

Tuscany



Stupendous art, soul-aching countryside, stirring wine and lip-smacking cuisine is what this enviable region, from where the Renaissance rippled out across Europe, is all about. Tuscany in English, Toscana in Italian, it specialises in being the best.

It was in Florence, the region's leading lady who everyone knows, that Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and a bunch of other brilliant 14th- to 16th-century Tuscan masters carved out art history. Brunelleschi's dome did wonders to the course of architecture, while Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio penned parchments to plant the seeds for a unified Italian language. Be it Pisa's famous Leaning Tower, Siena's sparky horse race or Florence's small-balled *David* and once-outlawed steak, Tuscany is iconic in what it says about Italy.

But there's far more to this tourist-packed land of world-famous art and architecture. Take two steps back from centre stage and a kaleidoscope of slow-paced hill-top towns to lunch in, vineyards and olive groves to taste wine in, and fresh green Alpine pastures to amble oh-so-slowly over looms large. Be it savouring ancient Etruscan sites around Saturnia and Sovana (where's that?), submitting to a wine-fuelled medieval reverie at Arezzo's Giostra del Saracino (what's that?) or island-hopping off the southern coast, you don't need to jostle with the crowds to discover the best of the best.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Revel in Renaissance Florence with the city's best: **Uffizi Gallery** (p470), **Palazzo Vecchio** (p469), **Duomo** (p463) and **baptistry** (p464)
- Gorge on Italian icons: Michelangelo's **David** in Florence's **Galleria dell'Accademia** (p475); the Leaning Tower et al on Pisa's **Piazza dei Miracoli** (p507); and fine wines from **Chianti** (p516) and **Montalcino** (p533)
- Take a Tuscan walk on the wild side in the **Apuane Alps** (p504), **Garfagnana** (p504), **Mugello** (p494) or **Chianti** (p516)
- Be like a local – pick up a bike and lazily loop the old city walls of lovely **Lucca** (p499).
- Set the heart racing with Gothic enlightenment in Siena's ornate **cathedral** (p521) or at the world's shortest horse race, **Il Palio** (p523)
- Dip into natural hot springs in **Saturnia** (p537) or diverse, unspoiled scapes in the sprawling **Parco Regionale della Maremma** (p536)



■ POPULATION: 3.5 MILLION

■ AREA: 22,990 SQ KM

FLORENCE

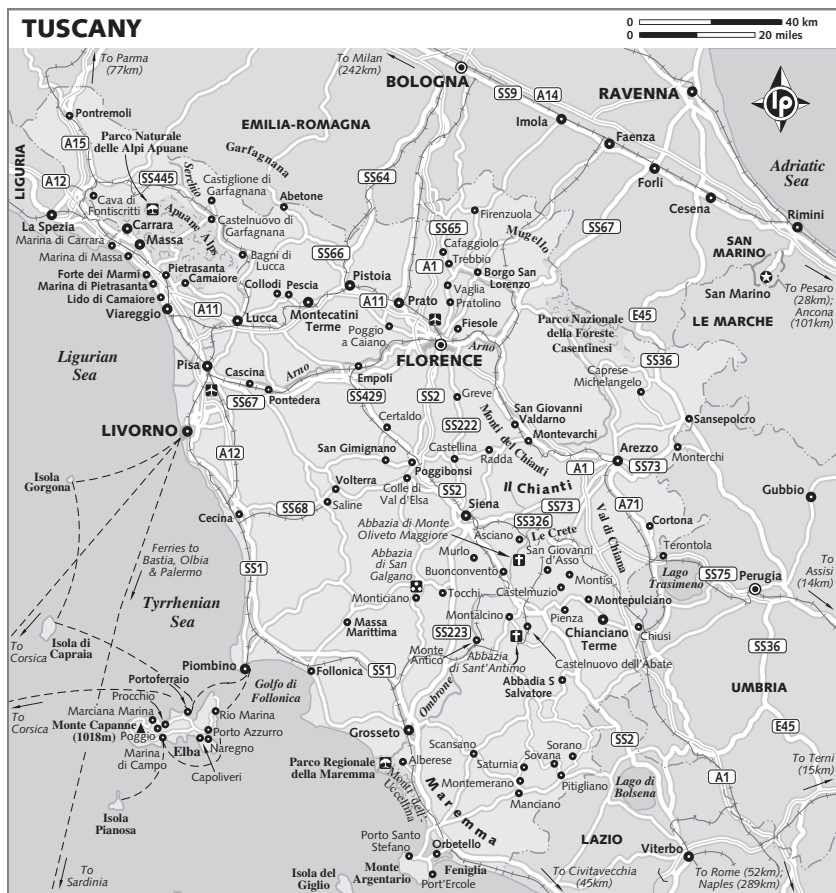
pop 353,000

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, the mood, the view changes every time. Surprisingly small as it is, this city is like no other. Cradle of the Renaissance and home of Machiavelli, Michelangelo and the Medici, Firenze is magnetic, romantic, unrivalled and busy. Far too many *motorini* (scooters) whizz through its historic streets, which 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 city than priceless masterpieces. Its riverside streets evoke a thousand tales of its medieval past; designer boutiques stud its most famous street, Via de' Tornabuoni; its café and bar scene buzzes; and – when the summer heat simply gets too stifling – there's a ring of wine-rich hills to flee to.

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 head of state (*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 from one to the other 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 whole 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 (p469), 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.

Florence was severely damaged during WWII by the retreating Germans, who blew up all its bridges except the Ponte Vecchio. Floods ravaged the city in 1966; 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 (see p471).

ORIENTATION

Budget hotels are concentrated east of 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 trendy, less touristy area south of the river is known as Oltrarno.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

McRae Books (Map p470 ☎ 055 238 24 56; www.mcraebooks.com; Via dei Neri 32r; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Sun) English-language bookshop covering the whole gamut of genres; brilliantly organised.

Paperback Exchange (Map p470; ☎ 055 29 34 60; www.papex.it; Via dell' Oche 4r) Anglo-American bookshop, new and secondhand titles.

Emergency

Police station (Questura; Map pp464-5; ☎ 055 4 97 71; Via Zara 2; ☎ 24hr) Report thefts at the foreigners office here.

THE RED & THE BLACK

Florence has two parallel street-numbering systems: red or brown numbers (which have 'r' for rosso, red, after the number) indicate commercial premises; black or blue ones are private residences.

To compound the confusion, black or blue numbers may denote whole buildings while each red/brown one refers to one commercial entity – and a building may have several. It can turn you purple if you're hunting for a specific address and in a hurry.

Tourist Police (Polizia Assistenza Turistica; Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 20 39 11; Via Pietrapiana 50r, Piazza dei Ciompi; 🕒 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat)

Internet Access

Internet Pitti (Map pp466-7; www.internetpitti.com; Piazza de'Pitti; per hr €4; 🕒 11am-11pm Mon-Sun) Excellent bulletin board with ads for flatmates, room rentals etc.

Internet Train (www.internettrain.it) Borgo San Jacopo 30r (Map p470; per hr €3.20; 🕒 11am-10pm Mon-Fri, noon-10pm Sat & Sun; Via dell'Ortiuolo 40r (Map p470; per hr €3.20; 🕒 10am-10.30pm Mon-Fri, noon-8pm Sat, 3-7pm Sun); Via Guelfa 24 (Map pp466-7; per hr €3.20; 🕒 9am-midnight Mon-Fri, 11am-9pm Sat & Sun) In all, 10-odd branches.

Internet Resources

City of Florence (www.comune.firenze.it) Useful city information portal.

Florence for Fun (www.florenceforfun.org) Fun, good for accommodation and museum bookings, well tuned in to Florence's nightlife.

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

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

Laundry

Wash & Dry (wash or dry €3.50; 🕒 8am-10pm), Via de' Serragli 87r (Map pp466-7); Via dei Servi 105r (Map pp466-7); Via del Sole 29r (Map p470); Via della Scala 52-54r (Map pp466-7); Via Nazionale 129r (Map pp466-7)

Left Luggage

Stazione di Santa Maria Novella (Map pp466-7; per item for 5hr €3.80, for each additional hr €0.60; 🕒 6am-midnight) Find it on platform 16.

Medical Services

24-Hour Pharmacy (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 67 61; Stazione di Santa Maria Novella) Inside the main train station.

Dr Stephen Kerr (Map p470; ☎ 055 28 80 55; www.dr-kerr.com; Via Porta Rossa 1; by appointment or open clinic 🕒 3-5pm Mon-Fri) Resident British doctor.

Tourist Medical Service (Map pp464-5; ☎ 055 47 54 11; Via Lorenzo il Magnifico 59; open clinic 🕒 11am-noon & 5-6pm Mon-Sat) English-speaking doctors on call 24hr.

Money

American Express (Map p470; ☎ 055 5 09 81; Via Dante Alighieri 22r)

Post

Central Post Office (Map p470; Via Pellicceria)

Tourist Information

Comune di Firenze Tourist Office (www.comune.fi.it in Italian) Train Station (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 22 45; Piazza della Stazione 4; 🕒 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-1.30pm Sun); Santa Croce (Map p470; ☎ 055 234 04 44; Borgo Santa Croce 29r; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) Information on the city, run by Florence's city council.

GUNK ALERT

It's not just bag snatchers and pickpockets you need to watch out for in touristy old Florence says Janet C of the USA, who sent the following tale to Lonely Planet: 'I was crossing the piazza at Santa Maria Novella on the way to the train station in Florence last Friday morning when a very well-dressed Italian gentleman on his way to work walked past me and pointed out gunk dripping down the front of the luggage I was wheeling behind me. My natural response was 'Gross! What's that?' and when he kindly offered me a tissue to clean it off, I took it rather than reaching into my own shoulder bag...which I stupidly set down to clean up the mess. He's the one who squirted the stuff (looked like runny baby cereal) on my luggage and then distracted me while his accomplice took off with my bag. This will hopefully help other travellers, since the US Consulate in Florence tells me it has become a very popular method of separating tourists from their valuables.'

CUT THE QUEUE

Summer queues to get into key museums can mean a hot sticky wait of four to seven hours! Booking ahead, however, slashes waiting time – in the case of the Uffizi at peak times, an hour or more.

For a fee of €3 per ticket, tickets can be reserved up to one day in advance to all 13 *musei statali* (state museums), including the Uffizi Gallery, Galleria dell'Accademia (where *David* lives), Palazzo Pitti, Museo del Bargello, Museo Archeologico and the Medici chapels (Cappelle Medicee). Free tickets for those aged under 18 also incur the €3 booking fee. Make yourself a coffee then call **Firenze Musei** (Florence Museums; ☎ 055 29 48 83; www.firenzemusei.it; 🕒 8.30am–6.30pm Mon–Fri, 8.30am–12.30pm Sat) and loiter in the phone queue. At the Uffizi, signs shepherd pre-booked ticket holders first to the ticket office to collect tickets and then to a different entrance to the gallery.

You can book at **Firenze Musei information desks** (🕒 8.30am–7pm Tue–Sun) inside the Uffizi and at Palazzo Pitti; or online (commission €5.70) through **Weekend a Firenze** (www.weekendafirenze.com).

Provincia di Firenze Tourist Office City Centre (Map pp466–7; ☎ 055 29 08 32/3; www.provincia.firenze.it in Italian, www.firenzeturismo.it; Via Cavour 1r; 🕒 8.30am–6.30pm Mon–Sat, 8.30am–1.30pm Sun); Aeroporto di Firenze (Map pp464–5; ☎ 055 31 58 74; infoaeroporto@aeroporto.firenze.it; 🕒 8.30am–8.30pm) Information on the city and province of Florence.

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

Travel Agencies

CTS (Map pp466–7; ☎ 055 28 95 70; www.cts.it in Italian; Via de' Ginori 25r) Florence branch of national youth travel organisation.

SIGHTS

Florence seriously overwhelms: it swarms with sights, conveniently within walking distance of each other. In true Italian fashion, state museums and monuments (Uffizi and Galleria dell'Accademia included) close on Monday.

Piazza del Duomo & Around

The city's most iconic landmark, the **Duomo** (Cathedral; Map p470; ☎ 055 230 28 85; 🕒 10am–5pm Mon–Wed & Fri, 10am–4pm Thu, 10am–4.45pm Sat, 1st Sat of month 10am–3.30pm, Mass in English Sat 5pm) thrills. Its red-tiled dome, dominating Florence's skyline, is packed with drama, while the sheer size and ordered vivacity of its pink, white and green marble façade turns you into a tiny weeny Alice in Wonderland.

Begun in 1296 by Sienese architect Arnolfo di Cambio, the world's fourth-largest cathedral took almost 150 years to complete. Its neogothic façade was designed in the

19th century by architect Emilio de Fabris to replace the uncompleted original, torn down in the 16th century. The oldest part of the cathedral is pierced by **Porta dei Canonici** (Canons' Door), a mid-14th-century High Gothic creation – 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 façade, 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 sizable chunk of the cathedral not paid for by the church).

Scaling the 463 steep stone steps up to the cathedral **dome** (adult/child under 6yr €6/free; 🕒 8.30am–7pm Mon–Fri, 8.30am–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 Brunelleschi, who, though initially commissioned with arch rival Ghiberti to build what was, at the time, the world's largest church dome, quickly took the lead on a project that had defeated every architect before him. 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 p470; adult/child under 6yr €6/free; 🕒 8.30am–7.30pm), designed by Giotto in 1334. He died before the graceful bell tower was complete, leaving Andrea Pisano and Francesco Talenti to finish it.

Ghiberti and Brunelleschi competed for domes...and doors, as the 11th-century Romanesque **baptistry** (battistero; Map p470; admission €3; ☎ noon-7pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-2pm Sun) – an octagonal striped structure of (grubby) white and green marble – testifies. 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. Pisano executed the southern doors (1330) illustrating the life of St John the Baptist; and Lorenzo Ghiberti won a public

FLORENCE

1 To Aeroporto di Firenze (Florence Airport; 2km); Provincia di Firenze Tourist Office (2km); Ufficio Depositeria Comunale (2km)

2 To Tenax (2km)

3 To Pisa International Airport Galileo Galilei (42km)

4

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competition in 1401 to design the northern doors. But it is the gilded bronze doors at the eastern entrance, the Gate of Paradise (Porta del Paradiso), that took Ghiberti a painstaking 27 years to complete, that are the most celebrated.

What you see today are copies (in turn, pawed so much they too have been taken away







for restoration); turn to the **Museo dell'Opera del Duomo** (Map p470; www.operaduomo.firenze.it; Piazza del Duomo 9; admission €6; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1.40pm Sun) for the originals. Displays here include the equipment used by Brunelleschi to build the dome, and his death mask. On the mezzanine floor is Michelangelo's *Pietà*, which he intended for his own tomb. Vasari



CENTRAL FLORENCE





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recorded in his *Lives of the Artists* 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 Piazza della Signoria

From Piazza del Duomo take Via de' Calzaiuoli to reach **Chiesa e Museo di Orsanmichele** (Map p470; ☎ 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 many Renaissance artists, including Lorenzo Ghiberti's bronze *Saint Matthew* and a copy of Donatello's *St George*.

Northwest is **Piazza della Repubblica** (Map p470), the heart of Roman and medieval Florence. Today's buildings, mostly constructed in the late 19th century, are home to Florence's oldest cafés (see p488).

Head east from the piazza and turn right into Via Santa Margherita to the **Museo Casa di Dante** (Dante's Museum House; Map p470; ☎ 055 21 94 16; Via Santa Margherita 1; admission €3; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun, 1st Sun of month 10am-4pm, closed last Sun of month), built in 1910 above the foundations of Dante's dwelling. Up the road, 11th-century **Chiesa di Santa Margherita** (Map p470; Via Santa Margherita), dubbed Chiesa di Dante, is where the poet first spied muse Beatrice Portinari and wed Gemma Donati; both women are buried in the church.

Crowds claw to see *David* but few rush to see Michelangelo's early works in the out-

standing **Museo del Bargello** (Map p470; ☎ 055 238 86 06; Via del Proconsolo 4; admission €4, audioguide for 1/2 people €5.50/7; 🕒 8.15am-1.50pm Tue-Sat, 2nd & 4th Sun of the month), inside Florence's earliest public building where the *podestà* meted out justice from the late 13th until early 16th centuries. Unfortunates received their last rites in the palace's 1st-floor Capella del Podestà (where Giotto frescoed Hell and Paradise on the walls) and/or were tortured near the well in the centre of the medieval courtyard, the site of the city's gallows.

The museum is home to Italy's most comprehensive collection of Tuscan Renaissance sculpture. Several works by Michelangelo grace the ground floor, notably his drunken *Bacchus* (executed when he was 22) and the *Tondo pitti*, a roundel of a very human, haloless Madonna and Child with the infant St John. After Michelangelo left Florence in 1534, sculpture was dominated by Baccio Bandinelli (see his *Adam & Eve* here) and Benvenuto Cellini, whose playful marble *Ganimede* (Ganymede) feeding a falcon meat is uplifting. Keen to discover Renaissance sculpture in chronological order? Save the Michelangelo hall until last and start instead with Donatello's two *Davids* in the Sala di Donatello on the 1st floor.

Nearby at the southern end of **Mercato Nuovo** (Via Porta Rossa), a once-fine market now sheltering tacky souvenir and leather stalls, is Florence's **Fontana del Porcellino** (Piglet Fountain). Rub the porker's snout, throw a coin in the water and – so legend says – you're bound to return to Florence.

Head to **Via de' Tornabuoni**, the city's most legendary fashion street – often called the 'Salotto di Firenze' (Florence's Drawing Room) – to peer at **Palazzo Strozzi** (Map p470; Piazza degli Strozzi), a Renaissance colossus that was raised by one of the most powerful of the Medici's rival families. Never completed, its three finished façades in heavy rusticated *pietra forte* (local sandstone) scream naked power. Today it occasionally hosts art exhibitions.

Piazza della Signoria

The hub of the city's political life and surrounded by some of its most celebrated buildings, this lovely café-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 **Fontana di Nettuno** (Neptune Fountain).

No, the much-photographed **David** guarding the entrance to Palazzo Vecchio since 1910 is *not* the original (which stood here until 1873 but is now in the Galleria dell'Accademia; see p475). Ditto for Donatello's *Marzocco*, the heraldic Florentine lion (original in Museo del Bargello) and *Giuditta e Oloferne* (Judith and Holofernes; original inside Palazzo Vecchio). Some other great sculptures seek shelter beneath the **Loggia della Signoria** (Map p470), built in the late 14th century as a platform for public ceremonies.

As much a symbol of the city as the Duomo is the striking 94m-tall **Torre d'Arnolfo** that crowns **Palazzo Vecchio** (Map p470; ☎ 055 276 82 24; Piazza della Signoria; adult/18-25yr/3-17yr €6/4.50/2, family of 4/5 €14/16, visit & guided tour €8/6.50/3, each additional tour €1; 🕒 9am-7pm Fri-Wed, 9am-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.

A series of lavish apartments created for the ever-greedy Medici clan climaxes with 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. 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 Siennese, 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. Viewing the result from above – from between the 25 trusses accessible on a secret-passage guided tour – is a staggering experience.



Uffizi

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 – in short a government office building (*uffizi* meaning offices).

Vasari also designed the **Corridoio Vasariano** (Map p470 and Map pp466–7), a long private corridor linking Palazzo Vecchio and Palazzo Pitti through the Uffizi Gallery and across Ponte Vecchio. Unfortunately it is closed to the public.

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, indi-

rectly, the first steps were taken to turn it into an art gallery.

THE GALLERY

Forget the world-famous masterpieces for a second: simply the circus of snagging a ticket (see boxed text, p463) casts mystique over this art gallery that every visitor to Florence, art lover or not, feels obliged to visit. Be warned that the actual visit, depending on how many tour groups you jostle with and how many works are temporarily on loan to other museums, can be a real anticlimax.

Yet that is the power of the **Galleria degli Uffizi** (Uffizi Gallery; Map pp466–7; Piazza degli Uffizi 6; ☎ 055 238 86 51; adult/18–25yr with EU passport/under 18s €6.50/3.25/free, 85-min audioguide for 1/2 people €5.50/8; ⌚ 8.15am–

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Cappelle Medicee.....17 B1	Hotel Pensione Ferretti.....43 A2	Hotel Perseo.....44 B1	La Terrazza.....72 B2
Chiesa della Santa Trinità.....18 A3	Hotel Perseo.....44 B1	Hotel San Giovanni.....45 B1	Naima.....73 C3
Chiesa di Santa Margherita.....19 C2	Hotel San Giovanni.....45 B1	Hotel Scoti.....46 A3	Noir.....74 A3
Chiesa e Museo di	Hotel Scoti.....46 A3	Il Salotto di Firenze.....47 B2	Rivoire.....75 B3
Orsanmichele.....20 B3	Il Salotto di Firenze.....47 B2	In Piazza della Signoria.....48 C3	
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6.35pm Tue-Sun), 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. Housed inside the vast U-shaped **Palazzo degli Uffizi**, its sheer size alone impresses (don't dream of viewing the 50-plus rooms and 1555 masterpieces properly in one visit – preselect which artists or period of art interest you most).

Should you have the mental stamina to spend the day here, the Uffizi has a **rooftop café** serving light snacks (pizzas/panini €3.50/4.50, 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.

Tuscan Masters: 12th to 14th Centuries

Three large altarpieces from Florentine churches – *Madonna in maestà* (Madonna

THE UFFIZI: FACE OF THE FUTURE

The lighting in places is atrocious; the vital statistics of some works not even marked, let alone explained in English; and world-class masterpieces jostle for limited wall space. Historic, vast, world famous and crammed to the rafters with the very best of the Renaissance it might be, but Italy's most famous art gallery sucks in terms of museum design and efficiency.

