at the southern end of the town, Via San Giovanni heads northwards to central Piazza della Cisterna and the connecting Piazza del Duomo. From here the other major thoroughfare, Via San Matteo, extends to the principal northern gate, Porta San Matteo.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0577 94 00 08; www.san-gimignano.com; Piazza del Duomo 1; ☒ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mar-Oct, 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Nov-Feb) hires out audioguides of the town (€5) and organises Vernaccia di San Gimignano vineyard visits (two-hour tours, Tuesdays and Thursdays, from May to October; €20). Advance reservations are essential.

Sights

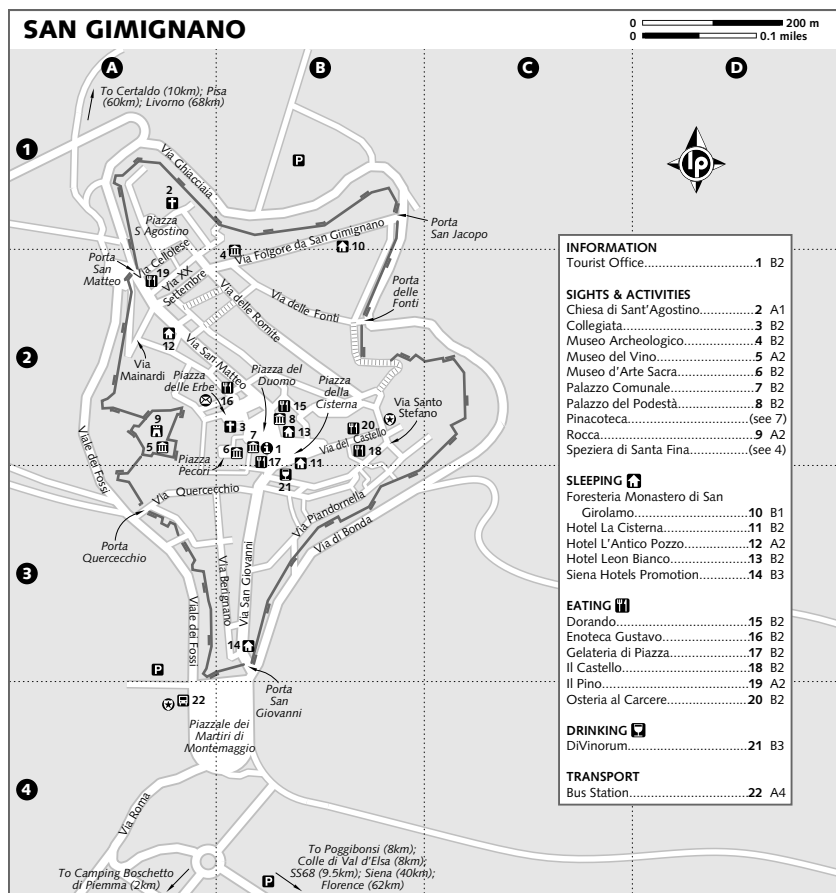
COLLEGIATA

The 13th-century **Palazzo del Podestà** and its tower, the **Torre della Rognosa**, look across to the town's Romanesque **basilica** (adult/child €3.50/1.50; ☒ 9.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun Nov–mid-Jan & Mar). Access is up a flight of steps. Its bare facade belies the remarkable 14th-century frescoes that stripe the interior walls like a vast medieval comic strip.

Along the northern aisle are frescoes of key moments from the Old Testament by Bartolo di Fredi. Opposite, covering the walls of the south aisle, the school of Simone Martini illustrates New Testament scenes. On the inside wall of the facade, extending onto adjoining walls, Taddeo di Bartolo probably scared the daylighters out of pious locals with his gruesome

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR EURO

If you're an assiduous sightseer, two combined tickets may be worth your while. One (adult/child €7.50/5.50) gives admission to the Palazzo Comunale and its Museo Civico, the archaeological museum, Torre Grossa and some secondary sights. The other (adult/child €5.50/2.50) gets you into the Collegiata and nearby Museo d'Arte Sacra.



depiction of the Last Judgment. The **Cappella di Santa Fina** is adorned with naive and touching frescoes by Domenico Ghirlandaio depicting events in the life of the saint, and a superb alabaster and marble altar picked out in gold.

Across the square, the **Museo d'Arte Sacra** (☎ 0577 94 03 16; Piazza Pecori 1; adult/child €3/1.50; ☎ 9.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun Nov-mid-Jan & Mar) has some fine works of religious art, collected in the main from the town's churches.

PALAZZO COMUNALE

From the internal courtyard, climb the stairs to the **Pinacoteca** (☎ 0577 99 03 12; Piazza del Duomo; museum & tower adult/child €5/4; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mar-Oct, 10am-5.30pm Nov-Feb), which features paintings

from the Siennese and Florentine schools of the 12th to 15th centuries. In the main room, the great poet Dante addressed the town's council, urging it to support the Guelph cause. The room contains an early 14th-century fresco of the *Maestà* by Lippo Memmi. Climb up the palazzo's **Torre Grossa** for a spectacular view of the town and surrounding countryside.

MUSEUMS

In an unmarked gallery just outside the town's fortress is **Museo del Vino** (Wine Museum; ☎ 0577 94 12 67; Parco della Rocca; admission free; ☎ 11.30am-6.30pm Thu-Mon, 3-6.30pm Wed Mar-Oct). A sommelier is usually on hand to lead an informed – and paid – tasting of some of the choice local white wines.

The **Museo Archeologico & Spezieria di Santa Fina** (☎ 0577 94 03 48; Via Folgore da San Gimignano 11; adult/child both museums €3.50/2.50; ☹ 11am-5.45pm mid-Mar-Dec) complex is home to the town's small archaeological museum and a reconstructed 16th-century pharmacy and herb garden. There's also a **modern art gallery** that in itself merits a visit.

OTHER SIGHTS

From the **Rocca** (what remains of the town's fortress), there are great views over the surrounding countryside.

At the northern end of the town is the **Chiesa di Sant'Agostino** (Piazza Sant'Agostino; ☹ 7am-noon & 3-7pm Apr-Oct, to 6pm Nov-Mar). Its main attraction is the fresco cycle in the apse by Benozzo Gozzoli, depicting the saint's life.

Sleeping

In high summer San Gimignano can be as unpromising for accommodation as Christmas Eve in Bethlehem. This said, Siena Hotels Promotion (see p541) will book hotels and some *affittacamere*. The tourist office, for its part, will reserve a wider range of *affittacamere* and also *agriturismi* if you call by in person.

Camping Boschetto di Piemma (☎ 0577 94 03 52; www.boschettopiemma.it; per person €6.70-10.10, tent €4.90-8.90, car €1.50-3; ☹ Easter-Oct; 🚰) The closest campsite is located in Santa Lucia, 2km south of town. There's a bus service between the two (€0.50).

Foresteria Monastero di San Girolamo (☎ 0577 94 05 73; www.monasterosangirolamo.it; Via Folgore da San Gimignano 26-32; per person €27; 🚰) This is an excellent budget choice. Run by friendly nuns, it has basic but spacious, comfortable rooms with attached bathrooms, sleeping two to five people. Breakfast is €3. Ring ahead as it is perpetually booked. If you don't have a reservation, arrive between 9am and 12.30pm or between 3pm and 5.45pm and ring the monastery bell (not the Foresteria one, which is never answered). Kitchen use costs €3 per day. There's access for disabled guests.

Hotel Leon Bianco (☎ 0577 94 12 94; www.leonbianco.com; Piazza della Cisterna 13; s €65-80, d €85-135; ☹ 🚰 📺) Occupies a 14th-century mansion. This smoothly run hotel is welcoming and friendly with a ground-floor abundance of plants, a pretty inner courtyard, a breakfast patio, a billiard table and a fitness room.

Hotel La Cisterna (☎ 0577 94 03 28; www.hotelcisterna.it; Piazza della Cisterna 24; s €62-78, d €88-145;

☹ 🚰 📺) Located in a splendid 14th-century building, this accommodation option now offers 21st-century comfort in quiet, spacious rooms.

Hotel L'Antico Pozzo (☎ 0577 94 20 14; www.anticopozzo.com; Via San Matteo 87; s €85-100, d €110-140; ☹ closed first 2 weeks Nov & Jan; ☹ 🚰 📺) L'Antico Pozzo is named after the old, softly illuminated *pozzo* (well) just off the lobby. Each room has its own personality, with thick stone walls, high ceilings, wrought-iron beds, frescoes, antique prints and peach-coloured walls.

Eating

Each Thursday morning there's a **produce market** (Piazza della Cisterna & Piazza del Duomo).

Gelateria di Piazza (Piazza della Cisterna 4; ☹ Mar-mid-Nov) As the pictures on the wall attest, many celebrities have closed their lips around one of these rich ice creams ('All the family thought the ice cream was delicious,' attested one Tony Blair). Master Sergio uses only the choicest ingredients: pistachios from Sicily and cocoa from Venezuela.

Enoteca Gustavo (☎ 0577 94 00 57; Via San Matteo 29; snacks & wine from €2.50; ☹ 9am-8pm) Snacks include bruschetta and a plate of cheese with honey to go with your choice from the impressive selection of wines.

Osteria al Carcere (☎ 0577 94 19 05; Via del Castello 5; meals €35; ☹ closed Thu lunch & Wed) A fine *osteria*, offering an atypical menu (the words '*primi*' and '*secondi*' are nowhere to be seen) loaded with distinctive plates. There are a half-dozen soups, including *zuppa di farro e fagioli* (spelt and white bean soup) and creative flashes like *tacchina al pistacchi e arance* (turkey with pistachios and orange sauce).

Il Castello (☎ 0577 94 08 78; enotecailcastello@iol.it; Via del Castello 20; meals €37; ☹ Mar-mid-Jan) Both wine bar and restaurant, this place has a delightful patio with views and an all-brick, glass-domed courtyard. Nosh on a macho-meaty *bistecca alla fiorentina* or *cinghiale alla sangimignanese con polenta* (wild boar with polenta), or opt for a lighter option such as the *pennette* with broccoli, wild mushrooms and saffron.

Il Pino (☎ 0577 94 04 15; Via Cellolese 8-10; meals €40; ☹ Fri-Wed) The atmosphere here is spruce, vaulted and airy. Service is friendly and attentive and the seasonal menu, which includes massive pasta plates and several truffle-based specialities, is a winner.

Dorando (☎ 0577 94 18 62; www.ristorantedorando.it; Vico dell'Oro 2; meals €60; ☹ daily Easter-Oct, Tue-Sun Oct-

Easter) Recognised by the Slow Food Movement, Dorando runs a classic five-course menu with dishes based on authentic Etruscan recipes. The menu is otherwise brief and focused (only four *primi* and four *secondi*). The atmosphere is swanky yet cool, with intimate corners and works of art.

Drinking

DiVinorum (Piazza della Cisterna 30; ☎ 11am-8pm Mar-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Dec) This cool wine bar is housed in cavernous former stables. In summer, sip your drink on the tiny outdoor terrace with stunning valley views.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (Piazzale dei Martiri di Montemaggio) is beside Porta San Giovanni. Buses run to/from Florence (€6, 1¼ hours, over 30 daily) but almost always require a change at Poggibonsi. Buses also run to/from Siena (€5.30, one to 1½ hours, 10 daily).

For Volterra (€4.30, 1½ hours, four daily except Sunday) you need to change in Colle di Val d'Elsa, and maybe also in Poggibonsi.

Poggibonsi (by bus €1.80, about 30 minutes, frequent) is the closest train station.

From Florence or Siena, take the SS2 to Poggibonsi, then the SS429 and finally the SP63. From Volterra, take the SS68 east and follow the turn-off signs north to San Gimignano. There are car parks (per hour €2 or per day €5 to €20) outside the city walls and beside and below Porta San Giovanni.

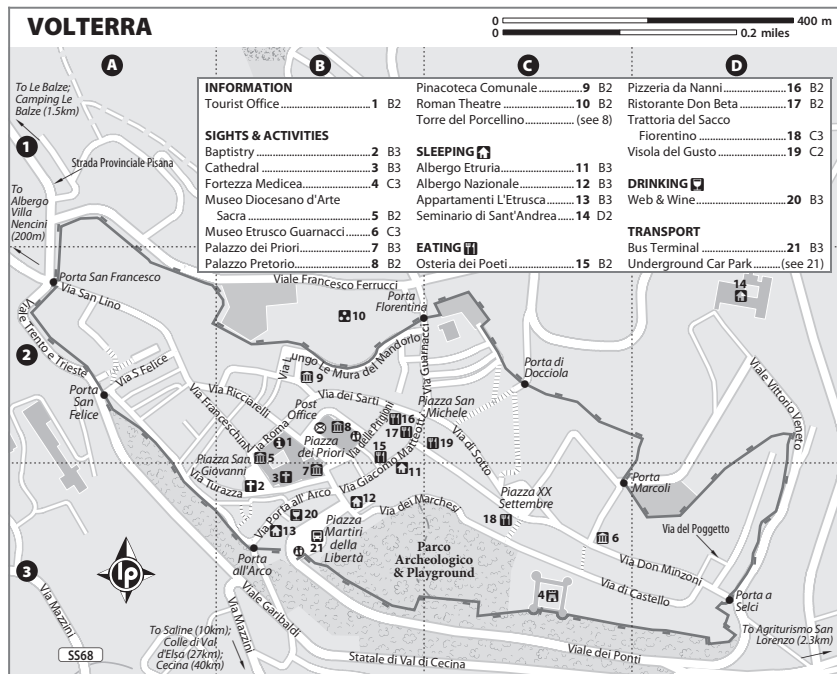
VOLTERRA

pop 11,206

Volterra's well-preserved medieval ram-parts give the windswept town a scrappy, yet proud, forbidding air deemed ideal for the discriminating tastes of the planet's principal vampire coven in the wildly popular book series *Twilight*, by Stephanie Meyer. Where San Gimignano has its towers, Volterra has its archaeological sites, extensive network of mysterious alleys to explore and steep, stone stairways to scale.

Orientation & Information

Whichever one of the four main gates you enter, the road will lead you to central Piazza



dei Priori. The **tourist office** (☎ 0588 8 72 57; www.volterratour.it; Piazza dei Priori 19-20; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-6pm) offers a free hotel-booking service and rents out a town audioguide (€5).

Sights

PIAZZA DEI PRIORI & AROUND

Piazza dei Priori is ringed by austere medieval mansions. The 13th-century **Palazzo dei Priori** (admission €1; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm daily mid-Mar-Oct, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Nov-mid-Mar), the oldest seat of local government in Tuscany, is believed to have been a model for Florence's Palazzo Vecchio (p486). Highlights are a fresco of the Crucifixion by Piero Francesco Fiorentino on the staircase, the magnificent cross-vaulted council hall and a small antechamber on the 1st floor giving a bird's-eye view of the piazza below.

Palazzo Pretorio dates back to the same era. From it thrusts the **Torre del Porcellino** (Piglet's Tower), so named because of the wild boar protruding from its upper section.

The **cathedral** (Piazza San Giovanni; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 3-6pm) was built in the 12th and 13th centuries. Highlights include a small fresco, the *Procession of the Magi* by Benozzo Gozzoli, behind a terracotta Nativity group tucked away in the oratory at the beginning of the north aisle. There is also an exquisite 15th-century tabernacle by Mino da Fiesole that rises above the high altar. Just west of the cathedral, the 13th-century **baptistry** features a small marble font by Andrea Sansovino.

Nearby, the **Museo Diocesano d'Arte Sacra** (☎ 0588 8 62 90; Via Roma 1; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-6pm mid-Mar-Oct, 9am-1pm Nov-mid-Mar) merits a peek for its collection of ecclesiastical vestments, gold reliquaries and works by Andrea della Robbia and Rosso Fiorentino. The **Pinacoteca Comunale** (☎ 0588 8 75 80; Via dei Sarti 1; ☎ 9am-7pm mid-Mar-Oct, 8.30am-1.45pm Nov-mid-Mar) houses a modest collection of local art.

For admission prices, see the boxed text, right.

MUSEO ETRUSCO GUARNACCI

In terms of content, this is one of Italy's finest **Etruscan Museums** (☎ 0588 8 63 47; Via Don Minzoni 15; adult/student €8/5; ☎ 9am-7pm mid-Mar-Oct, 8.30am-1.45pm Nov-mid-Mar). Much of the collection is displayed in the old-style didactic manner, though exhibits on the upper levels have been artfully enriched. The multilingual audioguide (€3) is worth the investment.