The Uffizi needs a facelift. Funding is not the issue – a €49 million revamp project pledging to more than double the 5400-sq-m state gallery in size was announced way back in 1997; implementing the revamp is. Eventually, finally, years too late, the first crane hit the Florence skyline in early 2007. The hoped-for completion date of the so-called Nuovi Uffizi (literally 'New Uffizi'; www.nuoviuffizi.eu in Italian): 2010 – maybe, possibly...don't hold your breath.

Enthroned) by Tuscan masters Duccio di Buoninsegna, Cimabue and Giotto – and a polyptych by Giotto likewise featuring the Madonna enthroned in room 2 reflect the transition from Gothic to the precursor of the Renaissance. 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 master Cimabue.

From the same period, Simone Martini's shimmering *Annunciazione* (Annunciation; 1333) sets the Madonna in a sea of gold and is a masterpiece of the Sienese school of the 14th century – the focus of room 3. Also of note is the triptych *Madonna col bambino e santi* (Madonna with Child and Saints) by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, which demonstrates the same realism as Giotto; unfortunately both Ambrogio and his artistic brother Pietro died from the plague in Siena in 1348.

Masters in 14th-century Florence paid as much attention to detail as their Sienese counterparts, as works in room 4 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 *La battaglia di San Romano* (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.

Piero della Francesca's famous profile portraits of the crooked-nose, red-robed Duke and Duchess of Urbino (1465; room 8) – the former always painted left-side after losing his right eye in a jousting accident and the latter painted a deathly white reflecting the posthumous portrait the diptych was – are wholly humanist in spirit.

Carmelite monk Filippo Lippi had an unfortunate soft spot for earthly pleasures, scandalously marrying a nun from Prato. Search out his self-portrait as a podgy friar in *Coronation of the Virgin* (1439–47), which hangs alongside works by his son Filippino.

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: Charity holds a burning flame as a baby suckles her breast; Faith bears a cross and chalice; Prudence poses with a mirror and a serpent; and Temperance is traditionally portrayed pouring liquid from one vessel to another. *Fortezza* (Strength; 1470) – an elegant young woman dressed in shining armour, cloak draped across her knee – is the first documented work by Botticelli. The clarity of line and light and the humanity in the face set it apart from Pollaiuolo's. In visitors' haste to reach the Botticelli room next door, most miss the twinset of Botticelli's miniatures depicting a sword-bearing Judith returning from the Camp of Holofernes and the Discovery of the Decapitated Holofernes in his Tent, displayed in a glass cabinet in room 9.

The spectacular Sala del Botticelli (numbered 10 to 14 but actually one large hall – a former Medici theatre) is a definitive Uffizi highlight. Of the 15 works by the Renaissance master known for his ethereal figures, *Nascita di Venere* (Birth of Venus), *Primavera* (Spring) and the deeply spiritual *Annunciazione* (Annunciation) are the best known.

High Renaissance to Mannerism

In the west wing, Michelangelo dazzles with *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 1506.

Raphael (1483–1520) and Andrea del Sarto (1486–1530) rub shoulders in room 26, where Sarto's classical *Madonna col bambino* (1517) fills the room with terror: Madonna sits on a pedestal smothered in horrid winged creatures ('the harpies') with bloated tummies, bony legs and cries of distress ripping across their monstrous faces.

Previous works by Tuscan masters can be compared with the greater naturalism inherent in the work of their Venetian counterparts in room 28 where – in another defining Uffizi moment – 11 Titians kick in. Masterpieces include the world's most powerful nude (opposite), painted in 1538 and hung disguised

TOP FIVE NUDES

- *Medici Venus* (La Tribuna)
- *Sleeping Hermaphrodite* (room 17)
- Lukas Cranach's *Adamo & Eva* (room 20)
- Titian's *Urbino Venus* (room 28)
- Tintoretto's *Leda e il cigno* (Leda and the Swan; room 32).

with a cover portraying *Sacred Love* in the Uffizi's Tribuna from 1736; the highly sensual *Flora* (1515); and an exquisitely tender study of *Madonna delle Rose* (Madonna of the Roses) in which the Christ child plays with flowers proffered by the infant John the Baptist, Mary observing with a hint of amusement on her face.

Painter of portraits with a penchant for the more figurative thought of an older face, Tintoretto was the Venetian school's greatest mannerist painter. His *Ritratto di ammiraglio Veneziano* (Portrait of a Venetian Admiral) in the Sala al Bassano e del Tintoretto (room 32) is astonishing: the admiral's dark solemn eyes peer out from a canvas that is almost entirely black bar a hint of rich purple velvet and a pair of hands.

Baroque & Neoclassicism

Downstairs on the 1st floor (something of a building site with the revamp), intense, dramatic, invariably bloody and loaded with tension are the baroque hallmarks of Caravaggio (1573–1610), leading exponent of the Baroque movement. Take one look at Artemisia Gentileschi's gruesome *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (1620–21) – dead man's eyeballs strewn, dagger thrust in bloody throat – in the Sala del Caravaggio and you get the picture. One of the first female artists to be acclaimed in post-Renaissance Italy, Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1653), victim in a highly scandalous seven-month rape trial, painted strong women seeking revenge on evil males. Like Caravaggio, she used *chiaroscuro* (contrast of light and dark) to full dramatic effect.

Santa Maria Novella & Around

West of the Uffizi is **Ponte Santa Trinità** (Map p470), rebuilt after being destroyed during WWII. Michelangelo is believed to have

drawn the original plan of the bridge, which was executed by Ammannati.

Turning inland, you arrive at 14th-century **Chiesa della Santa Trinità** (Map p470; Piazza Santa Trinità), rebuilt in Gothic style and later graced with a mannerist façade. 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.

Northwest, 13th-century **Chiesa di Ognissanti** (Map pp466-7; Borgo Ognissanti; ☎ 7am–12.30pm & 4–8pm Mon–Sat, 4–8pm Sun) changed appearance in the 17th century when its baroque façade was added. Inside are older treasures: Botticelli's pensive *San Augustin* and Ghirlandaio's fresco, above the second altar on the right, of the Madonna della Misericordia, protector of the Vespucci family. Ghirlandaio's masterpiece the *Last Supper* covers most of a wall in the former monastery's refectory, reached via the cloister.

Basilica di Santa Maria Novella (Map p470; ☎ 055 21 59 18; Piazza di Santa Maria Novella; admission €2.50; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Thu, 1–5pm Fri) was begun in the late 13th century as the Dominican order's Florentine base. The lower section of the marble façade 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 of the Trinity (1428), one of the first artworks to use the then newly discovered techniques of perspective and proportion.

The first chapel 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 frescoes 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. Brunelleschi's crucifix hangs above the altar in the **Cappella Gondi**.

The **Chiostro Verde** (Green Cloister) is so named because green is the predominant colour of the fresco cycle by Paolo Uccello. The impressive **Cappellone degli Spagnuoli** (Spanish Chapel) has frescoes by Andrea di Bonaiuto.

End your stroll around Santa Maria Novella with a sniff at the **Officina Profumo-Farmaceutica di Santa Maria Novella** (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 62 76; www.smnovella.com; Via della Scala 16), a perfumery-pharmacy in business since 1612. Particularly fun are its remedies – acqua di Santa Maria Novella to cure hysterics, acqua di Melissa to aid digestion, and smelling salts. Visit the free museum 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 p470; Piazza San Lorenzo; admission €2.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat), one of the most harmonious examples of Renaissance architecture. However, it looks nothing from the outside: Michelangelo was commissioned to design the façade 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*. Rosso Fiorentino's *Sposalizio della Vergine* (Marriage of the Virgin Mary; 1523) is in the second chapel on the south aisle. Left of the altar is the **Sagrestia Vecchia** (Old Sacristy), designed by Brunelleschi and decorated in the main by Donatello.

Nowhere is Medici conceit expressed so explicitly as in their mausoleum, the **Cappelle Medicee** (Medicean Chapels; ☎ 055 238 86 02; Piazza Madonna degli Aldobrandini; admission €6; ☎ 8.15am-1.50pm 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: *Aurora e crepuscolo* (Dawn and Dusk), *Notte e giorno* (Night and Day) and *Madonna col bambino* (Madonna and Child).

Just off Piazza San Lorenzo is the extraordinary **Palazzo Medici-Riccardi** (Map p470; ☎ 055 276 03 40; www.palazzo-medici.it; Via Cavour 3; admission €5; ☎ 9am-7pm Thu-Tue), principal Medici residence until 1540 and the prototype for other buildings in the city. Inside, the **Capella di Benozzo** (Chapel of the Magi) flaunts a series of wonderfully detailed serene frescoes (1459) by Benozzo Gozzoli, a pupil of Fra Angelico. His ostensible theme of *Journey of the Magi* is but a slender pretext for portraying members of the Medici clan in their best light; spy Lorenzo il Magnifico, Cosimo il Vecchio and the self-portrait of the artist himself in the crowd. Only eight visitors are allowed in at a time, for a maximum of seven minutes; reserve in advance at the palace ticket desk.

San Marco Area

At the heart of Florence's university area sits **Chiesa di San Marco** (Map pp466-7; Piazza San Marco) and adjoining Dominican convent where gifted painter Fra Angelico (c 1395-1455) and the sharp-tongued Savonarola piously served God. Today it is the **Museo di San Marco** (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 238 86 08; Piazza San Marco 1; adult/concession €4/2; ☎ 8.15am-1.50pm Tue-Fri, 8.15am-6.50pm Sat, 8.15am-7pm 2nd & 4th Sun & 1st, 3rd & 5th Mon of month), and is one of Florence's most fascinating museums, essentially a showcase for Fra Angelico's art.

You enter the museum via Michelozzo's **Chiostro di Sant'Antonio** (1440; cloister). Turn immediately right to enter the **Sala dell'Ospizio**, where Fra Angelico's attention to perspective and the realistic portrayal of nature comes to life in the *Deposizione di Cristo* (1432), deemed by many critics as the first true painting of the Renaissance. The walls of the upstairs cells, painted *in situ*, carry several masterpieces, including Fra Angelico's huge *Crucifixion* (1442) and his magnificent *Madonna delle ombre* (Virgin of the Shadows). Known as 'Il Beato Angelico' (literally 'the blessed angelic') or simply 'Il Beato' (the blessed), the painter was made a saint by Pope John Paul II in 1984. Contrasting with such beauty is the cell (three-room suite in fact) that Savonarola called home from 1489. Ten visitors at a time are allowed in.

From Piazza San Marco, a right turn into Via Cesare Battisti brings you to the beautiful **Piazza della SS Annunziata**, where Giambologna's equestrian statue of Grand

Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici overlooks the student scene.

Chiesa della SS Annunziata (Map pp466-7; 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. In the ornate tabernacle, to your left as you enter the church, is a so-called miraculous painting of the Virgin. No longer on public view, the canvas is attributed to a 14th-century friar and legend says it was completed by an angel. Also of note are frescoes by Andrea del Castagno, Perugino, Andrea del Sarto and Jacopo Pontormo.

On the piazza's southeastern side, the **Spedale degli Innocenti** (Map pp466-7; 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 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 **Galleria della Spedale degli Innocenti** (☎ 055 249 17 08; www.istituto.deglinnocenti.it; admission €4; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-2pm Sun) features works by Florentine artists, including Luca della Robbia and Domenico Ghirlandaio.

About 200m southeast of the piazza is the **Museo Archeologico** (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 23 57 50; Via della Colonna 38; admission €4; ☎ 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 Greco-Roman art.

The excellent **Galleria dell'Accademia** (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 238 86 09; Via Ricasoli 60; adult/concession Dec-Aug €8/4, Sep-Nov €6.50/3.25; ☎ 8.15am-6.50pm

WHO'S THAT BLOKE?

Name: David.

Occupation: World's most famous sculpture.

Vital Statistics: 5.16m tall, 19 tonnes of mediocre-quality pearly white marble from the Fantiscritti quarries near Carrara.

Spirit: Young biblical hero in meditative pose who, with the help of God, defeats an enemy more powerful than himself. Scarcely visible sling emphasises victory of innocence and intellect over brute force.

Commissioned: In 1501 for the cathedral, but subsequently placed in front of Palazzo Vecchio, where he stayed until 1873.

Famous journeys: It took 40 men four days to transport the statue on rails from Michelangelo's workshop behind the cathedral to Piazza della Signoria in 1504. Its journey from here to its purpose-built tribune in the Galleria dell'Accademia in 1873 took seven days.

Outstanding features: (a) His expression which, from the left profile, appears serene and boy-like; from the right, concentrated, manly and highly charged in anticipation of the gargantuan Goliath he is about to slay; (b) the sense of counterbalanced weight rippling through his body, from the tension in his right hip, on which he leans to his taut left arm.

Why the small dick: In classical art a large or even normal-sized package was not elegant, hence the dainty size.

And the big head and hands: David was designed to stand up high on a cathedral buttress in the apse, from where his head and hand would have appeared in perfect proportion.

Beauty treatments: Body scrub with hydrochloric acid (1843); clay and cellulose pulp 'mud pack', bath in distilled water (2004).

Occupational hazards: Over the centuries he's been struck by lightning, attacked by rioters and had his toes bashed with a hammer. The two pale white lines visible on his lower left arm show where his arm got broken during the 1527 revolt when the Medici were kicked out of Florence. Giorgio Vasari, then a child, picked up the pieces and 16 years later had them sent to Cosimo I, who restored the statue, so the story goes.

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 (p463) if you don't want to queue.

Santa Croce Area

The French writer Stendhal was so dazzled by **Basilica di Santa Croce** (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 246 61 05; adult/concession incl Museo dell'Opera €5/3; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 1-5.30pm Sun) he was barely able to walk for faintness. Designed by Arnolfo di Cambio between 1294 and 1385, the church's name stems from a splinter of the Holy Cross donated to the Franciscans by King Louis of France in 1258. The magnificent façade enlivened by the varying shades of coloured marble is a 19th-century neogothic addition, as indeed is the bell tower. Inside, the tombs of famous Florentines pave the floor, Michelangelo's tomb – designed by Vasari (1570) along the southern wall between the first and second altars – being the most visited. Next along is a 19th-century cenotaph to the memory of Dante (whose remains, in fact, are in Ravenna: see p451) and Galileo Galilei's (1737), easy to spot with its bust of the great scientist clutching a telescope and gazing skywards, lies directly opposite, in the left aisle.

Otherwise, Santa Croce's artistic treasures come in the shape of frescoes. Five chapels on either side of the **Cappella Maggiore** line the transept, the two nearest the right side of the chapel being decorated with fragmentary frescoes by Giotto – the best examples of his work in Florence. His assistant and loyal pupil Taddeo Gaddi (1300–66) frescoed the neighbouring **Chapelle Majeure** and nearby **Cappella Baroncelli**; while Gaddi's son Agnolo (1345–96) painted the **Cappella Castellani** (1385) with delightful frescoes depicting the life of St Nicholas.

From the transept chapels a doorway designed by Michelozzo leads into a corridor off which is the **Sagrestia**, a 14th-century room dominated by Taddeo Gaddi's fresco of the **Crocifissione**. Through the next room, access the **Scuola del Cuoio**, a leather school and shop. At the end of the corridor is a Medici chapel with a fine two-tone altarpiece in glazed terracotta by Andrea della Robbia.

Brunelleschi designed the serene **doisters** just before his death in 1446. His **Cappella**

de'Pazzi, at the end of the first cloister, with its harmonious lines and restrained terracotta medallions by Luca della Robbia, is a masterpiece of Renaissance architecture.

The **Museo dell'Opera di Santa Croce** (Map pp466-7; admission adult/concession incl basilica €5/3; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 1-5.30pm Sun), in the first cloister, 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.

The Oltrarno

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

PONTE VECCHIO

This 14th-century bridge has twinkled with the glittering wares of jewellery merchants since Ferdinando I de' Medici ordered them here to replace the often malodorous presence of the town butchers who used to toss unwanted leftovers into the river. It was the only bridge not to be blown up by the Nazis in 1944, some say on Hitler's express orders; others say the German commander disobeyed Hitler's orders (yet the commander still wreaked havoc by razing the medieval quarters at either end). Views of and from the bridge are every bit as beguiling as you might expect.

PALAZZO PITTI

Begun in 1458 for the Pitti family, rivals of the Medici, the original nucleus of the **palace** (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 238 86 14; Piazza de' Pitti; adult/concession €11.50/5.75; 🕒 8.15am-6.50pm Tue-Sun) took up the space encompassing the seven sets of windows on the 2nd and 3rd storeys. Ironically, Cosimo I and Eleonora de Toledo acquired the palace in 1549. It remained the official residence of Florence's rulers until 1919, when the Savoys handed it over to the state.

Irrespective of how much you do or don't want to see, one ticket covers admission to everything: the palace's royal apartments and art galleries, silver museum and gardens with porcelain museum. Reserve at least one afternoon to take it all in.

A stroll around the ground-floor **Museo degli Argenti** (Silver Museum), accessed from the interior courtyard, reveals far more than extraordinary silverware, amber, ivory and *pietre dure* (hard stone) pieces amassed by the Medici. The first room you enter, the Sala di Giovanni da San Giovanni, stuns with its lav-

ish head-to-toe frescoes (1635–42) celebrating the life of Lorenzo the Magnificent – spot Michelangelo giving Lorenzo a statue.

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**, reached by a staircase from the palace's central courtyard. The backdrop is the **Appartamenti Reali** (Royal Apartments), a series of rather sickeningly furnished and decorated rooms, many adorned with stunning ceiling frescoes of mythological scenes, where the Medici and their successors lived, slept and received their guests. The style and division of tasks assigned to each room are reminiscent of Spanish royal palaces, and all are heavily bedecked with drapes, silk and chandeliers. Each room has a colour theme, ranging from aqua green to deep wine red.

Only the most dedicated visitors make it to the 2nd-floor **Galleria d'Arte Moderna** and **Galleria del Costume** (Costume Gallery), displaying 18th- to mid-20th century Tuscan works and high fashion respectively.

Giardino di Boboli

Relax in the palace's **Boboli Gardens** (Map pp466-7; adult/concession €6/3; ☎ 8.15am-7.30pm Jun-Aug, 8.15am-6.30pm Apr, May, Sep & Oct, 8.15am-5.30pm Mar, 8.15am-4.30pm Nov-Feb), laid out in the mid-16th century according to a design by architect Niccolò Pericoli, aka Il Tribolo.

A shabby shadow of its former glorious self, Boboli remains nonetheless a prime example of a formal Tuscan garden: 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; 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**. Unfortunately the 17th-century maze was razed in the 1830s to make way for a driveway for carriages.

At the upper, southern limit of the gardens, fantastic views over the palace complex and Florentine countryside fan out beyond the neglected **rose garden**, overlooked by the **Museo delle Porcellane** (Porcelain Museum; Map pp464-5), home to Sèvres, Vincennes, Meissen, Wedgwood and other porcelain pieces collected by Palazzo Pitti's wealthy tenants.

At the top of the hill is the rambling **Fortè di Belvedere** (Map pp464-5; closed to visitors), built by Grand Duke Ferdinando I to protect Palazzo Pitti.

Giardino di Bardini

Smaller but better tended is Florence's little-known **Bardini Gardens** (Map pp464-5; ☎ 055 29 48 83; Costa San Giorgio 4-6 via Boboli Gardens & Via de' Bardi 1r; adult/concession incl Boboli & Porcelain Museum €5/2.50; ☎ 8.15am-sunset), named after art collector Stefano Bardini (1836-1922) who bought the villa and gardens in 1913. Accessible from Boboli or down by the Arno, its 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.

PIAZZALE MICHELANGELO

Turn your back on the bevy of ticky-tacky souvenir stalls flogging *David* statues and how-to-make-*limoncello* tea towels and take in the soaring city panorama from **Piazzale Michelangelo** (Map pp464-5), 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 (above) is five minutes further uphill, at the wonderful Romanesque **Chiesa di San Miniato al Monte** (Map pp464-5; Via Monte alle Croce; admission free; ☎ 8am-7pm May-Oct, 8am-noon & 3-6pm Nov-Apr). 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 façade 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**, in the southeast corner, features marvellously bright frescoes 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.

Come here around 4.30pm in winter or 5.30pm in summer; you can hear the monks' Gregorian chant wafting up from the crypt.

The 13th-century **Basilica di Santa Maria del Carmine** (Map pp466-7; Piazza del Carmine) was all but destroyed by fire in the late 18th century. Fortunately the magnificent frescoes by Masaccio in **Capella Brancacci** (advance reservations ☎ 055 276 82 24, 055 76 85 58; admission €4; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Sat & Mon, 1-5pm 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 pre-booked.

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.

Basilica di Santo Spirito (Map pp466-7; Piazza Santo Spirito; ☎ 10am-noon & 4-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11.30-noon Sun, closed Wed afternoon), 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 *Madonna and Saints* by Filippino Lippi in the right transept. In the equally harmonious sacristy is a poignantly tender wooden crucifix attributed to Michelangelo.

Certosa di Firenze

From Porta Romana at the southern tip of the Oltrarno, follow Via Senese south for 3km to the village of Galluzzo and its remarkable 14th-century Carthusian monastery, the **Certosa di Firenze** (☎ 055 204 92 26; Via Senese 206-208r, Galluzzo; admission free; ☎ guided tour 9am, 11.30am, 3pm & 4.30pm or 5.30pm Tue-Sun), also called Certosa del Galluzzo, where Carthusian monks make liqueur and honey between prayers. The great cloister is decorated with busts from the della Robbia workshop, and there are frescoes by Pontorno in the Gothic hall of Palazzo degli

Studi. Take bus 37 from Stazione di Santa Maria Novella.

Medici Villas

In the 15th and 16th centuries the Medici built villas in the countryside around Florence – now city suburbs and industrial sprawl.

Villa Medicea La Petraia (☎ 055 45 26 91; Via della Petraia 40; admission free; ☎ 8.15am-8pm Jun-Aug, to 7pm Apr, May & Sep, to 6pm Mar & Oct, to 5pm Nov-Feb, closed 2nd & 3rd Mon of the month), 3.5km north in Castello, was commissioned by Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici in 1576. Its gardens feature a fountain by Giambologna and May is an exceptional time to visit. Take ATAF bus 28 or the City Sightseeing bus (see opposite) from Stazione di Santa Maria Novella.

Lorenzo il Magnifico's summer home, **Villa Medicea di Castello** (☎ 055 45 47 91; Via di Castello 47; admission free; ☎ 8.15am-8pm Jun-Aug, to 7pm Apr, May & Sep, to 6pm Mar & Oct, to 5pm Nov-Feb, closed 2nd & 3rd Mon of the month), a little further north of Petraia, was a favourite of Cosimo I and is framed by sumptuous gardens. Take the same bus routes as for La Petraia.

Lorenzo il Magnifico took his last breath in 1492 at **Villa Medicea di Careggi** (☎ 055 427 97 55; Viale Pieraccini 17; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat), now admin offices for the local hospital in Careggi. The gardens can be visited; take ATAF bus 14C from Stazione di Santa Maria Novella.

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 the best ones:

Accademia Italiana (Map pp466-7; ☎ 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.

Alice Atelier (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 28 73 70; www.alicemasks.com; Via Faenza 72r) Mask-making courses with Professor Agostino Dessi and daughter, Alice; half-day and day courses.

British Institute of Florence (Map p470; ☎ 055 267 78 200; www.britishinstitute.it; Piazza degli Strozzi 2) Much-respected institution dating to 1917; language, art history, cooking and wine appreciation.

Centro Lorenzo de' Medici (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 28 73 60; www.lorenzodemedici.it; Via Faenza 43) Language and huge variety of supplementary courses including jewellery design, archaeology and film production.

Scuola del Cuoio (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 24 45 33; www.leatherschool.it; Piazza di Santa Croce 16) Leather-working courses, from half a day to a year.

FLORENCE FOR CHILDREN

Several locally published books and games help children discover Florence – the bookshop in Palazzo Vecchio (p469) has a tip-top selection. Nancy Shroyer Howard's activity-driven book *Fun in Florence* kits out kids aged six to 10 years with pencils and do-and-find sections for major sites. Ellen and Marvin Mouchawar's *Treasure Hunt Florence* sends the same age group chasing around the city looking for items or opportunities to carry out simple tasks. For older children try *Florence, Just Add Water* by Simone Frasca and *Florence: Playing with Art* by Maria Salvia Baldini.

La Bottega dei Ragazzi (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 247 83 86; www.istitutodeglinnocenti.it; Via dei Fibbiai 2; 1/3 workshops €10/20; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat), an inspirational 'play and learn with art' space next to the Spedale degli Innocenti, runs workshops for children aged three to five years and six to 11 years. Parents and kids can pop in anytime to play with its many toys, books and games.

At the **Palazzo Vecchio** (p469), younger children aged three to seven years can watch a shadow theatre about a theft from Francesco's studio then visit the latter. Those aged eight years or older can learn about Michelangelo through a theatre sketch, meet Cosimo I and Eleonora de Toledo (actors dressed up) or take a tour of the place with Vasari.

The best **playgrounds** (Map pp466-7) for children 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.

Otherwise there's **Mondobimbo** (Map pp464-5; ☎ 055 553 29 46; Via Ponte Rosso; admission €5; ☎ 10am-midnight May-Sep, 10am-7pm Oct-Apr), an airless soft-play area in a tent with bouncy castles, ball pools etc for kids aged two to 10.

TOURS

Bus

CAF Tours (Map p470; ☎ 055 21 06 12; www.caftours.com; Via Sant'Antonino 6r) Half- and full-day city coach tours (€42 to €90) including designer-outlet shopping tours (€23 to €30).

City Sightseeing Firenze (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 29 04 51; www.firenze.city-sightseeing.it; Piazza Stazione

1) Tour Florence by red open-top bus, hopping on and off as you please at bus stops around the city. Tickets (incl audioguide) lines A & B adult/5-15yr/family €20/10/60, line C adult/6-15yr €28/20 are valid for 24 hours.

Cycling

Florence by Bike (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 48 89 92; www.florencebybike.it; Via San Zanobi 120-122r) Straight bike rental (per hour/five hours/day/three days €2.70/7.50/14/34.50 incl self-guided city itineraries) and a 32km-long guided day tour of Chianti (€75 incl lunch).

Tour Bike Florence (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 234 30 48, 340 635 18 00; www.tourbikeflorence.it; Via Fiesolana 14r) Bike rental (per one/three/five/seven days €13/32/50/65 incl self-guiding itineraries), three-hour guided city tours (€35) and day trips to Fiesole and Chianti (both €65 incl lunch).

Accidental Tourist (☎ 055 69 93 76; www.accidental-tourist.com) Become an Accidental Tourist (membership €10) then sign up for a sunset stroll, nature trail, picnic, walking or bike tour.

Walking

The Original & Best Walking Tours of Florence (Map p470; ☎ 055 2 64 50 33, 3296 132 730; www.italy.artviva.com; Via de'Sasseti 1) Excellent one- to three-hour walks of the city (€25-39) led by historians or art history graduates, including an evening Medici murder stroll (€25, 1½ hours).

Mercurio Tours (☎ 055 21 33 55; www.mercurio-italy.org) Three-hour walking tours of the city (€42.50) and half-day Chianti trips (€67.50). Reserve by phone or online.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Festa di Anna Maria Medici (Feast of Anna Maria Medici) On 18 February, the date of the death in 1743 of the last Medici, Anna Maria, there is a costumed parade from Palazzo Vecchio to her tomb in the Cappelle Medicee.

Scoppio del Carro (Explosion of the Cart) A cart of fireworks is exploded in front of the cathedral at 11am on Easter Sunday.

Festa di San Giovanni (Feast of St John) On 24 June Florence celebrates its patron saint with the *calcio storico* medieval football matches on Piazza di Santa Croce and fireworks over Piazzale Michelangelo.

Maggio Musicale Fiorentino A major summer music festival (see p491).

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

SLEEPING

The city has hundreds of hotels, some excellent hostels and a burgeoning B&B scene – but get in quick. Florence is a hot destination for much of the year and rooms are in constant demand, reflected by the city's inflated prices. 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 in private houses). Towns like Arezzo, Prato and Pisa are a short train trip away and offer cheaper accommodation.

ACCOMMODATION AGENCIES

For free or a small fee, these agencies – two of which have offices inside the main train station – can find/reserve a hotel room in Florence for you.

Consorzio ITA (Informazione Turistiche Alberghiere; Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 28 28 93; 🕒 8am-7.30pm) In the main hall of Stazione di Santa Maria Novella next to the pharmacy; reservation fee €3.

Agenzie 365 Hotel Reservation (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 28 42 01; firenze1.gb@agenzie365.it; Platform 5, Stazione Santa Maria Novella; 🕒 8am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm Sun) Reservation fee €5.50.

Florence Promhotels (☎ 055 55 39 41, 800 86 60 22; www.promhotels.it) Online and telephone reservations for one- to five-star hotels.

Top Quark (☎ 055 33 40 41, 800 60 88 22; www.familyhotels.com) B&Bs, apartments and hotels.

Affiazione Bed & Breakfast Affittacamere (☎ 055 654 08 60; www.abba-firenze.it) Great one-stop shop for B&Bs.

East of Stazione di Santa Maria Novella

BUDGET

Ostello Archi Rossi (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 29 08 04; www.hostelarchirossi.com; Via Faenza 94; dm incl breakfast & sheets €18-26; 🕒 closed 2 wk Dec; 🗺) Guests' paintings and graffiti pattern the walls at this private hostel near Stazione di Santa Maria Novella. Bright white dorms have three to 12 beds; there are washing machines (wash €3), frozen meal dispensers (€3.50) and microwaves for guests to use, and free wi-fi in the internet corner. No curfew (knock to get in after 2am).

Ostello Gallo d'Oro (Map pp464-5; ☎ 055 552 29 64; www.ostellogalldodoro.com; Via Cavour 104; dm/d incl

TOP 10 ONLINE RENTAL RESOURCES

Our favourite websites for tracking down a self-catering city-slicker apartment in Florence or a slice of paradise in the surrounding Tuscan countryside; several share Slow Food's go-slow, think-green philosophy.

- www.i-escape.com
- www.florenceandtuscany.com
- www.knowital.com
- www.justtuscany.com
- www.merrygoround.org
- www.responsibletravel.com
- www.slowtrav.com
- www.solemar.it
- www.tourism-in-tuscany.com
- www.viatraveldesign.com

breakfast €30/75; 🗺) Play happy families at this dynamic 24-bed hostel, run by bubbly young duo Florentine Silvia and Umbrian Max, who serve guests a free aperitif and tablecloth dinner (€10) each evening. Dorms max at five beds and three have a balcony.

Soggiorno La Pergola (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 213 886; www.soggiornolapergola.it; Via della Pergola 23; s €45-60, d €72-103, tr €80-134) This budget place around the corner from Teatro della Pergola oozes character – mainly due to larger-than-life host Letizia Barlozzi. A jungle of orange trees and plastic plants greets guests in the cupboard-sized hallway, and rooms (no greenery) are equally exuberant. Look for the electric buggy parked nearby.

MIDRANGE

Johanna & Johlea (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 463 32 92; www.johanna.it; Via San Gallo 80; s incl breakfast €70-120, d incl breakfast €85-175; 🗺) One of the most established B&Bs in town, J&J has more than a dozen tasteful, impeccable, individually decorated rooms split between four historic residences. Those desiring total luxury should ask about the suite apartments.

Hotel Casci (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 16 86; www.hotelcasci.com; Via Cavour 13; s €60-110, d €90-150, tr €120-190, q €150-230, all incl breakfast; 🕒 closed 2 wk Jan; 🗺) Run by a superefficient mother-son team, Casci was the first hotel in Florence to have hot and cold running water in its rooms, in 1926. Flatscreen TVs, shell-shaped corner

baths and a feisty breakfast buffet with a bot-tomless cappuccino could make its twinset of stars become three soon. Free internet station and wi-fi.

our pick **Hotel Morandi alla Crocetta** (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 234 47 47; www.hotelmorandi.it; Via Laura 50; s €80-115, d €140-180; (P) (☎) (📺)) 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 room where the nuns ‘attended’ Mass at the chapel they weren’t allowed to enter next door. Breakfast/parking €11/16.

Hotel Paris (Map p470; ☎ 055 28 02 81; www.paris.hotel.it; Via dei Banchi 2; s €80-125, d €110-165; (P) (☎) (📺)) Designed by Bernardo Buontalenti in the 15th century, this twinset of palaces linked on the second floor by a glass walkway is the way to sleep in the Renaissance. Three-star rooms sport high ceilings. Window pelmets and bed-heads are adorned with rich, embroidered drapes. The painted ceiling in the breakfast room is breathtaking.

Around Piazza di Santa Maria Novella

Hotel Abaco (Map p470; ☎ 055 238 19 19; www.abaco-hotel.it; Via dei Banchi 1; d €45-75, tr €65-110, q €80-135; (☎) (📺)) The seven rooms in this simple establishment are each named after a Renaissance artist and furnished in high-baroque style with canopy beds; three have en suite bathrooms. Pay €5 extra a night to get the air-con switched on – or settle the bill in cash and get air-con and breakfast (€5) for free.

Hotel Pensione Ferretti (Map p470; ☎ 055 238 13 28; www.pensioneferretti.it; Via delle Belle Donne 17; s €40-75, with bathroom €50-85, d €50-85, with bathroom €60-105, extra bed €30, all incl breakfast; (📺)) Roberto and Sandra will make you feel at home in their no-frills, unpretentious hotel with 16 rooms. Those on the 3rd floor have been refurbished, making them the most white and sparkly. No air-con but there are ceiling fans. Free internet.

Tourist House (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 26 86 75; www.touristhouse.com; Via delle Scala 1; s €50, d €60-85, tr €100-120, q €100-140, all incl breakfast; (☎)) The nine basic rooms with air-con to cool things down on steamy summer days may not set hearts racing, but they represent good value for money and the bijou plant-bedecked terrace between rooftops is a welcome breath of fresh air at breakfast.

our pick **Hotel Scoti** (Map p470; ☎ 055 29 21 28; www.hotelscoti.com; Via de' Tornabuoni 7; s €50-75, d €75-115, tr €100-140, q €130-165) Wedged between Dior, Prada and McQueen, this *pensione* dating to 1875 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. Rooms have antique pieces and contemporary en suite bathrooms, but the star of the show is the floor-to-ceiling frescoed living room (1780).

Hotel Consigli (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 41 72; www.hotelconsigli.com; Lungarno Amerigo Vespucci 50; incl breakfast d €100-150, tr €120-170; (P) (☎)) A short walk from town, this riverside Renaissance palace is perfect for peace-seeking guests happy to cycle to dinner. It's next door to the road-blocked US embassy, meaning motorised vehicles are

BLOG IT – TOP FIVE

Tune into the underbelly of what Tuscans are thinking with these locally generated blogs.

- **Florence Night & Day** (<http://lovingflorence.blogspot.com>) Diary of a 30-something Florentine gal in English.
- **Living in Florence** (www.melindagallos.com/blog) An American moves to Florence.
- **Tuscany Blog** (www.tuscanyblog.com) Cramped with useful links, recommendations and advice, this is a one-stop shop for tracking down food and wine, real estate, farm accommodation, B&Bs, upcoming events etc.
- **Tuscany Travel** (<http://tuscany-travel.blogspot.com>) Useful advice on where to go, what to see, sleeping, eating, events and so on in Tuscany
- **Tuscany.Podtravels.tv** (<http://tuscany.podtravels.tv>) Videoblog: everything from Tuscany's grape harvest to pig breeding and futuristic sonic gardens.

kept well away. The flowery terrace with deck chairs is a stargazer's dream. Parking €15.

Between the Duomo & the Arno

BUDGET

Hotel Orchidea (Map p470; ☎ 055 248 03 46; www.hotelorchideaflorence.it; Borgo degli Albizi 11; s €35-55, d €50-75, tr €75-100, q €80-125) This old-fashioned *pensione* in the mansion is charm itself. Its seven rooms with sink and shared bathroom are simple; rooms 5, 6 and 7 have huge windows overlooking a gorgeous garden, while room 4 spills out onto a terrace. Pop the kettle on and let Miranda answer all your questions. No credit cards.

Hotel San Giovanni (Map p470; ☎ 055 28 83 85; www.hotelsangianni.com; Via de' Cerretani 2; s €40-58, d €50-95, tr €68-98, q €80-108; 🚽) Buzz to enter and ride the rattly old cage lift (forget jumbo-sized suitcases) up to what was once the bishop's private residence – a 14th-century *palazzo* – where fresco traces still adorn room 3. Lofty ceilings top off the other eight light and spacious rooms, just two of which have a private bathroom and four of which have air-con: rooms 6, 7 and 8 look at the cathedral. Breakfast €5.

ourpick Hotel Cestelli (Map p470; ☎ 055 21 42 13; www.hotelcestelli.com; Borgo SS Apostoli 25; s €45-55, d €60-75, d with bathroom €80-110, extra bed €15-25; 🚽) closed 2wk Jan, 3wk Aug) The scent of joss sticks and flicker of night lights add a soothing Zen air to this eight-room hotel, stylish home of Florentine photographer Alessio and Japanese massage therapist Asumi. Each room is different and the couple brim with dependable dining recommendations.

Hotel Dali (Map p470; ☎ 055 234 07 06; www.hoteldali.com; Via dell' Oriuolo 17; s/d €40/65, d with bathroom €80; 🚽) closed 3 wk Jan; (P) This spruce, simple hotel on Clock Rd is run with unrelenting energy and smiles by busy parents-of-three Marco and Samanta. Rooms overlooking the leafy inner courtyard are serene; those facing the street can be pub-noisy. Doubles are big and easily sleep four or five (extra bed €25) and there's free parking for motoring guests – a concept as rare as icebergs in Florence. Low-season rates are 10% to 15% less.

MIDRANGE

Il Salotto di Firenze (Map p470; ☎ 055 21 83 47; www.ilsalottodifirenze.it; Via Roma 6r; s €70-80, d €90-130; 🚽 📺) Nestled above Gucci, the Drawing Room of Florence is well named. Quality and stylish

furnishings are incidental to the soul-stirring views from the windows of this six-room B&B overlooking the Duomo. The Giovanni Fattori room has a little terrace peeking onto Via Roma and there are plenty of books in the library to borrow.

Hotel Perseo (Map p470; ☎ 055 21 25 04; www.hotelperseo.it; Via de' Cerretani 1; s €85-99, d €110-140, tr €135-170, q €160-200; 🚽 📺) Don't be deceived by the grubby façade. Once you're out of the cage lift and in this three-star hotel, which was overhauled in 2006, the décor is all sweetness, 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.

TOP END

In Piazza della Signoria (Map p470; ☎ 055 239 95 46; www.inpiazzedellasignoria.com; Via dei Magazzini 2; s €140-210, d €200-280; 🚽) Alessandro and Sonia bought this house, a split second off Piazza della Signoria, in 2000 and spent a year doing it up. The result: a stylish, refined *residenza d'epoca* with the family's portraits in the hallway, period furnishings and plenty of knick-knacks to make it feel like home.

Borghese Palace Art Hotel (Map p470; ☎ 055 28 43 63; www.borghesepalace.it; Via Ghibellina 174r; s/d €190/350; (P) 🚽) 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. Décor verges on the theatrical and dinner by candlelight on the terrace is an impressionable affair.

ourpick Continentale (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 2 72 62; continentale@lungarnohotels.com; Vicolo dell'Oro 6r; d incl breakfast €300-380; (P) 🚽) Dip inside this ugly concrete block and be bowled over by a very glamorous, very pink design-driven celebration of Italian creativity and cinema in the 1950s. Rooms are hi-tech and the glass lift with cushioned sofa is cutting-edge indeed.

Gallery Hotel Art (Map p470; ☎ 055 2 72 63; www.lungarnohotels.com; Vicolo dell'Oro 5; d incl breakfast €350-450, ste incl breakfast €640-1110; (P) 🚽 📺) Owned by the Ferragamo fashion house and designed by Florence architect Michel Bonan, this modern gallery hotel is true 21st-century. Peace reigns in its 74 minimalist, edgy and soft-hued rooms – a night in its rooftop penthouse is unforgettable. Contemporary art dresses public areas, including its hip Japanese-style Fusion Bar.

The Oltrarno

Campeggio Michelangelo (Map pp464-5; ☎ 055 681 19 77; www.ecvacanze.it in Italian; Viale Michelangelo 80; adult €8.90-9.90, car & tent €10.70-11.90; (P)) The closest camping site to the centre, just off Piazzale Michelangelo, south of the river Arno. Big and comparatively leafy with lovely city views, it's handy for the historic quarter, though it's a steep walk home. Solo backpackers with a tent can pitch up for €10.50 year-round. Take bus 13 from Stazione di Santa Maria Novella.

Ostello Santa Monaca (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 26 83 38; www.ostello.it; Via Santa Monaca 6; dm €17-19; (I)) Once a convent, this large Oltrarno hostel run by a cooperative since the 1960s is warmly recommended. There is a kitchen, laundrette, safe deposits and two computers (internet per hour €3). Single-sex dorms sleep four to 22 and are locked 10am to 2pm. Curfew 2am.

Althea (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 233 53 41; www.florencealthea.it; Via delle Caldaie 25; s €40-60, d €60-90, tr €80-105, all incl breakfast; (I)) 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 with skype and free internet access.

Hotel La Scaletta (Map p470; ☎ 055 28 30 28; www.hotellscaletta.it; Via Guicciardini 13; s €55-100, d €65-140, tr €85-160, q €100-180, all incl breakfast; (I) (S)) An austere air wafts through this maze of a hotel, hidden in a 15th-century *palazzo*. But rooms are spacious and taking breakfast/apéritifs on the roof terrace overlooking Boboli is a rare opportunity; rooms 20, 21 and 22 also peep down on the gardens.

Hotel Silla (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 234 28 88; www.hotelsilla.it; Via dei Renai 5; s €90-125, d €100-170, tr €140-220, all incl breakfast; (P) (S)) 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. Parking €16.

Residenza Santo Spirito (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 265 83 76; www.residenzasspirito.com; Piazza Santo Spirito 9; d €110-130, tr €145-170, q €180-210; (S)) Brilliantly 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.

Our pick Palazzo Magnani Feroni (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 239 95 44; www.florencepalace.com; Borgo San Frediano 5; ste incl breakfast €335-800; (P) (S) (I)) This extraordinary old palace is the stuff of dreams. Languishing across four floors with the family's private residence wedged in between, the 12 suites are vast and ooze elegance with authentic period furnishings, rich fabrics, Bulgarian products in the bathroom and a choice of handmade Florentine soaps. The 360 degree city view from the rooftop is unforgettable. Parking €40 to €47.