All exhibits were unearthed locally. They include a vast collection of some 600 funerary urns carved mainly from alabaster and tufa and are displayed according to subject and period. The best examples (those dating from later periods) are on the 2nd and 3rd floors.

Original touches are the *Ombra della Sera* bronze ex-voto, a strange, elongated nude figure that would fit harmoniously in any museum of modern art, and the urn of the Sposi, a terracotta rendering of an elderly couple, their faces depicted in portrait fashion rather than the usual stylised manner.

OTHER SIGHTS

On the city's northern edge lies the **Roman Theatre** (☎ 10.30am-5.30pm daily mid-Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-mid-Mar), a well-preserved complex complete with a Roman bathhouse.

The **Fortezza Medicea**, built in the 14th century and altered by Lorenzo Il Magnifico (Lorenzo de' Medici), is nowadays a prison (admission one felony). To its west is the pleasant **Parco Archeologico**. Little of archaeological interest has survived, apart from a few battered Etruscan tombs, but it's a good place for a picnic.

Le Balze, a deep eroded limestone ravine about 2km northwest of the city centre, has claimed several churches since the Middle Ages as the buildings tumbled into its deep gullies. A 14th-century monastery, perched on the precipice, seems perilously close to continuing the tradition.

Festivals & Events

On the third and fourth Sundays of August, the citizens of Volterra roll back the calendar some 600 years, take to the streets in period costume and celebrate **Volterra AD 1398** with gusto and all the fun of a medieval fair.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR EURO

A €8 ticket covers visits to the Museo Etrusco Guarnacci, the Pinacoteca Comunale and the Museo Diocesano d'Arte Sacra. Meanwhile a €3 ticket allows entry to both the Roman Theatre and the seriously dilapidated Etruscan necropolis within the Parco Archeologico.

Sleeping

Camping Le Balze (☎ 0588 8 78 80; Via di Mandringa 15; person/tent/car €8/7/3; 🗓 Easter-Oct; 🚰) The closest campsite to town sits right on Le Balze.

Seminario di Sant'Andrea (☎ 0588 8 60 28; semves covile@diocesivolterra.it; Viale Vittorio Veneto 2; r with shared bathroom €14.28, d with bathroom €36; 🍷) Still an active church retreat, this place is peaceful, if a mite dilapidated, with vaulted ceilings and 60 large, clean rooms. Open to all comers, it's a mere 600m or so from Piazza dei Priori.

Albergo Villa Nencini (☎ 0588 8 63 86; www.villanencini.it; Borgo Santo Stefano 55; s €60-73, d €73-88; 🍷) A tranquil family hotel, Villa Nencini is a mere 200m beyond Porta San Francesco yet a world away from the town's summer bustle. Choose the original 17th-century mansion or the recently constructed wing.

Appartamenti l'Etrusca (☎ 0588 8 40 73; letrusca@libero.it; Via Porta all'Arco 37-41; 1-/2-/3-person apt €55/80/90; 🍷) Unlike most such rental companies, this place is happy to take you in for even a single night. The exterior of this late-Renaissance building gives no hint of all the mod cons within.

Albergo Nazionale (☎ 0588 8 62 84; www.hotelnazionale-volterra.com; Via dei Marchesi 11; s €65-75, d €78-88; 🍷) DH Lawrence once stayed in this late-19th-century hotel. Rooms vary in size and style and some have balconies; room 403, with a pair of them, is your best option. Meals in its summertime restaurant are simple, solid and uncomplicated; the reception desk betrays the same qualities.

Albergo Etruria (☎ 0588 8 73 77; www.albergoetruria.it; Via Giacomo Matteotti 32; s €60-70, d €80-90; 🗓 closed Jan; 🍷) This is a good-value hotel realised by two friendly English-speaking ladies. Look for the remains of an Etruscan wall upstairs and savour the fine views from the roof garden – a genuine garden with lawns and bushes. There's also a self-catering kitchen.

our pick Agriturismo San Lorenzo (☎ 0588 3 90 80; www.agriturismosanlorenzo.it; B&B d €90, apt without breakfast €95-110; 🍷) Just 3km outside Volterra on the road to Siena, this is a giddy fusion of sustainable tourism, countryside vistas, mod cons and wonderful food (dinner per person €28) served in the 12th-century Franciscan chapel. The mountain-spring-fed biological swimming pool, complete with frogs and salamanders, fronts the converted farmhouse (c 1400s). Rooms are 'farmhouse chic', individually decorated and colourful with modern kitchens and bathrooms. Walking, biking,

horseback riding and hands-on, seasonal olive-oil production (October to November) are immediately available, as are cooking classes (per person €90).

Eating

Visola del Gusto (Via Antonio Gramsci 3) Gelato lovers look no further: this place serves the freshest in town, starting at €1.50 for a small cone.

Pizzeria da Nanni (☎ 0588 8 40 47; Via delle Prigioni 40; pizzas €6.20-8.50; 🗓 Mon-Sat) A hole-in-the-wall-plus – the plus being the excellent pizzas that Nanni spatulas from his oven while sustaining a vivid line of backchat, notably with his wife. Unscheduled closings are increasing as the couple eases into retirement.

Trattoria del Sacco Fiorentino (☎ 0588 8 85 37; Piazza XX Settembre 18; meals €32, tasting menu €26-28; 🗓 Thu-Tue) A great little vaulted trattoria that serves up imaginative dishes with a happy selection of local wines. Try the *piccione al vin santo e radicchio rosso* (pigeon baked with red radicchio and wine) or the critical mass of flavour in the beef tartare with artichokes and fresh onions.

Osteria dei Poeti (☎ 0588 8 60 29; Via Giacomo Matteotti 55; meals €35, tourist menus €13-35; 🗓 Fri-Wed) Get here right at noon, before the business lunchers fill the last seat. Typical Tuscan fare includes *antipasto del poeta* (€15), a rich assortment of canapés, cheeses and cold cuts that is an unexpected delight.

Ristorante Don Beta (☎ 0588 8 67 30; Via Giacomo Matteotti 39; meals €40, set menus €12-21; 🗓 closed Mon Oct-Apr) With four truffle-based *primi piatti* and five *secondi* enhanced by their fragrance, this is the place to sample the prized fungus, which abounds – insofar as it abounds anywhere – in the woods around Volterra.

Drinking

Web & Wine (☎ 0588 8 15 31; Via Porta all'Arco 11-13; 🗓 9.30am-1am Fri-Wed) At once an internet point (€3 per hour), a stylish *enoteca* (with a good selection of tipples), a snack stop (that also serves full meals) and a hip designer cafe with underlit Etruscan remains.

Getting There & Around

Driving and parking inside the walled town are more or less prohibited. Park in one of the designated areas around the circumference, most of which are free. There's a four-level underground pay car park beneath Piazza Martiri della Libertà, which is also the bus station.

The tourist office carries bus and train timetables. CPT buses connect the town with Cecina (€3.50, frequent) and its train station. From Cecina, there are trains to Pisa (€4.20 to €8.60, 40 to 70 minutes, 23 daily).

For San Gimignano (€4.30, 1½ hours), Siena (€4.50, 1½ hours) and Florence (€7.40, two hours), change at Colle di Val d'Elsa (€2.50, 50 minutes), to where there are four runs daily from Volterra except on Sunday. The rare, direct run to Florence from Volterra costs €7.10.

By car, take the SS68, which runs between Cecina and Colle di Val d'Elsa.

LE CRETE

Le Crete (a Tuscan dialect word meaning clay) is an area of rolling hills scored by steep ravines offering a feast of classic Tuscan images – bare ridges topped by a solitary cypress tree and hills silhouetted one against another as they fade into the misty distance. Its most harmonious valley, the Val d'Orcia, is a Unesco World Heritage site.

Abbazia di Monte Oliveto Maggiore (☎ 0577 70 76 11; admission free; ☎ 9.15am–noon & 3.15–6pm Apr–Oct, to 5pm Nov–Mar), a 14th-century monastery, is still a retreat for around 40 monks. Frescoes by Signorelli and Sodoma decorate the Great Cloister, illustrating events in the life of the ascetic St Benedict.

Montalcino

pop 5192

This retiring hill town is a perfectly nice place to bulk up your calf muscles wandering inhumanly steep streets, but its real attraction is the internationally coveted wine, Brunello, which has been produced here since the middle of the 19th century. You can also savour the more modest, but still very palatable, Rosso di Montalcino.

If you're a jazz-loving oenophile, you'll savour the town's annual **Jazz & Wine festival**, held in the second and third weeks of July.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0577 84 93 31; www.proloco.montalcino.it, in Italian; Costa del Municipio 1; ☎ 10am–1pm & 2–5.40pm daily Apr–Oct, closed Mon Nov–Mar) is just off Piazza del Popolo, the main square.

SIGHTS

Museo Civico e Diocesano d'Arte Sacra (☎ 0577 84 60 14; Via Ricassoli 31; adult/child €4.50/3; ☎ 10am–1pm & 2–5.50pm Tue–Sun), just off Piazza Sant'Agostino, occupies a former monastery. In addition

DETOUR

The beautiful **Abbazia Di Sant'Antimo** (☎ 0577 83 56 59; Castelnuovo dell'Abate; ☎ 10.30am–12.30pm & 3–6.30pm Mon–Sat, 9–10.30am & 3–6pm Sun) lies in an isolated valley just below the village of Castelnuovo dell'Abate. Its Romanesque exterior, built in pale travertine stone, features stone carvings set in the bell tower and apsidal chapels.

Three daily buses (€1.20, 15 minutes) connect Montalcino with the village of Castelnuovo dell'Abate. From here, it's an easy walk to the church.

to canvases by Giovanni di Paolo, Sano di Pietro and others, it has a fine collection of painted wooden sculptures by the Sienese school.

Within the 14th-century **fortress** (☎ 0577 84 92 11; courtyard free, ramparts adult/child €4/2; ☎ 9am–8pm Apr–Oct, 10am–6pm Nov–Mar) is an *enoteca* where you can sample and buy local wines. The view is almost as magnificent from the courtyard as it is from the ramparts.

A combined ticket giving full access to the museum and fortress costs €6.

There's a vigorous **Fridays market** on and around Via della Libertà.

SLEEPING & EATING

Il Giardino (☎ 0577 84 82 57; albergoilgiardino@virgilio.it; Piazza Cavour 4; s €40–45, d €55–60) An excellent-value, friendly, family-run, two-star hotel. Occupying a venerable building overlooking Piazza Cavour, its decor has a distinct 1970s feel.

Hotel Il Giglio (☎ 0577 84 81 67; www.gigliohotel.com; Via Soccorso Saloni 5; s €82, d €122–135, annexes/d/tr €60/92/115, 2–4 person apt €90–120; ☎ ☎ ☎) Montalcino's oldest, but substantially renovated, hotel. Rooms have comfortable wrought-iron beds – each gilded with a painted *giglio* (lily) – and all doubles have panoramic views. There's a small annex just up the street and a couple of apartments. Room 1 has an enormous terrace that comes at no extra cost.

Hotel Vecchia Oliviera (☎ 0577 84 60 28; www.vecchiaoliviera.com; Via Landi 1; d €160–190; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Just beside the Porta Cerbaia, this is a former olive mill that has been tastefully restored utilising earthy colours and terracotta tiles. Tranquil (it's at the very limit of the town),

each room is individually decorated. The back patio has stunning views.

Al Baccanale (☎ 340 7810273; Via Matteotti 19; meals €32) A family operation favoured by locals, serving belt-challenging, pick-and-mix pasta/sauce plates, including the popular, idiosyncratic *maltagliati*, or 'badly cut pasta', the random, leftover bits after other pasta has been cut.

Re di Macchia (☎ 0577 84 61 16; Via Soccorso Saloni 21; meals €34, fixed menu €23; ☎ Fri-Wed) This is a very agreeable small restaurant run by an enterprising couple. Roberta selects the freshest of ingredients and the wine cellar is impressive; to sample a variety, try Antonio's personal selection of four wines (€16), each to accompany a course.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Regular TRAIN S.p.A. buses (€3.30, 1½ hours, six daily) run to/from Siena.

Pienza

pop 2172

The World Heritage-listed town of Pienza is on the primary road to Montepulciano. Its **tourist office** (☎ 0578 74 99 05; Corso Il Rossellino; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Wed-Mon) is located within the Museo Diocesano.

Spin 360 degrees in **Piazza Pio II** and you've taken in Pienza's major monuments. Gems of the Renaissance, they were all constructed in a mere three years between 1459 and 1462. The square is named after the pope who, in one of the earliest examples of urban planning, commissioned the architect Bernardo Rossellino to rebuild the little town of his birth.

Highlights of the **cathedral** (☎ 8.30am-1pm & 2.15-7pm), with its Renaissance facade, are a superb marble tabernacle by Rossellino, and five altarpieces, all by Siennese artists.

Palazzo Piccolomini, Padre Pio II's country residence, is considered to be Rossellino's masterpiece. From its loggia, there are spectacular panoramic views over the Val d'Orcia below.

Palazzo Borgia, also called the Palazzo Vescovile, houses Pienza's small **Museo Diocesano** (☎ 0578 74 99 05; adult/child €4.10/2.60; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-7pm Wed-Mon mid-Mar-Oct, Sat & Sun only Nov-mid-Mar), with paintings of the Siennese school and some striking 16th-century Flemish tapestries.

Almost a monument in its own right, the pungent **Bottega del Naturalista** (Corso Rossellino 16)

has a truly mouthwatering choice of cheeses, in particular the renowned ewe's milk *pecorino di pienza*.

Up to four buses run between Siena and Pienza on weekdays (€3.80, 1¼ hours) and nine travel to/from Montepulciano (€1.80). The bus station is just off Piazza Dante Alighieri. Buy tickets at the nearby bar.

Montepulciano

pop 14,389

You'll acquire a newfound appreciation for the term 'hotel restaurant' after a day of street (read: hill) climbing here. When your quadriceps reach their failure point, self-medicate with a generous pour of the highly reputed *Vino Nobile* while drinking in the views over the Valdichiana countryside.

ORIENTATION

The town sheers off to the left and right from the main street, which rises steeply southwards from Porta al Prato to the Piazza Grande and fortress beyond. The 750m walk bordered by the town's finest buildings may leave you breathless but is well worth the exercise.

INFORMATION

Strada del Vino Nobile di Montepulciano

Information Office (☎ 0578 71 74 84; www.strada vinonobile.it; Piazza Grande 7; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri) Books accommodation, arranges cooking courses, Slow Food tours, wine tastings, bike rentals and unstrenuous country walks culminating in lunch.

Tourist office (☎ 0578 75 73 41; www.prolocomontepulciano.it; Piazza Don Minzoni; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-8pm Easter-Jul & Sep-Oct, to 8pm Aug, to 12.30pm Mon-Sat & 3-6pm Sun Nov-Easter) Reserves accommodation without charge, as well as selling local bus tickets and train tickets and renting bikes and scooters.

SIGHTS

Most of the main sights are clustered around Piazza Grande, although the town's streets harbour a wealth of *palazzi*, fine buildings and churches.

From the **Porta al Prato**, walk south along Via di Gracciano nel Corso. At the upper end of Piazza Savonarola is the **Colonna del Marzocco**, erected in 1511 to confirm Montepulciano's allegiance to Florence.

Among several noble residences lining the main street is the **Palazzo Bucelli** at No 73, whose lower facades are recycled Etruscan and Latin inscriptions and reliefs. The **Palazzo**

Cocconi, nearly opposite at No 70, was also designed by Sangallo.

Continuing up Via di Gracciano nel Corso, you will find Michelozzo's **Chiesa di Sant'Agostino** (Piazza Michelozzo; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-6pm). Opposite, the **Torre di Pulcinella**, a medieval tower house, is topped by the town clock and the hunched figure of Pulcinella (Punch of Punch and Judy fame), who strikes the hours.

Overlooking Piazza Grande, which is the town's highest point, is the **Palazzo Comunale** (admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat). Built in the 13th-century Gothic style and remodelled in the 15th century by Michelozzo, it still functions as the town hall. On a clear day, you can see as far as the Monti Sibillini to the east and the Gran Sasso to the southeast from the top of its **tower** (entry 2nd fl; admission €1.60; ☎ Apr-Oct). Opposite is the **Palazzo Contucci** and its extensive wine cellar, **Cantine Contucci** (☎ 0578 75 70 06; www.contucci.it; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm), which is open for visiting and sampling.

The 16th-century **cathedral** (Piazza Grande; ☎ 9am-noon & 4-6pm) has an unfinished facade. Above the high altar is a lovely triptych by Taddeo da Bartolo depicting the Assumption.