Out of Town

Ostello Villa Camerata (Map pp464-5; ☎ 055 60 14 51; florenceaighostel@virgilio.it; Viale Augusto Righi 2-4; dm €18, d/tr/q with bathroom €60/69/80, all incl breakfast; (P) (I)) 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 stop 400m from the hostel.

EATING

Simplicity and quality sum up Tuscany's cuisine and Florence offers the widest choice. Here, rich green Tuscan olive oil, fresh fruit and vegetables, tender meat and, of course, the classic wine Chianti are so often the basics of a good meal.

Meat eaters might want to sink their teeth into the local classic, *bistecca alla fiorentina*, a huge slab of prime Florentine steak (see boxed text, p485). It costs around €40 per kilo, which is quite adequate for two.

East of Stazione di Santa Maria Novella

The streets around the central food market predictably cook up several tasty cheap options; the eastern side of Piazza del Mercato Centrale is lined with restaurant terraces.

La Mescita (Map pp466-7; ☎ 3477 951 604; Via degli Alfani 70r; meals €12; (S) 10am-3pm Mon-Sat) No concessions are made to the swarms of *David*-bound tourists milling past this historic pearl with 16th-century wooden ceiling, bottled-lined walls and five tables. In business since 1927, this *fiaschetta* (wine bar) cooks tripe on Monday, *lampredotto* (a type of tripe) on Tuesday, *porchetta* (roast pork) on Wednesday,

peposo (a fiery spicy Tuscan beef stew) on Thursday, *baccalà* (salted cod) on Friday and whatever the chef fancies (*i'cche c'e c'e*) on Saturday. *Panini* (€1.60 to €3) and pasta (€4) are daily staples.

our pick **Trattoria Mario** (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 85 50; www.trattoriario.com; Via Rosina 2; meals €20; ☎ noon-3.30pm Mon-Sat, closed 3 wk Aug) It is in every guidebook but has not lost its soul or lure with locals: 100% a family affair opened by Mario's parents in 1953 and continued by his two sons and their children today, Trattoria Mario dishes up unforgettable dining. Monday and Thursday are tripe days, Friday is fish day and the *bistecca* (€30 per kilo) here is Florence's best. No credit cards.

Da Sergio (Map p470; ☎ 055 28 19 41; Piazza San Lorenzo 8r; meals €20; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat Sep-Jul) Push your way into this Slow Food-recommended bolt hole hidden behind market stalls, established in 1915, and be greeted by a collection of old Florentine men dining solo – the ultimate sign of a real trattoria. The choice on Sergio's handwritten menu is simple: four *primi*, 10-odd *secondi* and a solitary *dolci* (*cantuccini* dunked in *vin santo*).

Around Piazza di Santa Maria Novella

Trattoria Marione (Map p470; ☎ 055 21 47 56; Via della Spada 27r; meals €20; ☎ daily) Red-and-white checked tablecloths, legs of ham strung from the ceiling, lace curtains and a menu built solely from *cucina tipica casalinga fiorentina* (typical homemade Florentine cuisine) ensures the authentic trattoria experience seven days a week. Its prices will see you coming back for seconds.

Il Latini (Map p470; ☎ 055 21 09 16; www.illatini.com; Via dei Palchetti 6r; meals €35; ☎ Tue-Sun) Request a menu (as a tourist, you might not be offered one) at this Florentine favourite or put yourself in the hands of the exuberant waiters and feast on melt-in-your-mouth crostini, Tuscan soups and a huge hunk of finely roasted meat – rabbit, lamb or veal – with white beans. The wine and water flow and if you're lucky you might get a complimentary plate of *cantuccini* (crunchy almond-studded biscuits) and *vin santo* (sweet dessert wine) with the bill.

Between the Cathedral & the Arno

BUDGET

Several pizzerias are tucked away in the streets between the Duomo and the Arno,

many touting a cent-saving takeaway option – anything from a full round disc to a simple slice (around €2).

Leonardo (Map p470; ☎ 055 28 44 46; Via de' Pecori 35r; meals €11; ☎ Sun-Fri) Regional dishes – *bollito misto* (boiled mixed vegetables and meat), *trippa alla fiorentina* (Florentine-style tripe) and *osso bucco* – are cooked up alongside burgers at this self-service restaurant, a spot hard to beat if you're after a full meal while pinching pennies.

Trattoria Bordino (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 30 48; Via Stracciarella 9r; meals €20; ☎ Mon-Sat) Get here fast to score a table at this astonishingly simple bistro, hidden on a dead-end street, seconds from the Ponte Vecchio crowds. Fare is wholly traditional Tuscan and the €6 lunch deal is a steal.

MIDRANGE

our pick **La Canova di Gustavino** (Map p470; ☎ 055 239 98 06; Via della Condotta 29r; meals €25; ☎ daily) The bread comes in a bucket and the oil and vinegar in a wooden box at this laid-back *osteria* arm of Gustavino (below), where cultured locals flock to lunch. Its cheese and cold meat platters are perfect wine companions and it hosts daily tastings. PS Yes, that misty blue glass box is the bathroom.

Trattoria Coco Lezzone (Map p470; ☎ 055 28 71 78; Via Parioncino 26r; meals €25; ☎ Mon-Sat) A cheerful, homely spot with a white-tiled interior and photographs of famous customers. No credit cards, bizarrely no coffee, just a handwritten menu and very good food at this tiny kitchen-style trattoria, where unnecessary concessions simply don't need to be made. *Ribollita* (Tuscan soup; included in the excellent-value 'Florence nostalgia' menu, €25 including 25cl of wine and mineral water) is the house speciality and Friday is fresh-fish day.

TOP END

Gustavino (Map p470; ☎ 055 239 98 06; Via della Condotta 37r; meals €50; ☎ lunch & dinner Fri-Sun, dinner Mon-Thu) Ricotta-stuffed artichoke cloaked in puff pastry and sprinkled with honeyed pine kernels, or lard smothered in hot chestnuts and caramelised in grappa are examples of Italian staples given an imaginative makeover at this inventive glass, stone and steel dining space. Gustavino is among the city's most stylish.

Angels (Map p470; ☎ 055 239 87 62; www.ristoranteangels.it; Via del Proconsolo 29-31r; meals €50; ☎ noon-2am)

A MEATY AFFAIR

'There is only one way to cook a *bistecca alla fiorentina*. If you ask for it blue or well done you are asking for something else,' says Umberto Montana between antipasti bites of *soprassata* and *finocchiona* over lunch at Osteria del Caffé Italiano (below), his Florentine *osteria*, which cooks strictly Tuscan.

'Burnt outside and completely raw inside...that is not a *bistecca alla fiorentina*. It should be pink in the middle; just the finest slither is blue,' he continues enthusiastically, illustrating the required rainbow of colours with two slices of typically unsalted bread as I savour a sweet Tuscan artichoke and eye up the 45 different bottles of olive oil eye vying to be tested on a dresser opposite.

Florence's legendary hunk of a beef cut sits on the T-bone, is 3cm to 5cm thick and easily feeds two. It comes from Tuscany's beautiful cream-coloured Chianina cows aged at least 15 months old and the loin must hang for a minimum of 10 days.

'Good meat and a good fire' are the secrets to a perfect *bistecca alla fiorentina* says Mr Montana, who pays a good deal more for his meat to hang for at least 25 days, preferably 40, thus ensuring it arrives in his restaurant mouth-melting tender. He cooks it straight – no salt ('dries the meat, makes it tough'), no olive oil ('fat in the meat already') – and cooks it on all three sides ('turn it thrice') above an exactly controlled fire of moderate temperature ('too hot, it will burn'). Total cooking time: 15 to 20 minutes; salt and pepper before serving.

Bistecca alla fiorentina, banned by the EU for fear of mad cow disease in 2001 and back on the menu since 2006, is priced by *l'etto* (100g). Pay around €45 per kilo.

The city's best-dressed beauties chink champagne flutes beneath vaulted frescoes at this American-style bar, a stylish minimalist space for dining and drinking, with a DJ space and a popular Sunday brunch. Food is Tuscan with a dash of Mediterranean.

Alle Murate (Map p470; ☎ 055 24 06 18; www.artenotai.org; Via del Proconsolo 16r; meals €65; 🍷 dinner Tue-Sat) Feast on extraordinary art (the earliest known portraits of Dante and Boccaccio included) and raved-about contemporary Tuscan cuisine with a feisty southern Italian kick at this unique restaurant nestled beneath 14th-century frescoes.

Santa Croce & East of the Centre

BUDGET

Ruth's (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 248 08 88; www.kosheruth.com; Via Luigi Carlo Farini 2a; meals €15-25; 🍷 lunch & dinner Sun-Thu, lunch Fri, dinner Sat) Dine at Ruth's for tasty dishes, at once kosher and vegetarian, served in the shade of the synagogue: think cous-cous, hummus, felafel, filo pie, potato salad, tabouleh, moussaka and fish of the day.

MIDRANGE

Antico Noè (Map p470; ☎ 055 234 08 38; Volta di San Piero 6r; meals €30; 🍷 Mon-Sat) Don't let the dank, rough-and-ready alley in which this legendary place – an old butcher's shop with white marble walls and wrought-iron meat hooks – is located put you off. The down-to-earth Tus-

can fodder here in the company of slow jazz and blues is a real joy.

Trattoria Cibrèò (Map pp466-7; Via dei Macchi 122r; meals €30; 🍷 Tue-Sat Sep-Jul) Dine here and you'll understand why a queue gathers outside each evening at 6.50pm. Once in, revel in old-fashioned Tuscan cuisine: ricotta and potato flan with a rich meat sauce, puddle of olive oil and grated parmesan (divine!), or a simple plate of polenta, followed by homemade sausages, beans in a spicy tomato sauce and braised celery. Arrive before 7pm to snag one of the eight tables and bring cash – no advance reservations, no credit cards, no coffee and no pasta.

our pick Osteria del Caffé Italiano (Map p470; ☎ 055 28 93 68; www.caffeitaliano.it; Via Isola delle Stinche 11-13r; meals €35; 🍷 Tue-Sun) *Osteria*, white-table cloth restaurant, wine cellar and pizzeria: this address caters to all tastes. Be it tagliatelle with chickpeas and Parma ham, skewered meat that turn heads or a good old *bistecca* (€50 per kilo; see boxed text, above) with beans, greens and roast spuds, discerning palates will be thrilled. A choice of three pizzas (€8) woo simplicity lovers in the pizzeria, an artfully simple dining space with strict 'no coffee, no credit cards' policy that's open in the evening.

Osteria de'Benci (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 234 49 23; Via de'Benci 13r; meals €35; 🍷 8am-midnight Mon-Sat) Deep-burgundy walls, a vaulted brick ceiling and a menu that makes no bones about what it cooks

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 pp466-7; ☎ 055 200 14 92; www.teatrodelsale.com; Via dei Macchi 111r; breakfast/lunch/dinner €5/15/25; 🕒 9-11am, 12.30-2.30pm & 7.30-11pm 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 chair around fold-up tables in the airy theatre space. Help yourself to water and wine, then wait for the chef to yell out what's cooking through the glass hatch – a help-yourself feast of antipasti, a *primo*, *secondo*, *dolci* and coffee. Lunch is a laid-back affair, while dinner is followed by a performance (advance reservations required): clear away your table, line up your chair and sit back for an evening of drama, music or comedy.

contribute to the relaxed, unpretentious air of this friendly place. Old favourites like honest slabs of *carbonata di chianina* (grilled Tuscan steak) – even more tender and succulent than the ubiquitous *bistecca alla fiorentina* (p485) – are (as the English-language menu so beautifully puts it) 'SERVED BLOODY!'

TOP END

Ristorante Cibrè (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 234 11 00; Via dei Macchi 118; meals €80; 🕒 Tue-Sat Sep-Jul) Incredulously, many of the dishes on the menu at this justifiably famous Florentine restaurant are identical to those served at the trattoria next door – but cost loads more. Not that the extremely well-dressed punters who flock to the formal arm of the legendary Fabio Picchi empire seem to care: this extremely elegant, stylish and upmarket restaurant is always full, rendering advance reservations essential.

The Oltrarno

To taste a different side of Florence, cross the river and make a beeline for busy Piazza Santo Spirito, awash with outdoor terraces to eat and drink in during the warmer months; Pop Café (p489) is perfect for a light lunch amid the student population. The neighbouring quarter of San Frediano hides a couple of gems too.

BUDGET

Trattoria Casalinga (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 86 24; Via de' Michelozzi 9r; meals €15; 🕒 Mon-Sat) Punters hungry for a filling meal at a bargain-basement price can't go wrong at this unpretentious spot that's family-run and loved by the locals. Look for the red-and-white telephone sign flanked by a line-up of *motorini* outside.

Vico del Carmine (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 233 68 62; <http://vicolodelcarmine.fol.it>; Via Pisana 40r; meals €20; 🕒 Tue-Sun) 'Vico' means alley – the inspiration behind the interior design of Carmine's Neapolitan pizzeria in trendy San Frediano. Much loved, it is Florence's best address for pizza. *Pesce* (fish) is the other speciality.

Trattoria da Ginone (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 87 58; Via de' Serragli 35r; meals €20; 🕒 Mon-Sat) Established by Big Gino after WWII and run by his son today, this trattoria dating to 1949 serves wholesome food like hare, wild boar, a well-marketed choice of vegetarian dishes and juicy fruit tarts. Opt for the set €9 or €13.50 menus, or go à la carte.

Al Tranvai (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 22 51 97; Piazza Torquato Tasso 14r; meals €21; 🕒 Mon-Fri) The menu could not be simpler at this rustic Tuscan eatery, known as The Tram and designed as such, where old men arrive at noon to bag their regular lunch spot. Sit nudged up with the locals, slurp house wine (€4 per 0.5L) and take your pick from the day's dishes chalked on the board. Since it's so deservedly popular, reserve your bench space ahead of time.

our pick **All'Antico Ristoro di'Cambi** (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 71 34; www.anticoristorodicambi.it; Via Sant'Onofrio 1r; meals €22; 🕒 Mon-Sat) Very much a family affair, strung with hanging hams, cobs of corn and woven garlic garlands, di'Cambi, born in 1950 in a former 16th-century convent, is the love child of Silvano and Bruno; their children run it today.

Trattoria Angiolino (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 239 89 76; Via di Santo Spirito 36r; meals €24; 🕒 Mon-Sun) The open-all-hours policy at this meat-driven trattoria makes it a great bet on Sunday, especially in August when the searing heat sees many kitchens shut. If you've never seen a

Real McCoy *bistecca alla fiorentina* (p485) in the flesh before, come here.

Borgo Antico (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 04 37; Piazza Santo Spirito 6r; pizzas €7-10, meals €20-30; ☺ daily) Prince and pauper, local and tourist are indiscriminately welcomed with a grin (and complimentary glass of sparkling wine when queues form) at this packed-to-the-rafters eatery. A veggie-stuffed calzone is a steal at €7, salads are jumbo and the pricier chef's specials offer good value. There's summer seating on the square outside.

MIDRANGE

ourpick Napoleone (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 28 10 15; www.trattorianapoleone.it; Piazza del Carmine 24; pizzas €7-12, meals €30; ☺ 7pm-12.30am daily) Hip Florentines are mad about this pizzeria, with an oh-so-cool staff that screams attitude and an outside terrace plump in a parking lot. That said, Napoleone cooks up a laid-back but supersleek vibe, and its pizzas are excellent. Pre-empt the experience with an apéritif at La Dolce Vita (p489), the other side of the car park.

Olio & Convivium (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 265 81 98; Via di Santo Spirito 4; meals €35; ☺ 10am-3pm Mon, 10am-3pm & 5.30-10.30pm Tue-Sat) A key address on any gastronomy agenda: not only will your tastebuds drool over the legs of hams, conserved truffles and other delectable delicatessen products sold in its shop; its €15 lunchtime menu – a cold mixed platter, wine, water and dessert – is the best lunch deal in town. At dusk,

try the veal-stuffed fresh artichokes or *taglierini* (pasta) with tiger prawns and black cabbage.

TOP END

Trattoria Cammillo (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 24 27; Borgo San Jacopo 57r; meals €45; ☺ Thu-Mon) Crostini topped with aphrodisiacal white-truffle shavings, deep-fried battered green tomatoes or zucchini flowers, lamb with artichokes, veal's brain and homemade walnut liqueur are seasonal highlights gracing the menu of this staunchly traditional trattoria where the quality of products used is just top-notch. Service is gentlemanly, bow-tied and impeccable.

Filipepe (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 200 13 97; www.filipepe.com; Via San Niccolò 39r; set menus €55 & €75; ☺ dinner) A theatrical, rustic and modern décor rolled into one makes a real change at this stylish dining space with a street terrace in front and a romantic, three-table courtyard out back. Dishes ooze innovation: fancy pearl barley crowned with goat's cheese, honey and a pear cooked in red wine? Octopus with polenta and cheese? Trendy moneyed couples are the prime clientele.

Quick Eats

I Fratellini (Map p470; ☎ 055 239 60 96; Via dei Cimatori 38r; panini €2.10-2.60; ☺ 8am-8pm, closed Sat & Sun Jul & Aug, 2 wk Mar & Aug) A legend in its own time since 1875, this hole in the wall whips out *panini*, (fennel sausage with goat cheese, spicy wild boar etc) like you've never seen

FAST FOOD FLORENCE

When Florentines fancy a fast munch on the move rather than a slow Full Monty lunch, they flit by a *trippaio* – a cart on wheels or mobile stand – for a juicy tripe burger. Think cow's stomach chopped up, boiled, sliced, bung in a bun and doused in hot chilli sauce. Yum!

Much loved by Slow Food as a bastion of good old-fashioned Florentine tradition, *trippaio* are increasingly far and few between these days. One faithful still going strong is **Tripperia Pier Paolo e Sergio** (Map pp466-7; Via de' Macci; ☺ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat Sep-May, 8.30am-3pm Mon-Sat Jun & Jul), a tripe cart parked in front of one of the city's busiest trattorias, Cibrèo (p485), where old men sit propped up on bar stools in the street reading newspapers between bites of tripe. Pay €2.30 for a tripe *panini* and not a lot more for a bowl of *lampredotto* (cow's fourth stomach chopped 'n' simmered for hours).

Or there's **Nerbone** (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 99 49; inside Mercato Centrale, Piazza del Mercato Centrale; primi/secondi €3.50/6; ☺ 7am-2pm Mon-Sat), a market stall in business since 1872, where crowds queue for lunchtime platters of *trippa alla fiorentina* (tripe and tomato stew), tripe *panini* and – should tripe simply be too offal for you to stomach – *panini con bollito*, a boiled beef bun infamously dipped in the cooking pot immediately before serving (no, incredibly, it's not soggy). Dine standing up or around a handful of tables. Complete the experience with a stroll around the Mercato Centrale's (p488) many tripe stalls, where the frilly offal, piled high, costs €6 per kilo.

it before. Wash one down with a beaker of wine and Bob's your uncle – the perfect pavement lunch. Etiquette requires you leave your empty on a wooden shelf outside.

Il Vegetariano (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 47 50 30; Via delle Ruote 30r; meals €15; ☎ Tue-Fri, dinner Sat & Sun Sep-Jul) This self-service veggie restaurant cooks up a great selection of Tuscan vegetable dishes, build-your-own salads and mains eaten around shared wooden tables. There's always a vegan option and the chalked-up menu changes daily.

Antico Noè (Map p470; ☎ 055 234 08 38; Volta di San Piero 6r; ☎ Mon-Sat) This place constructs 18 types of *painini*, making for a cheap quick lunch.

ourpick The Oil Shoppe (Map p470; ☎ 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 the best meal-sized sandwiches in town. 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.

Gelaterie

Carabè (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 28 94 76; www.gelatocarabe.com; Via Ricasoli 60r; ☎ Tue-Mon) Run with a sizzling passion by Antonio and Loredana, this is a hot spot for traditional Sicilian gelato, *granita* (sorbet) and brioche (a Sicilian ice-cream sandwich).

Perchè No? (Map p470; ☎ 055 239 89 69; www.perche.firenze.it; Via dei Tavolini 19r; ☎ Wed-Sun) In business since 1939, this one-stop shop for top-notch

ice in cones or tubs recommends marrying almond ice cream with fig sorbet or ginger ice cream with green-tea sorbet.

Gelateria Vivoli (Map p470; Via Isola delle Stinche 7; ☎ Tue-Sat) It only has tubs (€1.60 to €9) but this pocket-sized ice-cream shop and café is much-loved by Florentine families out on a Sunday afternoon *passeggiata*.

Self-Catering

Mercato Centrale (Map pp466-7; Piazza del Mercato Centrale; ☎ 7am-2pm Mon-Fri, 7am-5pm Sat) Central food market inside an iron-and-glass structure dating to 1874

Mercato di Sant'Ambrogio (Map pp466-7; Piazza Sant'Ambrogio; ☎ 7am-2pm Mon-Sat) Outdoor food market with intimate, local flavour.

Enoteca Vitae (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 246 65 03; vitae@email.it; Borgo la Croce 75r) Fill your water bottle with wine for as little as €1.30 per litre at this wine shop near Sant'Ambrogio market.

DRINKING Cafés

Piazza della Signoria, Piazza della Repubblica, Piazza San Lorenzo and Piazza Santo Spirito are particularly lovely squares for absorbing local café culture. Key fact to remember: it is substantially cheaper to drink standing up; sit down and prices double.

La Terrazza (Map p470; Piazza della Repubblica 1; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-8pm Sun) For a bird's-eye view of the Duomo, hit the rooftop café of central department store Rinascente.