SLEEPING & EATING

Bellavista (☎ 347 8232314; bellavista@bccmp.com; Via Ricci 25; d €65-70; (P)) Nearly all of the 10 high-ceilinged double rooms at this excellent hotel have fantastic views; room 6 has a private terrace. Some rooms have refrigerators and all have great beds. No-one lives here so phone ahead in order to be met and given a key (if you've omitted this stage, there's a phone in the lobby from where you can call).

Albergo Il Marzocco (☎ 0578 75 72 62; www.albergoilmarzocco.it; Piazza Savonarola 18; s €60-75, d €90-95; (P) ☎) Run as a hotel by the same family for over a century, the rooms in this fabulous 16th-century building are large, comfortable and well furnished. Those with a balcony and views come at no extra cost.

Meublè Il Riccio (☎ 0578 75 77 13; www.ilriccio.net; Via Talosa 21; s/d €80/100; (P) ☎) This gorgeous tiny hotel, with only six bedrooms, occupies a Renaissance *palazzo* just off Piazza Grande. It has large rooms, antiques, a solarium, a porticoed courtyard and a terrace bar for your glass of *vino* with a view.

Osteria dell'Acquacheta (☎ 0578 75 84 43; www.acquacheta.eu; Via del Teatro 22; meals €20; ☎ Wed-Mon) This is a small eatery with the look and feel

of a country trattoria. The food is excellent and mainly meaty, ranging from *misto di salami toscani* (a variety of Tuscan sausages and salamis) to huge steaks.

Caffè Poliziano (☎ 0578 75 86 15; Via di Voltaia nel Corso 27; meals €26) Established as a cafe in 1868, this elegant place has been lovingly restored and has tiny, precipitous balcony tables with expansive views.

Enoteca a Gambe di Gatto (☎ 0578 75 74 31; zelfdizekf@yahoo.it; Via dell'Opio nel Corso 34; meals €30; ☎ closed Jan-Easter & Wed) Renowned throughout the region, exacting husband and wife team of Emanuel and Laura travel the country each winter to acquire the absolute best products from organic producers. The daily menu fluctuates wildly, depending on market offerings.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

TRAIN S.p.A. (www.trainspa.it) runs five buses daily between Montepulciano and Siena (€4.70, 1¼ hours) via Pienza. Regular **LFI** (www.lfi.it) buses connect with Chiusi (€2.30, 50 minutes, half-hourly) and continue to Chiusi-Chianciano Terme train station, on the main Rome-Florence line. There are three services daily to/from Florence (€9.40) and two to/from Arezzo (€3.70; change at Bettolle).

By car, take the Chianciano Terme exit from the A1 and follow the SS146. Cars are banned from the centre. There are car parks near the Porta al Prato, from where minibuses weave their way to Piazza Grande.

SOUTHERN TUSCANY

This is a landscape of lush rumpled hills, distant smoky mountains and ancient hill-top villages. For pure drama, there are Etruscan sites such as the enigmatic *vie cave* (sunken roads), over whose significance archaeologists still puzzle. You can dunk yourself in the hot natural pools of Saturnia; laze on the smart marinas and good beaches of Monte Argentario; and trek through the quiet Parco Regionale della Maremma, which embraces the most varied and attractive stretch of the Tuscan coastline.

PARCO REGIONALE DELLA MAREMMA

This spectacular **nature park** (admission €6-9) includes the Monti dell'Uccellina, which drops to a magnificent stretch of unspoiled coastline.

The main **visitor centre** (☎ 0564 40 70 98; www.parco-maremma.it; ☎ 8am–5pm mid-Mar–Sep, 8.30am–1.30pm Oct–mid-Mar) is in Alberese, on the park's northern edge. There's a small **seasonal centre** (☎ 0564 88 71 73; ☎ 8am–noon & 5–8pm Jul & Aug, to 1pm Sep–Jun) at the park's southern extremity, 400m up a dirt lane about 1km before Talamone. Park access is limited to 11 signed walking trails, varying from 2.5km to 12km. Entry (by ticket bought at the visitor centre) varies according to whether a minibus transports you to your chosen route. Depending on your trail, you stand a chance of spotting deer, wild boar, foxes and hawks.

The **Centro Turismo Il Rialto** (☎ 0564 40 71 02), 600m north of the main visitor centre, offers guided canoe outings (adult/child €16/8; two hours) and rents mountain bikes (per hour/day €3/8). It doesn't have set core hours, so call ahead or risk finding the place abandoned.

To restore your energy after a walk, **Trattoria e Pizzeria Mancini e Caduro** (☎ 0564 40 71 37; Via del Fante 24; meals €21; ☎ Wed–Mon Apr–Sep), in nearby Alberese, has an affordable menu of home-made Tuscan standards, including *tortelli ricotta e spinace* (pasta with cheese and spinach) and *aquacotta* (soup with bread, onion, tomatoes, celery and egg).

ETRUSCAN SITES

Terme di Saturnia

This **thermal spa** (☎ 0564 60 01 11; www.termedi-saturnia.it; day admission €22, 3pm–closing €17, parking €4; ☎ 9.30am–7.30pm Apr–Sep, to 5.30pm Oct–Mar) is about 2.5km south of the village of Saturnia. You can spend a whole day dunking yourself in the hot pools and signing on for ancillary activities such as the alluring 'four-hand massage shower' or the somewhat sinister-sounding 'infiltration of gaseous oxygen to reduce excess fat'.

Econo-bathers can avail themselves of the waters running parallel to the road for several hundred metres, starting just south of the Terme di Saturnia turn-off. Look for the telltale sign of other bathers' cars parked on the road, then forage down the path until you find a suitable spot of cascading water.

Pitigliano

pop 4008

Growing organically from the high rocky outcrop that towers over the surrounding countryside, Pitigliano is outstanding long-shot, photo-op fodder. The main monuments are

within a stone's throw of Piazza Garibaldi, where you'll find the **tourist office** (☎ 0564 61 71 11; ☎ 10.20am–1pm & 3–7pm Tue–Sun Apr–Oct, to 1pm & 2–6pm Tue–Sun Nov–Mar).

SIGHTS

Off the square are an imposing 16th-century **viaduct** and the 13th-century **Palazzo Orsini** (☎ 0564 61 44 19; adult/child €2.50/1.50; ☎ 10am–1pm & 3–7pm Tue–Sun Apr–Sep, to 5pm Oct–Mar). The latter's small museum houses a cluttered collection of ecclesiastical objects.

Opposite is the altogether more organised **Museo Archeologico** (☎ 0564 61 40 67; Piazza della Fortezza; adult/child €2.50/1.50; ☎ 10am–1pm & 3–7pm Tue–Sun Apr–Sep, to 1pm & 3–6pm Tue–Sun Oct–Mar), with a rich display of finds from local Etruscan sites. They're well displayed, though the descriptive panels are in Italian only.

The town's medieval lanes and steep alleys are a delight to wander, particularly around the small **Ghetto** quarter. Take Via Zuccarelli and turn left for **La Piccola Gerusalemme** (☎ 0564 61 60 06; Vicolo Manin 30; adult/child €3/2; ☎ 10am–12.30pm & 4–7pm Sun–Fri May–Oct, to 12.30pm & 3–6pm Sun–Fri Nov–Apr). The area fell into disrepair with the demise of Pitigliano's Jewish community at the end of WWII and was practically rebuilt from scratch in 1995. A visit includes the tiny, richly adorned synagogue and a small museum of Jewish culture, including the old bakery, kosher butchers and dyeing shops.

There are some spectacular walks around Pitigliano. The base of the rocky outcrop is stippled with Etruscan tomb caves carved into the soft tufa, many of them recycled as storage cellars. From there, you can follow a signed trail (about 6km) to Sovana.

SLEEPING & EATING

Albergo Guastini (☎ 0564 61 60 65; www.albergoguastini.it; Piazza Petruccioli 16; s €35–40, d €58–66; ☎ closed mid-Jan–mid-Feb) Pitigliano's only hotel is particularly friendly and welcoming. Perched on the edge of the cliff face, many of its rooms have marvellous views. Breakfast costs €8.

Osteria Il Tufo Allegro (☎ 0564 61 61 92; Vico della Costituzione 2; meals €31; ☎ closed Wed lunch & Tue) This *osteria* is just off Via Zuccarelli. The aromas emanating from its kitchen should be enough to draw you into the cavernous chamber, carved out of the tufa foundations.

Il Forno (Via Roma 16) Pick up a stick or two of *sfritto*, a gorgeously sticky local confection made of honey and walnuts, from this place.

Counterbalance the sweetness with a glass or two of the town's excellent dryish Bianco di Pitigliano wine.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Rama (www.griforoma.it) buses run between Pitigliano and Grosseto's train station (€6, two hours, four daily). They connect Pitigliano with Sorano (€1.20, 15 minutes, seven daily) and Sovana (€1.20, 20 minutes, one daily). For Saturnia, change at Manciano.

Necropoli di Sovana

One and a half kilometres south of the pretty nearby village of Sovana are Tuscany's most significant **Etruscan tombs** (admission €5; ☎ 9am-7pm Mar-Nov, 10am-5pm Fri-Sun Dec-Feb). Look for the yellow sign on the left for the **Tomba della Sirena**, where you follow a trail running alongside a rank of tomb facades cut from the rock face, as well as walk along a *via cava*.

The **Tomba di Ildebranda**, by far the grandest of Etruscan mausoleums and the only surviving temple-style tomb, still preserves traces of its columns and stairs. **Tomba del Tifone** is about 300m down a trail running alongside a rank of tomb facades cut from the rock face. A few arresting lengths of *via cava* exist here as well.

Due east of the village, just outside the tiny hamlet of San Quirico and signposted from the main square, are the **Vitozza rock caves** (☎ 0564 61 40 74; admission €2; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Mar-Oct, by appointment Nov-Feb), more than 200 of them, peppering a high rock ridge. One of the largest troglodyte dwellings in Italy, the complex was first inhabited in prehistoric times.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR EURO

If you plan to visit both Sovana and Sorano, invest in a €7 combined ticket. It gives entry to Tomba della Sirena, Tomba di Ildebranda, Fortezza Orsini, Necropoli di San Rocco, and the Vitozza rock caves. Buy a ticket at any of the sites.

Sorano

High on a rocky spur, Sorano's houses, many of which are nowadays unoccupied, seem to huddle together in an effort not to shove one another off their precarious perch. The town's main attraction is the partly renovated **Fortezza Orsini** (☎ 0564 63 37 67; Piazza Cairoli; adult/child under 11yr/child over 11yr €2/free/1; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Apr-Oct, to 1pm & 3-5.30pm Fri-Sun Nov-Mar) with its medieval museum and underground passageways, visited by separate guided tour (€3; hourly).

A few kilometres out of Sorano on the road to Sovana is the **Necropoli di San Rocco** (☎ 0564 63 30 99; admission €2; ☎ 11am-6pm Mar-Oct), another Etruscan burial area.

EASTERN TUSCANY

This corner of Tuscany holds some cinematic oh-wow moments, and the fact that relatively few tourists bother to venture here means that you'll find yourself with plenty of elbowroom.

Fans of Piero della Francesca can follow a trail of his paintings through the towns of Sansepolcro and Monterchi, finishing with a

WALK CAVE

There are at least 15 rock-sculpted passages spreading out in every direction from the valleys below Pitigliano. These sunken roads (*vie cave*) are enormous, up to 20m deep and 3m wide, and are believed to be sacred routes linking the necropoli and other sites associated with the Etruscan religious cult. A less popular, more mundane explanation is that these strange megalithic corridors were used to move livestock or as some kind of defence, allowing people to move from village to village unseen.

The countryside around Pitigliano, Sovana and Sorano is riddled with *vie cave*. Two particularly good examples, 500m west of Pitigliano on the road to Sovana, are Via Cava di Fratenucci, with its high vertical walls and Etruscan graffiti; and Via Cava di San Giuseppe, which passes the Fontana dell'Olmo, carved out of solid rock. From this fountain stares the sculpted head of Bacchus, the mythological god of fruitfulness. Via Cava San Rocco, near Sorano, is another fine example. It winds its way through the hills for 2km between the town and the Necropoli di San Rocco.

There's a fine **walk** from Pitigliano to Sovana (8km, three hours) that incorporates parts of the *vie cave*. Inquire at the tourist office in Pitigliano for routes and the all-important return transport.

viewing of his fresco cycle in Arezzo's Chiesa di San Francesco.

AREZZO

pop 97,493

Arezzo may not be a Tuscan centrefold, but those parts of its historic centre that survived merciless WWII bombings are worthy competition for any destination in the region: particularly the sloping Piazza Grande, the Pieve di Santa Maria and the five-star frescoes by Piero della Francesca in the Chiesa di San Francesco. The setting for much of Roberto Benigni's Oscar-winning film *La vita è bella* (Life is Beautiful), it's well worth a visit, easily accomplished as a day trip from Florence.

Once an important Etruscan town, Arezzo was later absorbed into the Roman Empire. A free republic as early as the 10th century, it supported the Ghibelline cause in the violent battles between pope and emperor and was eventually subjugated by Florence in 1384.

Arezzo was the birthplace of the Renaissance poet Petrarch, who popularised the sonnet format, penning his verses in both Latin and Italian; and of Giorgio Vasari, the prolific painter and architect who contributed so much to Renaissance Florence.

On the second-last Sunday of June and first Sunday of September, the town hosts the famous **Giostra del Saracino**, a horse-jousting competition. A huge, 500-exhibitor **antiques fair** takes over Piazza Grande on the first weekend of every month.

Orientation

From the train station on the southern edge of the walled city, pedestrianised Corso Italia leads to the Piazza Grande, Arezzo's nucleus.

Information

APT tourist office (☎ 0575 2 08 39; www.apr.aretzo.it; Piazza della Repubblica 28; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Apr-Sep, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Oct-Mar) Has a representative from Colori Toscani onsite who can arrange accommodation and tours free of charge.

Centro di Accoglienza Turistico (☎ 0575 40 35 74; Via Ricasoli; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Jun-Oct, 10am-6pm Nov-May) Hires out audioguides to Arezzo (adult/child per day €2.50/2) with an accompanying map. Its 'Room 180' shows a 30-minute film about Arezzo (adult/child €2.50/2) in six languages on a 180-degree screen.

Eutelia (Via Guido Monaco 61; per hr €2; ☎ 9am-9pm) Internet access and cheap international phone calls.

Nuovo Ospedale San Donato (☎ 0575 25 50 01; Via A de Gasperi) Arezzo's hospital, located outside the city walls.

Police station (☎ 0575 31 81; Via Fra Guittone 3)

Post office (Via Guido Monaco 34)

Sights

CHIESA DI SAN FRANCESCO

Gracing the apse of this 14th-century **church** (Piazza San Francesco; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Oct, to 6pm Nov-Mar) is one of the greatest works of Italian art, Piero della Francesca's fresco cycle of the *Legend of the True Cross* (1452-66). This masterpiece relates in 10 episodes a highly coloured subsequent history of the cross on which Christ was crucified.

You can get some sense of the frescoes from beyond the cordon in front of the altar, but to really appreciate them up close, plan ahead for a **visit with audioguide** (☎ reservations 0575 35 27 27; www.pierodellafrancesca.it; admission €6; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Oct, to 6pm Nov-Mar). As only 25 people are allowed in every half-hour, it's essential to prebook by phone or at any of the sites that participate in the combined ticket scheme. The ticket office is at Piazza San Francesco 4, to the right of the church's main entrance.