TOP FIVE HISTORIC CAFÉS

- **Caffè Concerto Paszkowski** (Map p470; ☎ 055 21 02 36; www.paszkowski.com; Piazza della Repubblica 31-35r; ☎ 7-2am Tue-Sun) Born as a brewery overlooking the city's fish market in 1846, this Florentine institution lured the literary set a century on. Today it pulls a whole gamut of punters.
- **Giubbe Rosse** (Map p470; ☎ 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.
- **Caffè Gilli** (Map p470; ☎ 055 21 38 96; Piazza della Repubblica 3r; ☎ 8-1am Wed-Mon) This elegant 1793 ode to all things sweet, topped with Art Nouveau ceiling frescoes, isn't cheap. A pot of Earl Grey and a slice of cake sitting down is €13.
- **Rivoire** (Map p470; ☎ 055 21 44 12; Piazza della Signoria 4r; ☎ 8am-11pm Tue-Sun) The golden oldie for a refuel after visiting the Uffizi or Palazzo Vecchio. Black-jacketed barmen with navy ties set a formal tone.
- **Caffè Giacosa** (Map p470; ☎ 055 21 16 56; Via della Spada 10r) More famous as inventor of the Negroni and hub of Anglo-Florentine sophistication during the interwar years than what it is now – café of local hotshot designer Roberto Cavalli.

TOP FIVE APERITIVI

Our favourites for unusual apéritifs and/or a handsome free fill alongside that all-essential early-evening drink. Or buy a bottle of wine and head to the hottest seats in town – the east-facing stone bridge supports of Ponte Santa Trinità (p473) – where you can sit above the water, drink and stare out at a romantic star-lit Ponte Vecchio.

- **Noir** Map (p470; Lungarno Corsini 12-14r; ☎ 11-3am) The hottest in town; vast buffet inside, seating outside on the street and across the traffic-busy road on the riverside wall. Its Sunday brunch is legendary.
- **Negroni** (pp466-7; ☎ 055 24 36 47; www.negronibar.com; Via dei Renai 17r; ☎ 8-2am Mon-Sat, 6pm-2am Sun) Negroni shakes up cocktails galore including its namesake, invented in the 1920s when Count Camillo Negroni asked the barman at Caffè Giasoca (opposite) to add gin to his Americano.
- **Angels** Map p470; (☎ 055 239 87 62; www.ristoranteangels.it; Via del Proconsolo 29-31r; ☎ noon-2am) Stylish finger-food buffet (€8 incl cocktail) and super-sleek barman's specials including a balsamic, mint or chocolate martini or a don't-mess-with-me dirty martini (€9); dress right (to kill preferably). See also (p484)
- **Caffè Gilli** (opposite) No buffet, but how about a sundown glass of champagne (€15) or a chocolate-inspired cocktail (€10.50; vanilla vodka with splash of white-cream chocolate and garnished with Gilli chocolates)?
- **Caffè La Torre** Map(pp466-7; ☎ 055 68 06 43; www.caffelatorre.it; Lungarno Benvenuto Cellini 65r; ☎ 10.30-3.30am Mon-Sun) Loud wallpaper and legendary Aperitivo XL at this river-facing jazz bar spells hot with a capital H. Free wi-fi, jazz-driven DJ sets and a chef who cooks until 3am.

Caffè Cibrèò (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 234 58 53; Via Andrea del Verrochio 5r; ☎ 8-1am Tue-Sat) The perfect spot for a mid-morning coffee after shopping at the Piazza Sant' Ambrogio food market.

Cabiria (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 57 32; Piazza Santo Spirito 4r; ☎ 11am-1.30am Wed-Mon) Buzzing day and night is what this Oltrarno café, one of several on Florence's most happening bohemian squares, is all about. Come dusk it turns into a music bar.

Pop Café (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 38 52; www.pop.cafe.net; Piazza Santo Spirito 18r; meals €25; ☎ 8-2am daily Sep-Jul) Florence students have adopted this pocket-sized space as their own; grab a seat and tuck into a super-healthy breakfast, vegetarian lunch or all-day Sunday brunch.

Bars

Colle Bereto (Map p470; ☎ 055 28 31 56; Piazza degli Strozzi 5r; ☎ 9-3am Mon-Sat, 5pm-3am Sun) Dark oversized shades are vital at this hip bar, where Florence's fashion-conscious sit cool on a sleek, wood-decked terrace. Inside, pea-green neon and transparent Kartell chairs scream design.

Naima (Map p470; ☎ 055 26 54 098; Via dell'Anquillara 54r; ☎ 8-2am) 'Cocktails and more' is the tagline of this chic sharp bar, with industrial metalwork, pretty-in-pink lampshades and DJs

spinning tunes after dark. Apéritifs are served from 6.30pm to 9pm and the bar stool-clad place is a wi-fi hotspot.

Sei Divino (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 77 91; Borgo Ognisanti 42r; ☎ 8-2am) This is an open bar with great wine, great music, DJs, video projections, wi-fi, a no-fuss €7 lunch deal and themed apéritif buffet (7pm to 10pm) – Indian charm, Mexican passion, Tuscan, sushi and so on.

our pick Plasma (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 051 69 26; www.virtualplasma.it; Piazza Ferrucci 1r; ☎ 6.30pm-1.30am Wed, Thu & Sun, to 2.30am Fri & Sat) A hip set sips cocktails on Level 0, and gets lost in video art projected on eight 42-inch plasma screens and a waterfall on Level 1 at this minimalist fiberoptic-lit drinking space. DJs spin 'til late.

Zoe (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 24 31 11; Via dei Renai 13r; ☎ 3pm-2am Apr-Oct, 6pm-2am Tue-Sun Nov-Mar) With its innards glowing red and bedecked with changing art exhibitions, this busy San Niccolò bar heaves as its squadrons of punters – young locals – spill out onto the street across from the river.

La Dolce Vita (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 28 45 95; Piazza del Carmine 6r; ☎ 5pm-2am Mon-Sun) Sip an apéritif in the evening sun outside or enjoy the bold retro interior at this stylish bar. Live bands and DJs.

Rex Caffé (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 248 03 31; www.rexcaffe.it; Via Fiesolana 23r; ☎ 6pm-3am daily Sep-May) Décor is in-your-face gaudy and the air could be fresher at times, but the city's sassy set loves this American-styled favourite.

Moyo (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 24 79 738; www.moyo.it; Via de' Benci 23r; ☎ 8-2am Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat) A drinking establishment held in great esteem by the city's party-mad student crowd.

Fiddler's Elbow (Map p470; ☎ 055 21 50 56; www.thefiddlerselbow.com; Piazza Santa Maria Novella 7; ☎ 11-2am Mon-Fri, 11-2.30am Sat & Sun) Not far from Stazi-one Santa Maria Novella, this is one of many Irish pubs popular with an expat and foreign-student set.

ENTERTAINMENT

Bookshops sell *Firenze Spettacolo* (€1.60; www.firenzespettacolo.it in Italian), the city's definitive entertainment publication, published monthly. Otherwise, a clutch of freebies, including *Florence Concierge Information* (www.florence-concierge.it), *Informacittà Toscana 24ore* and *Florence Tuscany News* (www.informacittafirenze.it), list what's on. The city

listings in the local edition of *La Repubblica* (p851) are also useful.

Tickets for many cultural events are sold at central ticket outlet **Box Office** (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 08 04; www.boxol.it in Italian; Via Luigi Alamanni 39; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Tue-Sat, 3.30-7.30pm Mon). Otherwise try **Ticket One** (www.ticketone.it in Italian).

Live Music

Open-air concerts are a regular feature on Piazza Santa Spirito in summer, where half of Florence hangs out on hot sultry evenings. Most venues for live music are outside the town centre and most close in July and/or August.

Loonees (Map p470; ☎ 055 21 22 49; Via Porta Rossa 15; admission free; ☎ 8pm-3am Wed-Sat) Hot spot among the city's Anglophone and international set, this subterranean dance club run by a Danish-English duo is a dance-til-dawn venue.

Jazz Club (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 247 97 00; Via Nuova de' Caccini 3; compulsory 12-month membership €6; ☎ 9.30pm-1am Sun-Thu, 9.30pm-2am Fri & Sat Oct-mid-Jun) Florence's tip-top strictly jazz

DANIELE'S TOP TEN PLAYLIST

A high-flying events organiser, self-confessed reggae junkie and world traveller, Milan-born Daniele Palladini left for Jamaica when he was 18, has worked in Toronto, Boston and Rome, and arrived in Florence in 2005 to open Plasma (p489). As manager and art director of Tuscany's most experimental music and video-art space, he knows the beat – as his Top Ten playlist of the region's most interesting sounds shows:

- **Elton Junk** (www.myspace.com/eltonjunk) Psychedelic punk trio from Siena.
- **Ether** (www.myspace.com/3ther) Electronic IDM sound, a tad experimental, from Florence; independent label.
- **evanicetrip** (www.myspace.com/evanicetrip) Florence rock band looking for a label.
- **Jealousy Party** (www.myspace.com/jealousyparty) Florentine free-jazz trio dedicated to improvisation.
- **Miranda** (www.miramandiranda.it) Florence-based noise/experimental-punk trio, brilliant live, with two albums to date; *Rectal Explorations* (2006; from SCRATCHrecords) is the latest.
- **O.B.O.** (www.oboism.com) Noise 'n' roll in Florence.
- **Samuel Katarro** (www.myspace.com/samuelkatarro) Pistoia. One-man band.
- **Train de Vie** (www.traindevie.net) Florentine pop-folk fusing a violin, flute, guitar and voice with strong afro-Latin and folk-rock rhythms hammered on bass and drums; its third album (2007) was recorded live in Florence's Teatro di Rifredi.
- **TV Lumière** (www.tvlumiere.it) Dark melodic melancholic post-rock sound from Terni; self-produced its first album, *TV Lumière* (2005).
- **Zenerswoon** (www.zenerswoon.com) Three-piece Indie rock band from Florence with one album to date, *There In the Sun* (2005).

venue stages some quality acts, both local and from further afield, in an atmospheric vaulted basement.

Be Bop Music Club (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 97 99; www.bebopclub.com; Via dei Servi 76r; admission free-€10; 🕒 8pm-2am Mon-Sat) Live music to suit all tastes – everything from Led Zeppelin and the Beatles to vintage guitar, swing jazz, soul and 1970s funk – is the aim of this fresh little club.

Tenax (☎ 055 30 81 60; www.tenax.org; Via Pratese 46; admission varies; 🕒 10pm-4am Tue-Sun Oct-Apr) Florence's biggest venue for live bands, northwest of town, doubles as a house disco club; download flyers online. Take bus 29 or 30 from Stazione di Santa Maria Novella.

La Pavonière (Map pp464-5; ☎ 055 632 33 39 79; Via della Catena 2; admission free; 🕒 8pm-late May-Sep) DJ sessions and live bands by the pool is the thrust of this fabulous Miami-style summer project by Tenax – aperitif and cocktail bar with music until late around the swimming pool in Parco delle Cascine.

Auditorium Flog (Map pp464-5; ☎ 055 49 04 37; www.flog.it in Italian; Via M Mercati 24b; admission free-€15; 🕒 9.30pm-4am) Major venue for bands, this is in the Rifredi area north of the centre. It's not nearly as big as Tenax but has a reasonable stage and dance area. Take bus 14 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 Meccano Club, which have outdoor dance floors – are shut.

Central Park (Map pp464-5; ☎ 055 35 35 05; Via Fosso Macinante 2-6; admission incl 1st drink €20; 🕒 11pm-4am Tue-Sat) Flit between five different dance floors in city park Parco delle Cascine where everything from Latin to pop, house to drum 'n' bass plays – many a top Ibiza DJ has spun tunes here. From May the dance floor moves outside beneath the stars.

Meccano Club (Map pp464-5; ☎ 055 331 33 71; Viale degli Olmi 1; admission incl 1st drink women/men €13/16; 🕒 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 youth-friendly set.

Ex-Ex (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 263 85 83; www.ex-ex.it in Italian; Corso dei Tintori 4; admission €9-15; 🕒 9pm-4am Wed-Sat) Underground in mood and quite literally, this happening club attracts top DJs

from Berlin, Amsterdam and other hot-sound European cities.

YAB Club (Map p470; ☎ 055 21 51 60; www.yab.it in Italian; Via de' Sassetti 5r; admission incl 1st drink €20; 🕒 9pm-4am Wed-Mon) It's been around since the 1970s but remains a hit with students. Yabsmooove on Monday is the hottest hip-hop night in town; student night is Wednesday.

Cinemas

Few cinemas screen subtitled films (*versione originale*), **Odeon Cinehall** (Map p470; ☎ 055 21 40 68; Piazza degli Strozzi) and **Cinema Fulgor** (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 238 18 81; Via Maso Finiguerra 22r) being exceptions.

Theatre, Classical Music & Dance

Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino (Map pp466-7; ☎ information 055 27 793 50, tickets 055 28 72 22; www.maggiofirentino.com, Corso Italia 16) The curtain rises on opera, classical concerts and ballet at this lovely theatre, host to an international concert festival in May and June.

Teatro Verdi (Map p470; ☎ 055 21 23 20; www.teatroverdifirenze.it; Via Ghibellina 99) Hosts drama, opera, concerts and dance.

Teatro della Pergola (Map p470; ☎ 055 2 26 41; www.pergola.firenze.it 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.amicimusica.fi.it in Italian), October to April.

SHOPPING

Flimsy Italian-flag boxers (€6) emblazoned with *David's* packet where it matters most and other mass-produced souvenirs are rampant. But for serious shoppers, it is the city's fine leather and extraordinary variety of quality goods that tempts. For the truly dedicated, bookshops sell *Firenze Nonsoloshopping* (€14), an annual glossy shopping guide.

Fashion

Designer fashion boutiques strut down Via de' Tornabuoni and Via della Vigna Nuova. Via Roma, Via de' Calzaiuoli and Via Por Santa Maria, leading to the goldsmiths that line Ponte Vecchio, are likewise a shopper's dream.

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; Via Europa 8, Leccio; 🕒 10am-7pm Mon-Sat,

3-7pm Sun), the biggest and the best, 35km from Florence.

Markets

Mercato de San Lorenzo (Map pp466-7; Piazza San Lorenzo; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Tue-Sun) Leather, clothing and jewellery of varying quality on and around Piazza San Lorenzo.

Mercato Nuovo (Map p470; Loggia Mercato Nuovo; ☎ 8am-7pm Tue-Sat) Tourist kitsch and leather.

Mercato dei Pulci (Map pp466-7; Piazza dei Giompi) Flea market, especially large the last Sunday of the month.

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 Cuoio**, adjoining Basilica di Santa Croce (see p476). For gold and jewellery, browse the shops on either side of the Ponte Vecchio.

Pineider (Map p470; ☎ 055 28 46 55; www.peneider.com; Piazza della Signoria 13r) Shop for Florence's famous delicate marble-patterned paper at its most exclusive stationer, dating to 1774.

Officina Profumo-Farmaceutica di Santa Maria Novella (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 62 76; Via della Scala 16) Sweet-smelling unguents, balms, soaps, lotions and potions have been made between prayers here since 1612.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Aeroporto di Firenze (Florence Airport; Map pp464-5; ☎ 055 30 61 300; www.aeroporto.firenze.it), 5km north-west of the city centre, caters for domestic and a handful of European flights.

Pisa International Airport Galileo Galilei (☎ 050 84 93 00; www.pisa-airport.com), one of northern Italy's main international and domestic airports, near Pisa, is well linked with Florence by public transport (see right).

Bus

From the **SITA bus station** (Map pp466-7; ☎ 800 37 37 60; www.sitabus.it in Italian; Via Santa Caterina da Siena 17r; ☎ information office 8.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm) there are express services to/from Siena (€6.50, 1¼ hours, at least hourly) or add 30 minutes to your journey and change in Poggibonsi (€4.30, 50 minutes, half-hourly), from where there are also connecting buses for San Gimignano (€5.90,

1¼ hours, 12 daily). Direct buses also serve Arezzo, Castellina in Chianti, Faenza, Grosseto, Greve, Redda and other smaller cities throughout Tuscany.

Lazzi (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 51 55; www.lazzi.it in Italian; Piazza della Stazione) forms part of the Eurorlines network of international bus services and sells tickets for buses to various European cities. Locally, it runs buses to/from Prato (€2.40, 45 minutes, hourly), Pistoia (€3, 50 minutes, 10 daily), Lucca (€4.70, 1½ hours, frequent) and Pisa (€6.20, two hours, hourly). Several other bus companies, including **CAP** (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 21 46 37; www.capautolinee.it in Italian) and **COPIT** (Map pp466-7; ☎ 800 57 05 30), share the same bus station.

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 pp466-7; Piazza della Stazione). The **train information counter** (☎ 7am-7pm) faces the tracks in the main foyer. During busy periods, the **train information office** (☎ 7am-10pm) on platform 5 also functions.

Florence is on the Rome–Milan line. There are regular trains to/from Rome (€33, 1½ to two hours), Bologna (€11.50 to €15, one hour), Milan (€33, 2¼ to 3¼ hours) and Venice (€30, three hours). To get to Genoa (€22.40) change in Pisa; and in Milan for Turin (€41.20).

Frequent regional trains run to Prato (€1.70, 25 minutes, every 10 minutes), Pistoia (€2.70, 45 minutes, half-hourly), Pisa (€5.20, 1¼ hours, 40 daily) and Lucca (€4.80, 1½ hours, hourly).

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Buses to/from Aeroporto di Firenze (€4.50, 20 minutes, every 30 minutes between 6am and 11pm) depart from the SITA bus station. A taxi costs around €25.

Terravision (www.terravision.eu; single/return €8/16; 1¼hr, from Florence hourly 6am-7pm, from Pisa hourly 8.30am-

midnight) coaches shuttle passengers between Florence's Stazione di Santa Maria Novella on Via Luigi Alamanni (Map pp466-7) and Pisa International Airport Galileo Galilei.

Trains also link Florence's Stazione di Santa Maria Novella with Pisa International Airport Galileo Galilei (€5.20, 1½ hours, at least hourly).

Bicycle

Beat the traffic. Bike-tour operators Florence by Bike and Tour Bike Florence both rent wheels (see p479), as does the open-air rental outlet **Bicidette a Noleggio** (Map pp466-7; Piazza della Stazione; ☎ 7.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-7pm Sun Apr-Sep, shorter hr Oct-Mar), in front of Stazione Santa Maria Novella.

Car & Motorcycle

Casual traffic is banned from the heart of town. Cyclopan cameras snap your numberplate as you enter and fines for transgressors are savage. Parking anywhere can induce apoplexy; the only practical advice is to dump your vehicle as soon as you can.

The cheapest public car parks are in the Oltrarno beneath Piazzale di Porta Romana and Piazza della Calza; both cost €1.50 per hour or €15 for a 24-hour period. Otherwise, most hotels can arrange parking in a private garage for guests for €15 to €35 per 24 hours.

Should your car be towed away, call the **Ufficio Depositeria Comunale** (Car Pound Office; ☎ 055 328 36 60; Piazza Artom 13-14; ☎ 8am-12.45pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 8am-6pm Thu).

Car-rental agencies include:

Avis (Map pp466-7; ☎ 199 10 01 33; Borgo Ognissanti 128r)

Europcar (Map pp466-7; ☎ 055 29 04 38; Borgo Ognissanti 53-57r)

Hertz (Map pp466-7; ☎ 199 11 22 11; Via Maso Finiguerra 33r)

Public Transport

ATAF (Azienda Trasporti Area Fiorentina; Map pp466-7; ☎ 800 42 45 00; www.ataf.net in Italian) buses and electric *bussini* (minibuses) serve the city and its periphery. Most – including bus 7 to Fiesole and bus 13 to Piazza Michelangelo – start/terminate at the ATAF bus stops opposite the southeastern exit of Stazione di Santa Maria Novella.

Tickets cost €1.20 (€2 on board) and are sold at the ATAF **ticket & information office** (Map pp466-7; Piazza Adua; ☎ 7am-8pm daily), opposite

the 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

After muggy old Florence this bijoux village perched in hills 9km northeast of Florence revitalises. 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.

Founded in the 7th century BC by the Etruscans, Fiesole was the most important city in northern Etruria and makes a delightful foray for a few hours out of Florence.

The **tourist office** (☎ 055 597 83 73; www.comune.fiesole.fi.it in Italian; Via Portigiani 3; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Sun Mar-Oct, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Nov-Feb) is just off central Piazza Mine da Fiesole, the village heart.

Sights & Activities

Make the **Area Archeologica** (☎ 055 5 94 77; www.fiesolemusei.it; Via Portigiani 1; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-6pm Oct & Mar, 10am-5pm Wed-Nov-Dec, 11am-5pm Thu-Mon Jan & Feb) your first stop, where combined tickets (adult/concession/family low season €10/8/18, high season €13/10/20) covering the main sights are sold. A pretty spot to stroll aside, the archaeological area ensnares an Etruscan temple, Roman baths, an archaeological museum with exhibits from the Bronze Age to the Roman period, and a 1st-century-BC Roman theatre where a fiesta of music and theatre steals the show during the **Estate Fiesolana** (June to August).

Opposite, the tiny **Museo Bandini** (☎ 055 5 94 77; Via Dupré; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-6pm Oct & Mar, 10am-5pm Wed-Nov-Dec, 11am-5pm Thu-Mon Jan & Feb) has an impressive collection of early Tuscan Renaissance works, including Taddeo Gaddi's *Annunciazione* (Annunciation).