PIEVE DI SANTA MARIA

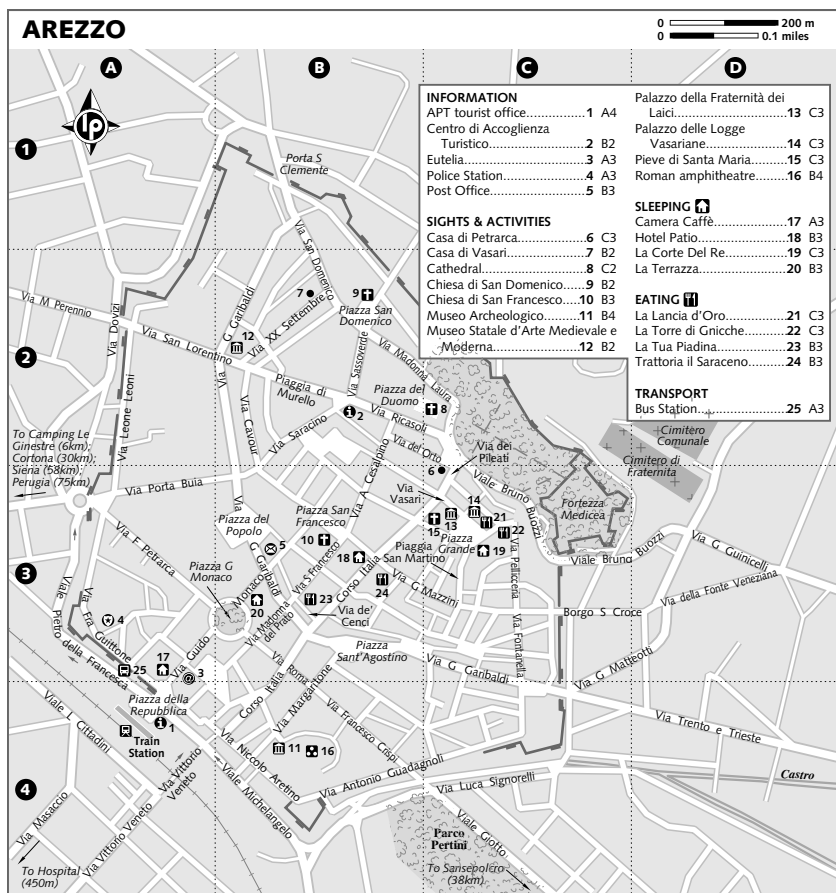
This 12th-century **church** (Corso Italia 7; ☎ 8am-1pm & 3-7pm May-Sep, to noon & 3-6pm Oct-Apr) has a magnificent Romanesque arcaded facade, in form reminiscent of the cathedral at Pisa, yet without the glorious marble facing. Over the central doorway are lively carved reliefs representing the months of the year. The 14th-century bell tower with its 40 apertures is something of an emblem for the city. The monochrome of the interior's warm, grey stone is relieved by Pietro Lorenzetti's fine polyptych, *Madonna and Saints*, beneath the semidome of the apse.

PIAZZA GRANDE & AROUND

The porticoes of **Palazzo delle Logge Vasariane**, completed in 1573, overlook this cobbled piazza. In the northwest corner, **Palazzo della Fraternità dei Laici**, with its churchlike facade, was started in 1375 in the Gothic style and finished after the onset of the Renaissance. Via dei Pileati leads to **Casa di Petrarca**, the poet's former home.

CATHEDRAL

Arezzo's **cathedral** (Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 7am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm) was started in the 13th century yet



was not completed until well into the 15th century. In the northeast corner, left of the main altar, an exquisite fresco of *Mary Magdalene* by Piero della Francesca is dwarfed in size, but not beauty, by the rich marble reliefs of the tomb of Bishop Guido Tarlati.

CHIESA DI SAN DOMENICO & AROUND

The short detour to the **Chiesa di San Domenico** (Piazza San Domenico 7; ☎ 8.30am-6pm) is a must so you can see the haunting *Crucifixion* – one of Cimabue's earliest works, painted around 1265 – that rears above the main altar. To the west, the **Casa di Vasari** (☎ 0575 40 90 40; Via XX Settembre 55; adult/child €2/1; ☎ 8am-7.30pm Mon & Wed-Sat, to 1pm Sun) was built and sumptuously decorated (overwhelmingly so in the case of

the Sala del Camino, the Fireplace Room) by the architect himself; ring the bell if the door's closed.

Down the hill, the **Museo Statale d'Arte Medievale e Moderna** (☎ 0575 40 90 50; Via San Lorentino 8; adult/student €10/7; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun) houses works by local artists, including Luca Signorelli and Vasari, spanning from the 13th to 18th centuries.

**MUSEO ARCHEOLOGICO & ROMAN
AMPHITHEATRE**

East of the train station, the **Museo Archeologico** (☎ 0575 2 08 82; Via Margaritone 10; adult/child €4/2; 🕒 8.30am-7pm) is in a convent overlooking the remains of a **Roman amphitheatre** (admission free; 🕒 8.30am-7pm Apr-Oct, to 6pm Nov-Mar).

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR EURO

You can buy a combined ticket (€10) giving entry to the Piero della Francesca frescoes in the Chiesa di San Francesco, plus Museo Archeologico, Museo Statale d'Arte Medievale e Moderna and Casa di Vasari, at any of the four venues.

It has a sizeable collection of Etruscan and Roman artefacts.

Sleeping

Camping Le Ginestre (☎ 0575 36 35 66; www.campingleginestre.it; Via Ruscello 100; per person €7-8, pitch €8-10; ☹ year-round) From Arezzo train station, take the LFI bus to Ruscello and request the camping stop.

Camera Caffé (☎ 347 0324405; www.cameracaffe.net; Via Guido Monaco 92; s with shared bathroom €35, s/d with bathroom €40/55; ☹) Across the street from the train station, the dorm-room decor here is supplemented by cushy beds and fat duvets. The huge, self-serve kitchen has a gorgeous dining terrace and some rooms have air-con.

La Terrazza (☎ 0575 2 83 87; laterrazza@lycos.it; 5th fl, Via Guido Monaco 25; s/d without bathroom €40/50, d with bathroom €60) Comprising apartments on two floors with eight large, bright rooms and a kitchen for guest use, this place is welcoming and good value. Go down the passage beside Blockbuster.

La Corte Del Re (☎ 0575 29 67 20; www.lacortedelre.com; Via Borgunto 5; s €60-75, d €70-90; ☹ ☹) A collection of six apartments, centimetres from Piazza Grande, harmoniously blending contemporary design into elements of the historic building. Some apartments have kitchenettes and views of the square. Three night minimum stay.

Hotel Patio (☎ 0575 40 19 62; www.hotelpatio.it; Via Cavour 23; s €115-130, d €155-176, ste €190-230; ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹) This is Arezzo's most characterful hotel, with 10 themed rooms, each dedicated to one of Bruce Chatwin's travel books. Each has original furnishings from the various countries represented, including Australia, Morocco and China.

Eating

La Tua Piadina (☎ 0575 2 32 40; Via de' Cenci 18) A justifiably popular takeaway place hidden away down a side street, where you can get a range

of hot, tasty *piadine*, the Emilia-Romagna version of the wrap, from around €3.50.

La Torre di Gnicche (☎ 0575 35 20 35; Piazza San Martino 8; meals €26; ☹ Thu-Tue) Just off Piazza Grande, this is a fine traditional restaurant offering a rich variety of antipasti. Choose from the ample range of local *pecorino* cheeses, accompanied by a choice red from the extensive wine list.

Trattoria Il Saraceno (☎ 0575 2 76 44; www.ilsaraceno.com; Via Giuseppe Mazzini 3a; meals €30; ☹ Thu-Tue) This trattoria serves quality, varied Tuscan fare. The impressive wine collection is hard to miss, as it conspicuously lines the walls. Pizzas start at €5.

La Lancia d'Oro (☎ 0575 2 10 33; Piazza Grande 18-19; meals €47; ☹ closed Sun dinner & Mon) Your order here is supplemented by excellent snacks and nibbles that arrive unannounced. There's a jolly, waggish waiter, while the interior, painted with swags and green-and-white stripes, is like dining in a marquee. Good light lunch menus (€15, two courses, plus glass of wine) are served on the terrace under the loggia that looks down over Piazza Grande.

A veritable produce melee erupts at Piazza Sant'Agostino's **market** each Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

Getting There & Away

Buses depart Piazza della Repubblica for Cortona (€2.80, one hour, more than 10 weekdays, three Saturday), Sansepolcro (€3.30, one hour, seven daily) and Siena (€5.20, 1½ hours, seven daily). For Florence, you're better off hopping on the train.

Arezzo is on the Florence-Rome train line with frequent services to Rome (€11.70, two hours) and Florence (€5.60, 1½ hours).

DETOUR

North of Arezzo is the **Parco Nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi** (www.parcoforeste.casentinesi.it), a wooded national park that takes in some of the Apennines' most spectacular scenery. One of the highest peaks, Monte Falterona (1654m), marks the source of the Arno. In addition to two monasteries, the park is home to a rich assortment of wildlife and nearly 100 bird species. The dense forests are a cool summer refuge, ideal for both walking and escaping the maddening crowds.

Trains also call by Cortona (€2.40, 20 minutes, hourly). Arezzo is just a few kilometres east of the A1 and the SS73 heads east to Sansepolcro.