In season a combined ticket also gets you a guided tour of the fabulous Renaissance-

FLORENCE GETAWAY

Fed up with one too many *motorini* whizzing past your window? Yearning for the Tuscan hills? Then **Barbially Nuova Fattoria** (☎ 0571 67 70 04; www.barbiallynuova.it; Via Casastada 49, Montaione; d/q/6 people €70/132/186, 2-/4-/6-person apt €430/790/1035; 📍 🚗) is for you. The Zen creation of Guido, Gianluca and Marco, this dreamy estate stands on 500 hectares of agricultural land (the farm is certified 100% organic) and oak woods where creamy Chianina cows graze and wild boars ferret for truffles between tree roots when Imperio and his dog Toby aren't looking. Farmhouse apartments are a hip mix of rustic old and minimalist new; the fabulously satisfying smell of wood-fuelled heating titillates throughout; and guests lucky enough to be here in winter can go on a thrilling white-truffle hunt (two hours, €200 for one to six people including apéritif; late September to December). Find Barbially Nuova Fattoria 65km southwest of Florence and 20km north of San Gimignano in Montaione.

styled gardens of **Villa Peyron** (☎ 05526 43 21; www.bardinipeyron.it; Via di Vincigliata 2; 📍 10am-sunset Mon-Fri by appointment only); minibuses depart (🕒 3-7pm Tue & Wed, 10am-1pm & 5-7pm Mon & Thu-Sun Mar-Oct) from in front of the Area Archeologica.

Far in time and style from such Renaissance splendour is the **Museo Primo Conti** (☎ 055 59 70 95; www.fondazioneprimoconti.org; Via Dupré 18; admission €3; 🕒 10am-2pm Mon-Fri), where the eponymous avant-garde 20th-century artist lived and worked.

At the far end of the square, steep-walled Via San Francesco ushers five-star view seekers up to **Basilica di Sant' Alessandro** (1399). Florence views from here are staggering and there are plenty of green spots to picnic. The tourist office has a couple of brochures outlining short easy walks – 1km to 3.5km – for those keen to carry on walking.

Sleeping & Eating

Campeggio Panoramico (☎ 055 59 90 69; www.florencecamping.com; Via Peramonda 1; 2 adults, tent & car €37.60; 📍 🚗) Larger and cooler than the camp sites in Florence and with panoramic views of the city, this makes a seductive alternative. It has a bar, restaurant and pool.

Hotel Villa Bonelli (☎ 055 5 95 13; www.hotelvilalabonelli.com; Via Poeti 1; s incl breakfast €60-75, d incl breakfast €90-124; 📍 🚗) Lacking excitement, yes, but this friendly, family-run hotel up a little lane (off Via Gramsci) where real people live is a solid midrange choice. Furnishings are typical of a 1964-built hotel and the sun-flooded terrace to lounge on out the front is nice. Parking €10 per night.

La Reggia degli Etruschi (☎ 055 5 93 85; www.lareggia.org; Via San Francesco; meals €35; 🕒 10am-3pm & 6-11pm daily) The cuisine – brandy-flavoured braised salt cod with tomatoes, homemade ta-

gliatelle with guinea-hen sauce or *pici umbri* all *agliane* (Umbrian spaghetti in a garlic and tomato sauce) – plays second fiddle to the stunning view from this five-table restaurant tucked up high in an old stone wall. Those who can't climb can ask for a lift.

Getting There & Away

Take ATAF bus 7 (€1.20, 30 minutes) from Stazione di Santa Maria Novella in Florence.

IL MUGELLO

Northeast of Florence leading up to the border with Emilia-Romagna is the area known as Il Mugello, birthplace to the Medici and with a smattering of family castles, villas and palaces (most closed to the public) to prove it. Traditional Tuscan villages sit between elegant second homes for fortunate Florentines here, while the valley that the river Sieve winds through is one of Tuscany's premier wine areas.

In **Borgo San Lorenzo**, the **Comunità Montana del Mugello** (☎ 055 849 53 46; Via Togliatti 45), **Associazione Turismo Ambiente** (☎ 055 845 87 93; Piazza Dante 29) and **Borga Informa** (☎ 055 845 62 30; infoborgo@tin.it; Villa Pedori Giraldi) are useful sources of information about the area.

Take the SS65 north from Florence. Near Vaglia, about 5km north of Pratolino, is the **Parco di Villa Demidoff** (☎ 055 40 94 27; Via Fiorentina 176; adult/concession €3/2; 🕒 10am-8pm Thu-Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-6pm Sun Mar & Oct), a hopelessly romantic garden built around a Medici villa, long since demolished. Follow the SS65 for another 13km and turn right for glimpses of another pair of Medici villas (both closed to the public): **Trebbio** and, further along the same road, **Cafaggiolo**, a fortress converted into a villa by Michelozzo in 1451.

Il Mugello offers wonderful walking: Sorgenti Firenze Trekking (SOFT; Florence Springs Trekking) is a network of signed day or half-day trails crisscrossing the area. *Mugello*, *Alto Mugello*, *Val di Sieve*, produced by SELCA, is a decent map for hikers at 1:70,000 (its trail 8 is an easy 3½-hour round trip, starting from the villa at Cafaggiolo and passing by Trebbio).

NORTHERN & WESTERN TUSCANY

A quick flit – indeed a day trip – from Florence ushers in a whole host of classic can't-miss-them sights (Pisa's Leaning Tower, lovely Lucca) and quintessential Tuscan scapes, including Carrara's mighty marble mountain and the Apuane Alps.

Further afield on a coast refreshingly unburdened by destinations everyone knows about, the port city of Livorno, like the primary school girl-bully, dares you to like it. Peculiar, intimidating and well fed, amenable

camaraderie is a possibility – if she doesn't punch your lights out first.

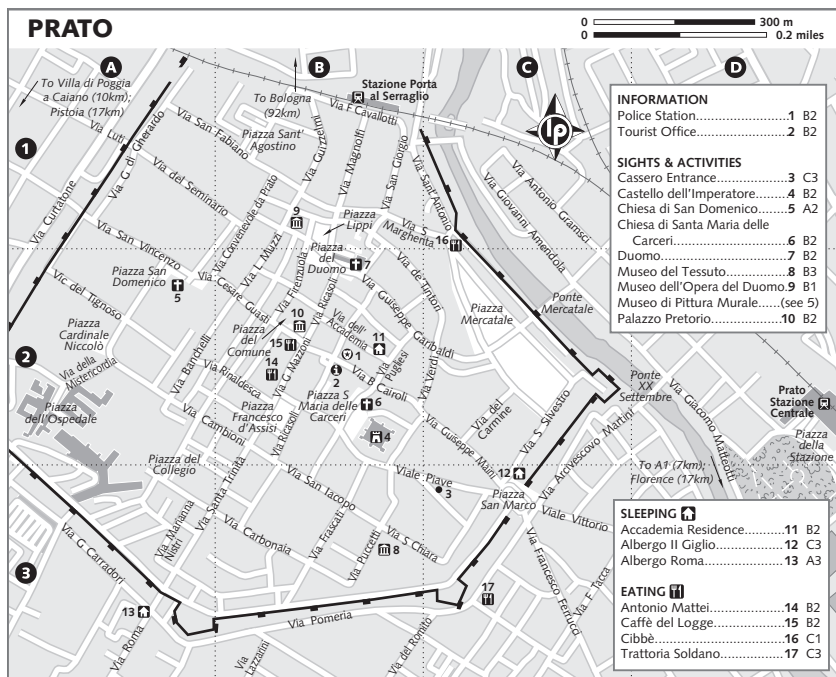
Ferries to the breezy Tuscan islands of Capraia and Gorgona depart from Livorno as well as Piombino.

PRATO

pop 174,600

Virtually enclosed within Florence's urban and industrial sprawl and a mere 17km to its northwest, Prato is one of Italy's main textile centres. Tuscany's second-largest town after Florence, it houses the country's biggest concentration of Chinese immigrants, many of whom are now second- or even third-generation Pratese. Originally founded by the Ligurians, the city fell to the Etruscans, then the Romans.

As early as the 11th century it was an important centre for wool production. Continuing the tradition, textiles, together with leather working, are to this day Prato's main industries. It's worth dropping in on your way to the more picturesque cities of Pistoia, Lucca and Pisa or as a half-day trip from Florence.



Information

Tourist office (☎ 0574 2 41 12; www.prato.turismo.toscana.it in Italian; Piazza Santa Maria delle Carceri 15; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1.30pm & 2-6pm Sat)

Sights

One day the impressive bulk of **Palazzo Pretorio** (Piazza del Comune), under renovation for years, will again house the city's **Museo Civico**. Until then, the highlights of its collection can be found in the following museums.

A combined ticket (€6), bought at any of the three sites, gives entry to the Museo di Pittura Murale, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo and Castello dell'Imperatore.

DUOMO

At first glance Prato's 12th-century **Duomo** (Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 7.30am-noon & 3.30-7pm), with its stark exterior of white-and-green marble bands, solitary terracotta lunette by Andrea della Robbia and magnificent Filippo Lippi frescoes behind the cathedral's high altar, appears a typical Tuscan affair.

But look closer and the **Pulpito della Sacra Cintola** to the right of the western entrance pops into vision. This highly unusual exterior pulpit was grafted on to the outside of the cathedral to display the Virgin Mary's *sacra cintola* (sacred girdle) five times a year (Easter, 1 May, 15 August, 8 September and 25 December). The girdle, so the story goes, was given by the Virgin to St Thomas, and brought to Prato from Jerusalem by a soldier centuries later after the Second Crusade. Inside the cathedral, Agnolo Gaddi's fresco cycle, *Legend of the Holy Girdle*, in a chapel in the northwest corner of the nave, illustrates the tale.

View the original panels of the pulpit, adorned with playful *putti* (winsome cherubs) designed by Donatello and Michelozzo in the 1430s, in the **Museo dell'Opera del Duomo** (☎ 0574 2 93 39; Piazza del Duomo 49; adult/concession €4/2; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun), where paintings by Filippo Lippi, Caravaggio, Bellini and Santi di Tito hang.

MUSEO DEL TESSUTO

Prato's **Textile Museum** (☎ 0574 61 15 03; Via Santa Chiara 24; adult/concession €4/2; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat, 4-7pm Sun) devotes itself to textiles through the ages. It highlights the achievements of the local cloth industry, but you'll also find examples of textiles (some from as early as the 3rd century) from Italy and

Europe, and as far afield as India, China and the Americas.

MUSEO DI PITTURA MURALE

The **Museum of Mural Painting** (☎ 0574 44 05 01; Piazza San Domenico; adult/concession €4/2; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 3-6pm Fri & Sat), within the **Chiesa di San Domenico**, houses a collection of largely Tuscan paintings. Artists represented include Filippo Lippi, Paolo Uccello and Bernardo Daddi with his touchingly naive polyptych of the miracle of the Virgin's girdle (see left).

CHIESA DI SANTA MARIA DELLE CARCERI & AROUND

Built by Giuliano da Sangallo towards the end of the 15th century, the high, graceful interior of this **church** (Piazza Santa Maria delle Carceri; ☎ 7am-noon & 4-7pm) was a prototype for many a Tuscan Renaissance church. The glazed terracotta frieze and, above it, medallions of the Evangelists are by Andrea della Robbia and his team.

Found on the same piazza, **Castello dell'Imperatore** (☎ 0574 3 82 07; Piazza Santa Maria delle Carceri; admission €2; ☎ 9am-1pm Apr-Sep), Prato's castle, was built in the 13th century by the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. It's an interesting enough example of military architecture but, bare inside, is only really worth a visit using a combined ticket.

Down the road, sneak along the **Cassero** (Viale Piave; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Wed-Mon), a medieval covered passageway that originally allowed access from the castle to the city walls.

VILLA DI POGGIA A CAIANO

Another Medici getaway, this sumptuously decorated **villa** (☎ 055 87 70 12; Piazza de Medici 14, Poggio a Caiano; admission free; ☎ 8am-5pm), 10km south of Prato in Poggia a Caiano, showcases a fine collection of 16th- to 18th-century still lives in its **Museo della Natura Morta** (Still Life Museum) inside and has magnificent sprawling gardens outside.

Sleeping

Albergo Il Giglio (☎ 0574 3 70 49; www.albergoilgiglio.it; Piazza San Marco 14; d €55-58, with bathroom €65-70; ☎ closed 10 days mid-Aug; ♿) Squeaky clean and run with passion by Alvaro Sabini since 1969, this old-style hotel with cosy could-be-your-own-home guest sitting room is a family affair. Siblings Stefania and Stefano help Papa

run the show and the Tuscan welcome oozes warmth.

Albergo Roma (☎ 0574 3 17 77; www.albergoilgiglio.it; Via Carradori 1; s €41-68, d €60-72; 🍴) A Sabini affair (see Albergo Il Giglio opposite) close to the heart since 1974, Roma is a one-star place with 12 modest, spruce rooms that offer excellent value for your euro. Ask for one at the back; the hotel overlooks a busy road.

Accademia Residence (☎ 0574 44 81 42; www.academiaresidence.it; Via dell'Accademia 45; s €52-60, d €85-98, q €119-135; 🍴) Stylish apartments with every mod con, the Accademia is a fantastic accommodation option. Each of the seven units is named after a famous person and peeps out onto an interior courtyard in Prato's historic heart.

Eating

Trattoria Soldano (☎ 0574 3 46 65; Via Pomeria 23; meals €15; 🍴 Mon-Sat Sep-Jul) Prices are dirt-cheap and dishes dead simple at this long-standing trattoria on a tatty street corner between the city walls and train station. Mutton is the meat and homemade desserts made by Mama and daughter are heaven.

Caffè delle Logge (☎ 0574 60 00 78; Piazza del Comune; meals €25; 🍴 Tue-Sun) Sprawled in the shade beneath the loggia on Prato's loveliest fountain-tinkling squares, this café-cum-lounge and cocktail bar is perfect any time. Inside, a white moulded ceiling ensnares 1950s seating, a flatscreen TV and boldly painted walls.

Cibbè (☎ 0574 60 75 09; Piazza Mercatale 49; meals €30; 🍴 Mon-Sat Sep-Jul) Hailed by Slow Food as a gatekeeper of local culinary custom, Cibbè is the place to try *bozza di Prato* (a round unsalted bread loaf typical to Prato) and *mortadella di Prato* (smoked pork salami spiced with black pepper corns, nutmeg, coriander and garlic).

Antonio Mattei (☎ 0574 2 57 56; Via Ricasoli 20-22) Created by the artisan biscuit maker in 1858, *biscotti di Prato* or *cantucci* (as they are also known) are still baked up on the very spot where they were born.

Getting There & Around

By car, take the A1 from Florence and exit at Calenzano, or the A11 and exit at Prato Est or Ovest. The SS325 connects Prato with Bologna.

Prato is on the Florence–Bologna and Florence–Lucca train lines. Sample fares to/

from its main train station (Prato Stazione Centrale) include Florence (€1.70, 25 minutes, every 10 minutes), Bologna (€9, one hour, 20 per day), Lucca (€4.30, one hour, 20 daily) and Pistoia (€1.70, 20 minutes, half-hourly).

PISTOIA

pop 84,200

Pleasant Pistoia sits snugly at the foot of the Apennines. Only 45 minutes northwest of Florence by train, it deserves more attention than it normally gets. Although it has grown well beyond its medieval ramparts – and is now a world centre for the manufacture of trains – its historic centre is well preserved. In the 16th century the city's metalworkers created the pistol, which was named after the city.

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.

If you're coming here by car from Florence, consider a stop at the **Villa di Poggio a Caiano** (opposite), a Medici getaway 15km from Florence in Poggio a Caiano.

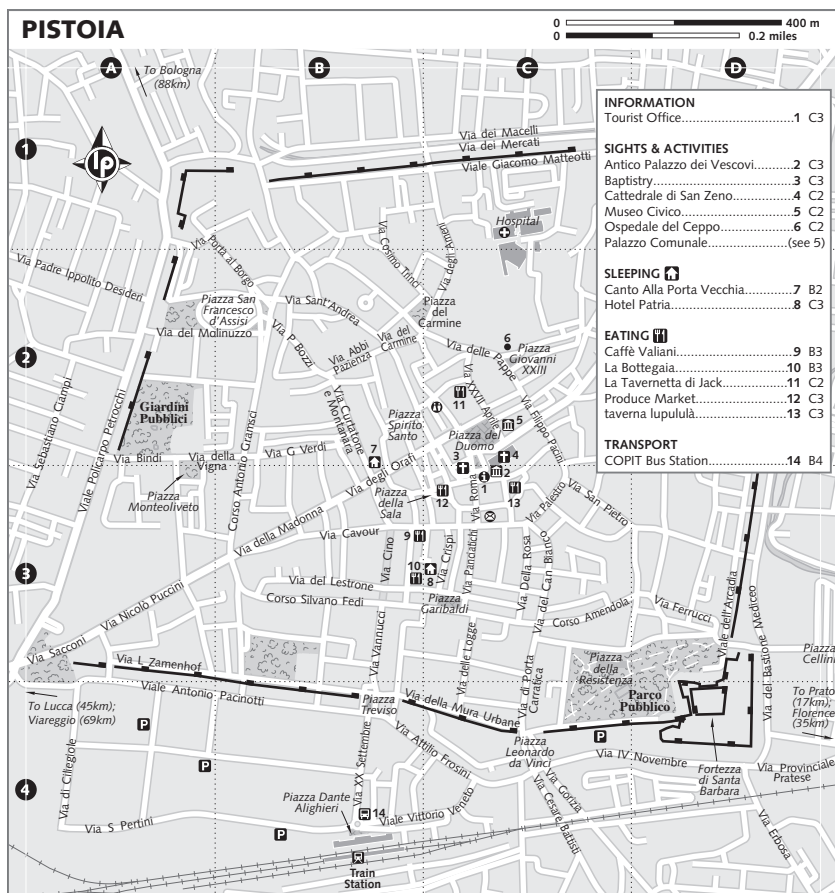
Information

Tourist office (☎ 0573 2 16 22; www.pistoia.turismo.toscana.it in Italian; Piazza del Duomo 4; 🍴 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Sun)

Sights

Pistoia's visual wealth is concentrated on Piazza del Duomo – and is reason alone to visit this humble city. The Pisan-Romanesque façade of **Cattedrale di San Zeno** (Piazza del Duomo; 🍴 8am-12.30pm & 3.30-7pm Sep-Apr, 8am-7pm May-Aug) 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 €2/0.50), begun in 1287 and finished off by Brunelleschi two centuries later – is in the gloomy **Cappella di San Jacopo** off the north aisle; to visit, track down a church official.

Wedged between the cathedral and Via Roma is **Antico Palazzo dei Vescovi** (admission €3.60; 🍴 10am-1pm & 3.30-5pm Tue, Thu & Fri, guided tours 10am, 11.30am & 3.30pm), guardian of a wealth of artefacts discovered during restoration work and dating as far back as Etruscan times.



Across Via Roma is the 14th-century **baptistry** (Piazza del Duomo; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Sun), elegantly banded in green-and-white marble to an Andrea Pisano design. A note on the baptistry door tells you what time the guided tours of the cathedral's **bell tower** are held.

The Gothic **Palazzo Comunale** dominates the Piazza del Duomo's eastern flank. It is home to the **Museo Civico** (☎ 0573 37 12 96; Piazza del Duomo 1; adult/concession €3.50/2; ☎ 10am-5pm or 6pm Tue-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun), which houses works by Tuscan artists from the 13th to 20th centuries.

The rich portico of the nearby **Ospedale del Ceppo** (Piazza Giovanni XXIII), with its detailed polychrome terracotta frieze by Giovanni della

Robbia, will stop the most monument-weary visitors in their tracks.

Sleeping & Eating

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

Canto alla Porta Vecchia (☎ 0573 2 76 92; bbanna01@virgilio.it; Via Curtatone e Montanara 2; B&B s €30, d with/without bathroom €70/60) It is impossible *not* to feel at home at this lovely four-room B&B, home to Anna and Giovanni Bresci. Rooms are vast, with high ceilings, old period furnishings and the odd fresco. Breakfast is served around a communal table with a stunning view of the church dome. There's a small rooftop terrace for guests to lounge on.

Hotel Patria (☎ 0573 2 51 87; www.patriahotel.com; Via Crispi 8; s €55-75, d €75-110; P) Proffering shelter to travellers since 1927, this 28-room inn has been around a while. Staff are well-mannered, rooms are clean and guests can choose whether they want to share a bathroom or not.

Caffè Valiani (☎ 0573 2 30 34; Via Cavour 55) Perfect for a pastry, cappuccino or light lunch beneath frescoed vaults, this old-fashioned café is in the former 14th-century oratory of the neighbouring church.

La Tavernetta di Jack (☎ 0573 2 04 91; Via del Presto 9; meals €20; ☹ Wed-Mon) No, there's no Jack running this backstreet *trattoria tipica Pistoiese* (typical Pistoiese trattoria). Rather, Lucciano – who happens to be the spitting image of Jack Nicholson! A local legend, Lucciano aka Jack cooks up great, cheap, filling Tuscan fare.