SANSEPOLCRO

pop 16,161

Sansepolcro was the birthplace of Piero della Francesca and is an important stop on any itinerary inspired by his work. On your way from Arezzo, stop in Monterchi to see his famous fresco **Madonna del Parto** (Pregnant Madonna; ☎ 0575 7 07 13; Via della Reglia 1; adult/child €3.50/free; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-7pm Tue-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar). A sensitive touch: pregnant women get free admission.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0575 74 05 36; info@sansepolcro@apt.aretzo.it; Via Matteotti 8; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 3-6pm Apr-Sep, to 12.30pm & 3.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat, to 12.30pm Sun Oct-Mar) is packed with multilingual information.

Within the **Museo Civico** (☎ 0575 73 22 18; www.comune.sansepolcro.ar.it, in Italian; Via Aggiunti 65; adult/child €6/4.50; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 2.30-7pm Jun-Sep, to 1pm & 2.30-6pm Oct-May), around the corner from the tourist office, are two Piero della Francesca masterpieces: his *Resurrection*, and the *Madonna della Misericordia* (Madonna of Mercy) polyptych, where the Virgin spreads her protective cloak over the painting's benefactors.

our pick Locanda Giglio & Ristorante Fiorentino

(☎ 0575 74 20 33; www.ristorantefiorentino.it; Via Pacioli 60; s/d/tr €55/80/110; (P) ☎), a very friendly hotel and restaurant, has been in the same family for four generations. The four hotel rooms with their oak floors, underfloor lighting and period furniture recovered from the family loft have been imaginatively renovated by Alessia, an architect/sommelier and youngest of the family (ask for La Torre, with a lovely low bed and the best views), while Dad, Alessio, still runs the restaurant with panache. The pasta's homemade and the imaginative menu (meals €30 to €34) changes with the seasons.

SITA buses link Sansepolcro with Arezzo (€3.30, one hour, seven daily) and there are several trains daily to Perugia (€4.15, 1½ hours).

CORTONA

pop 22,901

With a layout indicative of someone spilling a bucket of 'Etruscan town' down a hillside, rooms with a view are the rule rather than the exception in Cortona. In the late 14th century Fra' Angelico lived and worked here,

and fellow artists Luca Signorelli (1450-1523) and Pietro da Cortona (1596-1669) were both born within the walls. More recently, large chunks of *Under the Tuscan Sun*, the soap-in-the-sun film of the book by Frances Mayes, were shot here.

A full week of merriment in May or June (the date varies to coincide with Ascension Day) culminates in the **Giostra dell'Archidado**, a crossbow competition first held in the Middle Ages.

Orientation

Piazzale Garibaldi, on the southern edge of the walled city, is where buses arrive. From it, there are sensational views across the plain to Lago di Trasimeno in Umbria. From the piazzale, walk straight up Via Nazionale – about the only flat street in the whole town – to Piazza della Repubblica, the main square. The friendly **tourist office** (☎ 0575 63 03 52; Via Nazionale 42; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun May-Sep, 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat Oct-Apr) has maps, brochures and timetables, sells bus and train tickets and can book rooms.

Sights

Brooding over lopsided Piazza della Repubblica is the **Palazzo Comunale**, built in the 13th century, renovated in the 16th and once again in the 19th. To the north is attractive **Piazza Signorelli** and, on its north side, 13th-century **Palazzo Casali**, whose rather plain facade was added in the 17th century. Inside is the **Museo dell'Accademia Etrusca** (☎ 0575 63 04 15; Piazza Signorelli 9; adult/child €7/4; ☎ 10am-7pm daily Apr-Oct, to 5pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar), which displays substantial local Etruscan finds, including an elaborate 2nd-century-BC oil lamp.

Little is left of the Romanesque character of the **cathedral**, northwest of Piazza Signorelli. It was completely rebuilt late in the Renaissance and again, indifferently, in the 18th century. Its true wealth lies in the **Museo Diocesano** (☎ 0575 6 28 30; Piazza del Duomo 1; adult/child €5/3; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, to 5pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar) in the former church of Gesù. Its fine collection includes works by Luca Signorelli and a beautiful *Annunciation* and *Madonna* by Fra' Angelico.

Wriggle up through a sleepy warren of steep cobbled lanes in the eastern part of town to the largely 19th-century **Chiesa di Santa Margherita** (Piazza Santa Margherita; ☎ 7.30am-noon & 3-7pm Apr-Oct, 8.30am-noon & 3-6pm Oct-Apr). The remains of St

Margaret, the patron saint of Cortona, are on display in an ornate, 14th-century, glass-sided tomb above the main altar. It's a stiff climb, but worth it – and it's worth pushing even further uphill to the forbidding **Fortezza Medicea** (☎ 0575 63 04 15; adult/child €3/1.50; ☹ 10am–1.30pm & 2.30–6pm Apr, May, Jun & Sep, to 7pm Jul & Aug), Cortona's highest point, with stupendous views over the surrounding countryside.

Sleeping

Santa Margherita (☎ 0575 63 03 36; comunitacortona@smr.it; Via Cesare Battisti 15; s/d €40/54; ☹ year-round) Run by sweet, obliging nuns from the religious institute, this is a popular place with Italian groups, so call ahead (with Italian phrasebook at the ready). A renovation in 2009 included new beds, fresh paint and sparkling bathrooms. Breakfast costs €5. Disabled access.

Hotel Italia (☎ 0575 63 02 54; www.hotelitaliacortona.com; Via Ghibellina 5/7; s €83–88, d €110–116; ☹ ☹) A casual but atmospheric 17th-century *palazzo* just off Piazza della Repubblica. Standard rooms have traditional cross-beamed ceilings and are decorated in warm orange tones, while each of the unique superior rooms features giant bathtubs. Views are breathtaking from the roof-level breakfast room. Oriental massages, wi-fi and mountain-bike hire are available.

Hotel San Michele (☎ 0575 60 43 48; www.hotelsanmichele.net; Via Guelfa 15; d €79–220; ☹ closed Jan–mid-Mar; P ☹ ☹) This is Cortona's finest hotel. Primarily Renaissance, but with elements dating from the 12th century and modifications over subsequent centuries, it's like a little history of Cortona in stone. Rooms are airy, spacious and exquisitely furnished. Prices vary wildly due to frequent special offers and festivals.

Eating

Snoopy's (Piazza Signorelli 29) Gelato is served in generous portions here, starting at €1.50 for a small cone.

Trattoria Dardano (☎ 0575 60 19 44; Via Dardano 24; meals €24; ☹ Thu–Tue) Dardano is one of those

no-nonsense yet still unexpectedly wonderful *trattorie* that feature prominently in every Tuscany travel memoir, doing amazing things with ostensibly simple dishes. You'll be elbow-to-elbow with locals and giddy, idealistic visitors seriously considering buying and fixing up a nearby farmhouse on the strength of their lunch.

Osteria del Teatro (☎ 0575 63 05 56; www.osteria-del-teatro.it; Via Maffei 2; meals €40; ☹ Thu–Tue) Friendly service, fresh flowers on every table and a liberal meting out of truffle shavings awaits diners here. Featured in nearly every Italian gastronomic guide, its seasonally driven dishes include the *ravioli ai fiori di zucca* (pumpkin-flower ravioli) in summer.

La Bucaccia (☎ 0575 60 60 39; www.labucaccia.it; Via Ghibellina 17; meals €45) Decidedly tourist-targeted, with Etruscan cellar ambience: wine racks, grape press, tiny wine barrels, cheese wheels and an Etruscan cistern displayed under a glassed floor. The service is indisputably warm, and the food notable in both taste and presentation, but lofty wine prices push the final total quite high.

There's a Saturday **market** (Piazza Signorelli), which sells farmers' products.

Getting There & Around

From Piazzale Garibaldi, LFI buses connect the town with Arezzo (€2.80, one hour), via Castiglion Fiorentino.

The nearest train station on the main Rome–Florence line is located about 6km away at Camucia-Cortona, to which shuttle buses (€1, 15 minutes) run at least hourly. Destinations include Arezzo (€2.40, 20 minutes, hourly), Florence (€7.10, 1½ hours, hourly), Rome (€9.40, 2¼ hours, every two hours) and Perugia (€3.15, 40 minutes, over 12 daily).

The tourist office has timetables and sells both bus and train tickets.

By car the city is on the north–south SS71 that runs to Arezzo. It's also close to the SS75 that connects Perugia to the A1.

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