La Bottegaia (☎ 0573 36 56 02; Via del Lastrone 17; meals €25; ☹ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, dinner Sun & Mon) Dishes range from staunchly traditional (black cabbage) to experimental (vegetable flan dipped in a *pecorino* cheese fondue) at this Slow Food–hailed *osteria*, known for its finely butchered cured meats and interesting wine list.

taverna lupululà (☎ 0573 2 33 31; www.lupulula.it in Italian; Viccolo de' Bacchettoni 10; meals €30; ☹ 7pm-1am Tue-Sun) So hip it only takes lower case, design-driven lupululà brings a taste of modernity to Pistoia's otherwise traditional dining and drinking scene. From Via Roma, walk west along Via della Torre and turn right onto Viccolo de' Bacchettoni.

Getting There & Around

Buses connect Pistoia with Florence (€2.70, 50 minutes, hourly) and local towns in Tuscany; buy tickets at the **COPIT office** (☎ 0573 36 32 43; Via XX Settembre 71; ☹ 6.15am-8.15pm Mon-Sat, 7am-8.10pm Sun) opposite the train station.

The city is on the A11 and the SS64 and SS66, which head northeast for Bologna and northwest for Parma respectively. Local buses 10 and 12 connect the train station with the cathedral.

Trains link Pistoia with Florence (€2.70, 45 minutes, half-hourly), Prato (€1.70, 20 minutes, half-hourly), Lucca (€3.30, 45 minutes, more than 20 per day) and Viareggio (€4.30, one hour, hourly).

Most hotels provide motoring guests with a pass ensuring free street parking between 9pm

and 9am; otherwise private garage parking costs €6 per night.

LUCCA

pop 81,900

Lovely Lucca is gorgeous, a beautiful old city that smacks of 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 charming 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 one of the seemingly countless members of his family who needed an Italian fiefdom (this time his sister Elisa) in control. Twelve years later the city became a Bourbon duchy, before being incorporated into the Kingdom of Italy.

Lucca remains a strong agricultural centre. The long periods of peace it has enjoyed explain the almost perfect preservation of the city walls, which were rarely put to the test.

Information

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

Mondochiocciola (☎ 0583 44 05 10; Via del Gonfalone 12; per hr €5.50; ☹ 9.30am-1pm & 3.30-8pm Mon-Sat) Internet café with irregular hours and no sign outside.

Post office (Via Vallisneri 2)

Tourist office Piazza Napoleone (☎ 0583 91 99 41; ☹ 10am-7pm Apr-Oct, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar); Piazza Santa Maria 35 (☎ 0583 91 99 31; ☹ 9am-8pm Apr-Oct, 9am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) Wedged between bike-hire outlets; Piazzale Verdi (☎ 0583 58 31 50; ☹ 9am-7pm Easter-Oct, 9am-5.30pm Nov-Easter) Rents bicycles (per hr €2.50) and excellent city audioguides in English (1/2 persons €9/15), sells concert tickets, and has a left-luggage service (per hr €1.50).

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

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 Luccese life.

Down in the city, coloured *itinerario turistico* (tourist itinerary) panels map out routes for cyclists. For bike hire see p504.

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 or 6.45pm Mon-Sat, 9.30-10.45am & noon-6pm Sun Mar-Oct, 9.30am-4.45pm Mon-Sat, 9.30-10.45am & noon-5pm Sun Oct-Mar), dedicated to San Martino, dates to the 11th century. The exquisite façade 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, in fact dated to the 11th century, was carved by Nicodemus, who witnessed the Crucifixion. A major object of pilgrimage, it's carried in procession through the streets each year on 13 September at dusk during the Luminaria di Santa Croce (p502).

The cathedral's many other artworks include a magnificent *Last Supper* by Tintoretto

and the cool marble tomb of Ilaria del Carretto, a masterpiece of funerary sculpture, in the **sacristy** (adult/concession €2.50/1.50). Many more 15th- and 16th-century treasures from the cathedral are displayed in the **Museo della Cattedrale** (☎ 0583 49 05 30; Piazza Antelminelli; adult/concession €4/2.50; 🕒 10am-6pm daily Apr-Oct; 10am-2pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Nov-Feb; 10am-5pm daily Mar).

CHIESA DI SAN MICHELE IN FORO & AROUND

Equally dazzling is this Romanesque **church** (☎ 0583 48 459; Piazza San Michele; 🕒 7.40am-noon & 3-6pm Apr-Oct, 9am-noon & 3-5pm Nov-Mar), 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.

Languidly lording it over Piazza Cittadella, Puccini the maestro still sits, cast in bronze, with a cigarette dangling from his slender fingers, oblivious and in defiance of recent legislation. Just to the north of this square is the **Casa di Puccini** (☎ 0583 58 40 28; Corte San Lorenzo 9; 🕒 closed for renovation), the composer's modest house, preserved in much the same way as he left it, his glasses and pen poised on the desk beside the piano where he wrote *Madame Butterfly* and much of his later work. It was closed for renovations when we last tried to pay our respects.

EAST OF VIA FILLUNGO

Lucca's busiest street, Via Fillungo, threads its way through the medieval heart of the old city. It's a fascinating mix of smart boutiques, restaurants and buildings of great charm and antiquity – often occupying the same space; just look up above the street-level bustle.

Piazza Anfiteatro is a huge oval just east of Via Fillungo. The houses, raised upon the foundations of the one-time Roman amphitheatre, retain the shape of this distant original.

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

There are great views of the city from its walls, yes, but for a sweeping overview, head higher up 207 steps to the top of **Torre delle Ore** (☎ 0583 31 68 46; Via Fillungo; adult/concession €4/2.50; 🕒 9am-7pm, to 5pm Oct-Feb), a 13th-century clock tower hotly contested by rival families in medieval Lucca. Alternatively, attack the 230 equally steep stairs of **Torre Guinigi** (☎ 0583 31 68 46; Via Sant'Andrea 14; adult/concession €4/2.50; 🕒 9am-midnight May-Sep, 9am-7.30pm Mar-Apr, 9am-5pm Oct-Feb), where a tiny copse of holm oak trees offers welcome shade. A combined ticket covering both towers costs €6/4.

Nowadays, pavement cafés and restaurants jostle to accommodate one another around the edges of the square – or, rather, ellipse.

A short walk further east is **Piazza San Francesco** and the attractive 13th-century **Chiesa di San Francesco**. Nearby, the **Museo Nazionale di Villa Guinigi** (☎ 0583 49 60 33; Via della Quarquonia; adult/concession €4/2; 🕒 8.30am–7.30pm Tue–Sat, 8.30am–1.30pm Sun) showcases the city's art works and archaeological remnants from Roman Lucca.

For a leafy stroll to birdsong, head for Lucca's **Orto Botanico** (Botanical Garden; ☎ 0583 44 21 60; Via San Micheletto; adult/concession €3/2; 🕒 10am–5pm Apr & mid-Sep–Oct, to 6pm May & Jun, to 7pm Jul–mid-Sep, by appointment Nov–Mar).

WEST OF VIA FILLUNGO

The façade of the **Basilica di San Frediano** (☎ 0583 49 36 27; Piazza San Frediano; 🕒 8.30am–noon & 3–5.30pm Mon–Fri, 9–11.30am & 3–5pm Sat & Sun) has a unique (and much-restored) 13th-century mosaic in a markedly Byzantine style. But that's not the only anomalous feature: unlike just about every other church this side of Jerusalem, the apse faces *west*, away from the Holy City. The main feature of the beautiful basilica's interior is the **Fontana Lustrale**, a 12th-century baptismal font decorated with sculpted reliefs, just to the right as you enter. Behind it is *Annunciation* by Andrea della Robbia. Note too the fine capitals, many recycled from the nearby Roman amphitheatre.

A wonderful retreat from Lucca's excess of churches and Renaissance splendour is 17th-century **Palazzo Pfanner** (☎ 340 9 23 30 85; Via degli Asili 33; palace or garden adult/concession €3/2.50, combined €4.50/3.50; 🕒 10am–6pm Thu–Tue Mar–mid-Nov), where parts of *Portrait of a Lady* (1996) starring Nicole Kidman and John Malkovich were filmed. A staircase leads to the sumptuously furnished living area, or dip into the ornate 18th-century garden, the only one of substance within the city walls, guarded by statues representing Greek and Roman deities. (Incidentally, the eponymous Felix Pfanner, may God rest his soul, was an Austrian immigrant who first brought beer to Italy – and brewed it right here in the *palazzo's* cellars.)

The 17th-century **Palazzo Mansi** (Via Galli Tassi 43), a wonderful piece of rococo excess (that elaborate, gilded bridal suite must have inspired such high jinks in its time), houses the smallish **Pinacoteca Nazionale** (☎ 0583 5 55 70; adult/concession €4/2; 🕒 8.30am–7.30pm Tue–Sat, 8.30am–

1.30pm Sun) with paintings of the same period and some lively frescoes.

Festivals & Events

The city that gave birth to both Puccini and Boccherini has admirably catholic musical tastes. For more than 50 years the nearby village of Torre del Lago has hosted the annual **Puccini Festival** in July and August. Lucca's **Summer Festival** (www.summer-festival.com) in July meanwhile pulls in top performers.

Sleeping

To track down a bed and breakfast within the walls, 1km out of town or in the surrounding hills, surf **Lucca: B&B 'n' Guesthouses** (www.welcomeinlucca.it).

Locanda Buatino (☎ 0583 34 32 07; www.leosteriedilucca.com; Via Borgo Giannotti 508; d/tr without bathroom €40/60) There are few tastier places to sleep than in the trio of rooms above one of Lucca's oldest and most locally loved trattorias (see opposite). Original patterned tiled floors and beamed ceilings add an authentic air.

Ostello San Frediano (☎ 0583 46 99 57; www.ostelloluca.it; Via della Cavallerizza 12; dm with/without bathroom €19/17.50, d/tr/q with bathroom €48/92/115, 5-bed room €135; 📺) Top-notch in comfort and service, this HI-affiliated hostel with 141 beds in voluminous rooms is serviced with bar and grandiose dining room (breakfast €1.60 to €5, packed lunch €7, two-course dinner €9.50). Internet €5 per hour.

San Frediano Guesthouse (☎ 0583 46 96 30; www.sanfrediano.com; Via degli Angeli 19; s €35–48, d €45–68, s with bathroom €60–86, d with bathroom €70–90; 📺) A smartly painted salmon-pink town house built in 1600 is the venue for this appealing six-room guesthouse, complete with meat hooks in the beams of reception where butchers once strung their hams. Less-expensive rooms – far from bare-bones – share a bathroom. If full, ask about its sister guesthouse.

Casa Alba (☎ 0583 49 53 61; www.casa-alba.com; Via Fillungo 142; s without/with bathroom €55/70, d with bathroom €80, extra bed €15; 📺) Antipodean travellers will feel at home here; the delightful owner has spent many years in Australia. Her five rooms, each with fridge, are small but sunny, washed in pastel colours and decorated with arty prints. Winter prices are substantially lower.

Hotel Puccini (☎ 0583 5 54 21; www.hotelpuccini.com; Via di Poggio 9; s/d €65/90) Wedged between Puccini enjoying a cigarette in style on café-clad

Piazza Citadella and Piazza San Michele with its majestic church, this friendly three-star hotel with 14 modern rooms could not be better placed. No air-con – just ceiling fans.

Hotel Universo (☎ 0583 49 36 78; www.universolucca.com; Piazza del Giglio 1; s incl breakfast €75-120, d incl breakfast €108-190; (P) (♿) Flower-power carpets scream 1960s at this venerable old inn smack-bang on a lovely people-busy, tree-lined, carousel-pierced square since 1857. All 60 rooms – a tad weary in furnishings – stare at the equally venerable Teatro del Giglio or cathedral; only some have air-con.

La Corte degli Angeli (☎ 0583 46 92 04; www.allacortedeigliangeli.com; Via degli Angeli 23; d incl breakfast €120-175; (P) (♿) (♿) Occupying three floors of a 15th-century town house, this four-star boutique hotel oozes charm. Frescoed rooms are named after flowers: lovers in romantic Rosa can lie beneath a pergola and swallow-filled sky and play spot the mouse.

Eating

Trattoria da Leo (☎ 0583 49 22 36; Via Tegrimi 1; meals €20; (♿) Mon-Sat) Ask any Florentine where to lunch in Lucca and this wonderful, bustling, noisy trattoria with mixed clientele of students, workers and ladies taking a break from shopping is what they'll say. Save a small corner for their *torta di fichi e noci* (fig and walnut tart). In summer the shaded outside seating comes into its own.

Machiavelli (☎ 0583 46 72 19; lucadatorre@tiscali.it; Via Cesare Battisti 28; meals €20; (♿) Mon-Sat) Another favourite, this funky old-fashioned *osteria* has a definite retro air to it. Walls are pea-green, the bar is painted lavender-blue and the clientele is staunchly loyal, local, fun and of all ages. There is live music some nights, and the cuisine – salted cod with leeks, chickpea soup and grilled pork ribs and so on – oozes natural flavour.

Gigi Trattoria (☎ 0583 46 72 66; www.gigitrattoria.it; Piazza del Carmine 7; meals €20; (♿) Mon-Sat) Buzzing by noon, this 1950s cantina on the old market square – revamped by three young Lucchesi in the new millennium – is a hot address. Recipes are plucked straight out of nonna's cookbook, contemporary art to buy hangs on the walls and simplicity is the philosophy driving the place.

Locanda Buatino (☎ 0583 34 32 07; www.leosteriedilucca.com; Via Borgo Giannotti 508; meals €20; (♿) Mon-Sat) A Lucca legend, this age-old trattoria, reckoned to be Lucca's oldest, with a fun 'n'

funky air of retro wafting through it, has the added advantage of being a short walk from the madding crowds, outside the city walls. Chef Angelo chalks up a different menu daily; *cionca* (veal's head) is a speciality. Live jazz sets the place jiving on Monday from October to May.

Vecchia Trattoria Buralli (☎ 0583 95 06 11; Piazza Sant'Agostino 9; meals €25; (♿) Thu-Tue) A once-intimate local favourite, now in every guidebook, this crowd pleaser is great for sampling wine from the surrounding hills. Fare is traditional and a green parrot sits on the packed terrace outside.

Di Simo (☎ 0583 49 62 34; Via Fillungo 58; meals €28) This formal old-world café-cum-restaurant, with much of its original furniture and the world's most subtly camouflaged toilet door intact, was once patronised by Puccini and his coterie (the maestro would tickle the ivories of the piano at the entrance to the dining area). Then known as Antico Caffè del Caselli, contemporary Di Simo spoons out mean ice creams alongside leafy salads and mains to a well-dressed older crowd.

Buca di Sant'Antonio (☎ 0583 5 58 81; Via della Cervia 3; meals €30; (♿) lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) An outstanding spot for tasting excellent wine, this highly ranked restaurant dating to 1782 is a must-stop for visiting celebrities and politicians. Deep-fried breaded lamb cutlets with artichokes, rabbit salad or roast guinea fowl with ham and grapes: the menu and romantic old-world setting cannot fail to impress. Advance bookings recommended.

Taddeucci (☎ 0583 49 49 33; www.taddeucci.com; Piazza San Michele 34; (♿) Wed-Tue) A sweet must is a slice of *buccellato* (a hybrid bun-biscuit typical of Lucca) with coffee and cream, strawberries and wine, ricotta and rum or a simple *vin santo* at this cake shop, which dates to 1881. A loaf to take away costs €3.30.

Getting There & Away

From the bus stops around Piazzale Verdi, **CLAP** (☎ 0583 58 78 97; www.clapsa.it in Italian) runs services throughout the region, including destinations in the Garfagnana such as Castelnovo (€3.50, 1½ hours, eight daily); and **Lazzi** (☎ 0583 58 48 76) runs buses to/from Florence (€4.70, 1½ hours, hourly), Pisa (€2.20, 45 minutes, hourly), La Spezia (€5.20, three hours, four daily) and Marina di Carrara (€3.50, two hours, six daily) via Marina di Massa.

Lucca is on the Florence–Pisa–Viareggio train line and frequent trains run to/from Pisa (€2.20, 25 minutes) and Florence (€4.80, 1½ hours) via Pistoia (€3.30, 45 minutes) and Prato (€4.30, one hour).

The A11 runs westwards to Pisa and Viareggio and eastwards to Florence. The SS12, then the SS445 from Forno, links the city with the Garfagnana.

Getting Around

Most cars are banned within the city walls, but hotels will give you a permit entitling you to park in spaces reserved for residents (indicated by yellow lines). Outside the city walls, you can park for free.

CLAP electric buses connect the train station, Corso Garibaldi and Piazzale Verdi but it's quicker as well as more pleasurable to walk.

Otherwise, follow the crowd and rent a bike from **Poli** (☎ 0583 49 37 87; www.bicidettepoli.com; Piazza Santa Maria 42) or **Cidi Bizzarri** (☎ 0583 49 60 31; Piazza Santa Maria 32) for per hour/day €2.50/12.

For a taxi call ☎ 0583 95 52 00.

AROUND LUCCA

Parco de Pinocchio (☎ 0572 42 93 42; adult/child €10/7; ☎ 8.30am–sunset), a tribute to Italy's naughtiest and bestselling fictional character, is in a pine forest just outside the village of **Collodi**, located 15km east of Lucca. With a series of mosaics recounting the main episodes in the puppet's life, as well as statues and tableaux, it's as much a treat for grown-ups as it is for kids.

APUANE ALPS

This mountain range rears up between the coastal Versilia Riviera and, inland, the vast valley of the Garfagnana. Altitudes are relatively low compared with the real Alps further north, but the Apuane Alps offer great walking possibilities, often with spectacular views of the coastline and Ligurian Sea. Francesco Greco's *The Alps of Tuscany* describes many walks in detail.

You will find a good network of marked walking trails and *rifugi* (mountain huts). To guide your steps, pick up *Alpi Apuane Settentrionali*, published by the Massa and Carrara tourist offices with trails and *rifugi* marked up, or *Alpi Apuane*, produced by Edizione Multigraphic of Florence. Both are at a 1:25,000 scale.

SLEEP DREAM EAT VILLAS

Travellers dreaming of living like a wealthy 16th-century Luccan can do so thanks to the **Associazione delle Ville e dei Palazzi Lucchesi** (☎ 0583 900 11 15; www.villelucchesi.net), an association of historic villa owners who advertise their small collection of dreamy B&Bs and *agriturismi* online. See its website for details.

La Garfagnana

The northern slopes of the Apuane Alps are hugged by the Garfagnana, a deep valley formed by the river Serchio and its tributaries. Historically a region of net migration as villagers left to lead less-harsh lives on the plains, it's now revitalised thanks to tourism and the paper mills that whirl outside most valley towns. This is a tip-top spot for walking, horse riding and a host of other exhilarating outdoor pursuits.

Castelnuovo di Garfagnana, the main town in the valley, is the primary information source for the Alps. On the main square, the **Centro Visite Parco Alpi Apuane** (☎ 0583 64 42 42; www.parcapuane.it in Italian; Piazza delle Erbe 1; ☎ 9am–1pm & 3.30–5.30pm Mon–Sat, 9am–1pm & 3–7pm Sun Jun–Sep, shorter hr Oct–May) and **tourist office** (☎ 0583 64 10 07; www.garfagnanaturistica.info; Piazza delle Erbe; ☎ 9.30am–1pm & 3.30–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm & 4.30–7pm Sun Jun–Sep, closed Sun Oct–May) both sell hiking maps, have mountains of documentation on walking, mountain biking, horse riding and other activities as well as lists of *agriturismi* and *rifugi* well off any beaten track. Hardened walkers can meet their own kind at the local branch of **Club Alpin Italiano** (☎ 0583 6 55 77; Via Vittorio Emanuele 3; ☎ 9–10pm Thu, 6–7pm Sat).

Should you feel peckish when passing through the charming little spa town of **Bagni di Lucca**, nip into the **Circolo dei Forestieri** (☎ 0583 8 60 38; Piazza Jean Varraud 10; meals €15–25; ☎ closed lunch Mon & Tue Easter–Oct) for a splendid and excellent-value lunch.

Carrara

Marble Mountain is what Carrara is synonymous with. Indeed, gazing at the panorama of snowy-white mountain peaks looming large behind the town of Carrara, at the foothills of the Apuane Alps, you could be forgiven for thinking it is snow. Nothing more than a breathtaking illusion, it is in fact marble,

MARBLE MOUNTAIN

Here we are, 600m from the beginning of the tunnel, 600m from the end of it, 430m above sea level and 400m from the top. We are right in the middle of the mountain.

Cava di Fantiscritti tour guide

Zippering down a dank, wet, unlit tunnel in a dusty white minibus, grubby headlights blazing, driver incongruously dolled up in a shiny shocking-pink bomber jacket, it is all somewhat surreal. Five minutes into the pitch-black marble mountain, we are told to get out.

It is 16°C, foggy, damn dirty on foot (two Japanese had sensibly brought their wellies) and far from being a polished pearly white, it's grey – cold, wet, miserable grey. Rough-cut blocks, several metres long and almost as wide, are strewn about the place like toy bricks and marble columns prop up the 17m-high ceiling, above which a second gallery, another 17m, stands tall. The place is bigger than several football pitches, yet amazingly there is still plenty of marble mountain left for the five workers employed at Miseglia's **Cava di Fantiscritti**, 5km north of Carrara, to extract 10,000 tonnes of white marble a month. The current market price is €200 to €1000 per tonne, and Carrara's very best commands double that.

The hard graft – with the aid of water, mechanical diamond-cutting chains slicing through the rock like butter – is done in the cooler morning, leaving the afternoons free for tour groups (Marmo Tour; ☎ 339 765 74 70; adult/child €6/3; 🚶 25-min tour 3.30-7pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-7pm Sat) like us to slosh around. Marble dust is horribly fine; mix it with water and the goo is gross. Quarrying marble is definitely no holiday.

To learn how the Romans did it (the very hard way with chisels and axes), visit the small open-air **museum** (admission free; 🚶 9am-7pm), next to the souvenir shop across from the quarry entrance. Don't miss the B&W shots of marble blocks being precariously slid down the *lizza* (mountain pathway) to the bottom of the mountain, where 18 pairs of oxen would pull them to Carrara port for shipping elsewhere.

Should hunger beckon, zip to **Locanda Apuana** (☎ 0585 76 80 17; Via Comunale 1; meals €15; 🚶 Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) in Colonnata, 2km from Fantiscritti, for another taste of marble – *lardo di colonnata* (wafer-thin slices of local pork fat marinated in shallow marble vats). Then head back to Carrara for a well-spent afternoon at the **Museo del Marmo** (☎ 0585 84 57 46; Viale XX Settembre; admission free; 🚶 10am-6pm Mon-Sat May-Jun & Sep, 10am-8pm Mon-Sat Jul-Aug, 9am-5pm Oct-Apr), halfway between Carrara and Marina di Carrara. With descriptive panels in English, it has more marble in more varieties than you'll have ever seen and describes extraction from chisel-and-hammer days to the 21st century's high-powered industrial quarrying.

Oh, and don't wear black.

field upon field of it, in vast quarries that eat into the hills.

Excruciatingly mean to the environment as it is, sculptors worldwide still flock here to rummage through Carrara's jumble of blocks and cut-offs in search of the perfect piece. The texture and purity of Carrara's white marble is unrivalled and it was from here that Michelangelo selected marble for many of his masterpieces, *David* (actually sculpted from a dud veined block) included.

Bar the thrill of seeing its marble pavements, marble street benches and marble everything else, Carrara itself is pretty un riveting. Head straight to the **tourist office** (☎ 0585 84 41 36; Viale XX Settembre; 🚶 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr & May, 9am-1pm & 4-8pm or 9pm Jun-Aug, 9am-1pm & 3-5pm

Sep-Mar), opposite the stadium, to pick up a map marked with the only real item of note – the marble quarries (above), 5km north of town.

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; ostelloapuano@hotmail.com; Viale delle Pinete 237, Marina di Massa; dm €11, breakfast/packed lunch/dinner €1.60/7/9.50; 🚶 mid-Mar–mid-Oct) is a beautifully set HI-affiliated hostel slap bang next to the sand in a handsome house dating from the 1920s. Find it in Partaccia, which is just north of Marina di Massa. From the Carrara train station catch bus 53, marked Via Avenza Mare.

PIAZZA DEI MIRACOLI COMBINED TICKETS

Tickets to the Leaning Tower and cathedral are sold individually, but cost-cutting combined tickets are available for the rest of the Piazza dei Miracoli sights. A ticket covering one/two/three sights costs €5/6/8 and you can take your pick from the baptistry, Camposanto, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo and – for two or three sights – the cathedral. Tower aside (no under 8s), children aged under 10 are free.

Tickets are sold at three **ticket offices** (www.opapisa.it; Piazza dei Miracoli) on the main square: the central ticket office behind the Leaning Tower is the busiest; those inside the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo and entrance hall of the otherwise-closed Museo del Sinopie rarely have long queues.

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

Internet Planet (☎ 050 83 07 02; Piazza Cavallotti 3-4; per hr €3.50; ☎ 9am-midnight Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat & Sun)

Onda Blu (☎ 800 861 346; Via San Francesco 8a; ☎ 8am-10pm) Laundrette.

Post office (Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II)

Tourist office airport (☎ 050 50 37 00; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm & 6-10pm); Duomo (Piazza dei Miracoli; ☎ 050 56 04 64; www.pisa.turismo.toscana.it; ☎ 9am-6pm Mar-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Oct-Feb) Main tourist office near the Leaning Tower, inside Museo dell'Opera del Duomo; Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II 16 (☎ 050 4 22 91; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1.30pm Sat)

Sights

Pisa's central square, **Piazza dei Miracoli**, ranks as one of the world's loveliest. Set among its sprawling lawns is one of Europe's most extraordinary concentrations of Romanesque splendour: the cathedral, the baptistry and the Leaning Tower, all financed with the loot and booty brought back to the city after Pisa

beat the Arabs in Sicily. The piazza teems with people: students studying or at play, local workers eating lunch, and tourists, many (a fun one, this) getting snapped as they extend their arms t'ai chi-like so the shot suggests they're pushing the tower over.

LEANING TOWER

Pisa's **Leaning Tower** (☎ 050 387 22 10; www.opapisa.it/boxoffice; admission €15, with advance reservation €17; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Apr-mid-Jun & last 2wks Sep, 8.30am-11pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 9am-7pm Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb, 9am-6pm or 7pm Mar) is gravity defying.

Admission is limited to 40 people and is by guided tour. Book in advance (online or by telephone) or run straight to a ticket office when you arrive in Pisa to book your slot for later that day.

Visits – a hot climb up and down 300 occasionally slippery steps – last 30 minutes; late-evening summer visits proffer enchanting views of Pisa by night. Bags, including handbags, must be deposited at the free left-luggage desk next to the ticket office and children aged under 8 are not allowed up.

CATHEDRAL

The majesty of Pisa's **cathedral** (Piazza dei Miracoli; admission incl audioguide €2 Mar-Oct, free Nov-Feb; ☎ 10am-8pm Apr-Sep, 10am-7pm Oct, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Nov-Feb,

WHY THE LEANING TOWER LEANS

Welcome to one of the world's greatest architectural cock-ups. The cathedral's *campanile* (bell tower) first started to lean when its architect, Bonanno Pisano, had completed only three tiers. Shifting soil is the most favoured explanation and the 'leaning tower' continued to incline by an average of 1mm every year. Over the years several solutions to stop the lean were tried without success. Then in 1998, cables were wrapped around the 3rd storey and attached to A-frames. This held the tower in place while workers removed small portions of soil on the northern side to create a counter-subsidence. It did the trick and the famous lean lost 40cm. The lean is now 4.1m off the perpendicular (once it was 5m) but, more importantly, the slippage that first caused the tower to lean has finally been arrested.

10am-6pm or 7pm Mar, from 1pm Sun year-round) made it a model for Romanesque churches throughout Tuscany and even Sardinia. Begun in 1064, it's clad inside and out with alternating bands of dark green and cream marble that were to become characteristic of the Pisan-Romanesque style.

The main façade has four exquisite tiers of columns diminishing skywards. The vast interior has 68 columns in classical style. The bronze doors of the transept, facing the Leaning Tower, are by Bonanno Pisano. The 16th-century bronze doors of the main entrance were designed by the school of Giambologna to replace the wooden originals, destroyed in a fire in 1596, after which the interior was also mostly redecorated. Enjoy the depth of detail that Giovanni Pisano imparted to the vibrant early-14th-century marble pulpit in the north aisle, which he spent 10 years of his life working on. Above the altar, a striking mosaic of *Christ in Majesty*, completed by Cimabue in 1302, stares down upon visitors.

BAPTISTRY

The unusual round **battistero** (Piazza dei Miracoli; admission incl audioguide €5; ☎ 8am-8pm Apr-Sep, 9am-6pm or 7pm Mar & Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb) was started in 1153 by Diotisalvi, remodelled and continued by Nicola and Giovanni Pisano more than a century later and finally completed in the 14th century – hence the hybrid architectural styles. The lower level of arcades is in Pisan-Romanesque style and the pinnacled upper section and dome are Gothic. Inside, Nicola Pisano carved the beautiful pulpit (compare it with the one that his son, Giovanni, made for the cathedral), while in 1246 Guido da Como chiselled the octagonal white marble font, as big as a moderate swimming pool and used in its time for baptism by total immersion. The acoustics beneath the dome are remarkable; risk a low whisper and hear it resound. Climb the stairs to the gallery for a great overview.

CAMPOSANTO

Soil shipped from Calvary during the crusades – and reputed to reduce cadavers to skeletons within days – is said to lie within the white walls of this hauntingly beautiful **cemetery** (Piazza dei Miracoli; admission incl audioguide €5; ☎ 8am-8pm Apr-Sep, 9am-6pm or 7pm Mar & Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb), a beautiful final resting place for many prominent Pisans, arranged around a garden

in a cloistered quadrangle. Many of the more interesting sarcophagi are of Greco-Roman origin, recycled in the Middle Ages.

MUSEO DELL'OPERA DEL DUOMO

No museum provides a more striking overview of Piazza dei Miracoli's trio of architectural masterpieces than the **Museum of the Cathedral** (Piazza dei Miracoli; admission €5; ☎ 8am-8pm Apr-Sep, 9am-6pm or 7pm Mar & Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb), home to a profusion of artworks from the cathedral, tower and baptistry, including a magnificent ivory carving of *Madonna and Child* by Giovanni Pisano.

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, along with 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 graffiti decoration.

The piazza and *palazzo* are both named for the Knights of Santo Stefano, a religious and military order founded by Cosimo il Vecchio. Their church, **Chiesa di Santo Stefano dei Cavalieri** (☎ 050 58 08 14; Piazza dei Cavalieri 8; admission €1.30; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Sep, 11am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-5.30pm Sun Oct-Mar), was also designed by Vasari. **Chiesa di Santa Caterina** (Piazza Martiri della Libertà; ☎ 10.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 1-6.30pm Sun), north of Via San Lorenzo, is a fine example of Pisan-Gothic architecture and contains works by Nino Pisano.

Wander south to the area around Borgo Stretto, the city's medieval heart. East along the waterfront boulevard is the **Museo Nazionale di San Matteo** (☎ 050 54 18 65; Lungarno Mediceo; adult/concession €5/2; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sat, 8.30am-1.30pm Sun), a fine gallery that journeys from medieval ceramics to 12th- and 13th-century Pisan painting and early Renaissance sculpture.

Cross the Ponte di Mezzo and walk west to **Chiesa di Santa Maria della Spina** (Lungarno Gambacorti; adult/concession €1.50/1; ☎ 10am-5.45pm Tue-Fri, 10am-6.45pm Sat Mar-Oct, 10am-2pm Tue-Sun Nov-Feb), a fine example of Pisan-Gothic style, built in

the early 14th century to house a thorn from Christ's crown.

Enchanting rooftop views spill from **Torre Guelfa** (☎ 050 2 14 41; Piazza Tersanaia; admission €2; 🕒 3-7pm Fri-Sun Mar-Oct, 2-5pm Sat & Sun, every 2nd Sun of month 10am-1pm & 3-5pm Nov-Feb), part of the old citadel a few paces west of Chiesa di Santa Maria della Spina (a combined ticket covering admission to both costs €2.50) on the banks of the Arno. Built in the 15th century, the tower was completely destroyed during WWII but rebuilt in 1956. Trawl up 200 steps to reach the top.

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. The night before on 16 June, Pisa celebrates the **Luminaria**, when some 50,000 candles and blazing torches glow, making the night-time city bright with light.

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 Marinarie** (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. Although usually held in June, it has on occasion been delayed till as late as September.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Camping Torre Pendente (☎ 050 56 17 04; Via delle Cascine 86; 2 adults, tent & car €26.50; 🕒 Apr-mid-Oct; 🚻) Nearly 1km northwest of Piazza dei Miracoli, this camping ground isn't Tuscany's most attractive, but it has a supermarket, restaurant and small pool.

Ostello della Gioventù (☎ 050 89 06 22; Via Pietrasantina 15; dm €18) This is a rambling non-HI hostel, north of the city centre, beside a murky stream where mosquitoes run riot in summer. Take bus 3 from the train station or town centre.

MIDRANGE

Royal Victoria Hotel (☎ 050 94 01 11; www.royalvictoria.it; Lungarno Pacinotti 12; s/d without bathroom €70/80, s/d/tr/q with bathroom €118/138/147/152; (P) 🕒) 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. As part of its ecologically friendly policy, it rents bicycles to guests for €5 per day.

Hotel Francesco (☎ 050 55 41 09; www.hotelfrancesco.com; Via Santa Maria 129; s €75-90, d €85-100, tr €115-135; 🕒 🚻) Don't let the knight in armour next door put you off: this hotel on Pisa's main bar/restaurant drag boasts a great terrace out back with pretty purple wisteria and (from the far-end table) a view of the Leaning Tower! Rooms 201 and 202 open onto a shared balcony facing the cathedral.

Hotel Il Giardino (☎ 050 56 21 01; www.hotelilgiardino.pisa.it; Piazza Manin 1; s/d/tr/q incl breakfast €80/100/110/120; (P) 🕒) A gaggle of souvenir traders hit you the second you walk out the door, but the Garden Hotel – an old Medici staging post the other side of the cathedral square wall – does have a peaceful garden terrace to breakfast on with a baptistry-dome view. Décor is art-happy.

TOP END

Hotel Relais dell'Orologio (☎ 050 83 03 61; www.hotelrelaisoroologio.com; Via della Faggiola 12-14; d incl breakfast €200-800; (P) 🕒) Something of a wedding reception and honeymoon venue, Pisa's dreamy five-star hotel occupies a tastefully restored 14th-century fortified tower house, tucked away in a quiet street. Some rooms have original frescoes and the flowery patio out the back makes a welcome retreat from the crowds. Garage parking is pricey.

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.

Trattoria della Faggiola (☎ 050 55 61 79; Via della Faggiola 1; meals €20; 🕒 lunch Mon-Thu, lunch & dinner Fri & Sat) An excellent value, locally loved spot, this traditional trattoria with brick interior and a line-up of lovingly tended potted plants outside is delightful for lunch. The menu, chalked up on a board outside, is strictly Italian and offers a straightforward choice of three or four dishes per course.

Antica Trattoria il Campano (☎ 050 58 05 85; Via Cavalca 19; meals €30; 🕒 lunch & dinner Fri-Tue, dinner Thu) The adventurous Tuscan menu – pasta with leeks in cod sauce, octopus salad or beef

marinated with tomatoes, almonds and hazelnuts – at this longtime trattoria has the added advantage of being translated in English. Of both the dining areas – under vaulted arches down or beneath bare rafters up – downstairs is the more elegant.

La Grotta (☎ 050 57 81 05; Via San Francesco 103; meals €30; ☎ Mon-Sat) La Grotta is a cavelike place with sack-cloth curtains that serves up hearty portions of good old-fashioned Tuscan fare. The menu is simple but changes monthly to reflect the season; produce is fresher than fresh.

Caffè Federico Salza (☎ 050 58 02 44; Borgo Stretto 46; salads €7, pasta €7, mains €8.50-13.50; ☎ 8am-8.30pm daily Apr-Oct, Tue-Sun Nov-Mar) Cakes and chocolates to die for are the speciality of this café and *chocolatier* popular with Pisa sophisticates since 1898.

Caffetteria Betsabea (Piazza Dante Alighieri 7; salads & pasta from €5; ☎ 7.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat) Students from the political sciences faculty *luurvvv* this simple café, which dishes up 20 types of well-stuffed *facace*, meal-sized salads and loads of different dressed pasta – all served on wicker platters – as well as drinks from dawn to dusk.

La Bottega del Gelato (☎ 050 57 54 67; Piazza Garibaldi 11; one/two/three scoops €1.30/1.80/2.50; ☎ Thu-Tue) Sit at Garibaldi's feet and lick a seriously creamy gelato from the most popular ice-cream parlour in town.

There's an animated open-air morning **food market** (Piazza delle Vettovaglie), off Borgo Stretto.

Drinking

Stylish bars flank Via Carducci Oberdan and Borgo Stretto. Or head south of the river where casual student hang-outs abound.

Op Art Café (www.opartcafe.it; Via San Francesco 90; ☎ 7pm-1am Wed, Thu & Sun, 7pm-2am Fri & Sat) Art exhibitions add another dimension to this modern wine bar where a designer set meets at *apéritif* time – great buffet!

Temple Bar (Piazza Cairoli; ☎ 6pm-1am Mon-Thu, 6pm-2am Fri & Sat) This popular Irish pub paying homage to Dublin's cultural quarter touts tables and chairs on one of Pisa's cutest squares and conveniently neighbours a fine *yoghurteria*, open pub hours, in the shape of Coppella.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Pisa International Airport Galileo Galilei (☎ 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.

Daily destinations in the UK include London Gatwick (British Airways and Easyjet); London Stansted, Liverpool and East Midlands (all Ryanair), Bristol (Easyjet); Edinburgh, Glasgow/Prestwick, Leeds/Bradford Manchester and Newcastle (all jet2.com); and Coventry, Doncaster/Sheffield and Bournemouth (all Thomsonfly).

BUS

From its hub on Piazza Sant'Antonio, Pisan bus company **CPT** (Compagnia Pisana Trasporti; ☎ 800 012 773; www.cpt.pisa.it in Italian; Piazza Sant'Antonio) runs buses to/from Volterra (€4.80, two hours, up to 10 daily) and Livorno (€2.40, 45 minutes, half-hourly). To get to Florence, Lucca and Pistoia take the train.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

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

TRAIN

Pisa is connected by rail to Florence and is also on the Rome-La Spezia train line. Destinations include Florence (€5.20, 1¼ hours, 40 daily), Livorno (€1.70, 15 minutes, hourly), Pistoia (€4.20, 1¼ hours, five direct daily) and Lucca (€2.20, 25 minutes, around 20 daily).

Getting Around

For Pisa airport, take a train to/from Stazione Pisa Centrale (€1.10, five minutes, 15 per day) or the LAM Rossa (red) line (€0.90, 10 minutes, every 10 minutes) which passes through the city centre and train station on its way to/from the airport.

Large, pay **car parks** (www.pisamo.it in Italian; per hr €1.50) abound around the heart of Pisa. There's a huge free one about 2km north of Piazza dei Miracoli, with frequent shuttle buses to the centre. Cross your fingers that the cavernous subterranean car park being gouged out beneath Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II – a building site of several years already – really will be up and running by 2009.

Rent a bike to pedal about for €10 per day from **MaxiRent** (☎ 050 220 00 53; Via Cesare Battisti 13; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat).

For a taxi call ☎ 050 54 16 00.

LIVORNO

pop 156,000

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 a lack of aesthetics that only a sea captain could love. Its bizarre anglicised name, Leghorn, is luckily rarely used – and only then by impish guidebooks.

Orientation

From the main train station on Piazza Dante, 1km east of the city, walk westwards along Viale Carducci, Via de Larderel, then Via Grande into central Piazza Grande, Livorno's main square.

Information

Caffè Grande (Via Grande 59; internet per hr €5;

☎ 7am-11pm daily Jun-Sep, 7am-11pm Wed-Mon Oct-May) Has four computers upstairs.

Frag Planet (Scali del Corso 9; internet per hr €2;

☎ 10am-1pm & 3.30-8pm, closed Sat & Mon mornings)

Niagara (Borgo dei Cappuccini 13) Laundrette.

Post office (Via Cairoli 46)

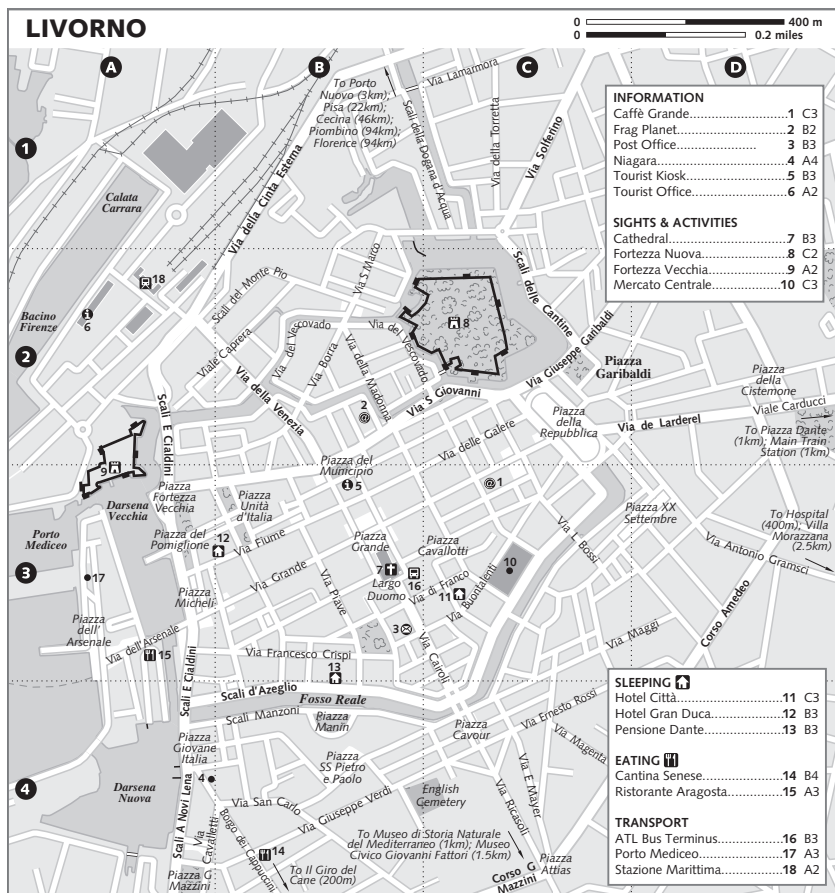
Tourist Kiosk (☎ 0586 20 46 11; www.costadegli

etruschi.it; Piazza del Municipio; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar)

Tourist office (☎ 0586 89 53 20; ☎ Jun-Sep) 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 fish section, which should charge admission to view its oddities.

The **Fortezza Nuova** (admission free), in an area known because of its small canals as *Piccola Venezia* ('Little Venice' – as if), was built for the Medici family in the late 16th century. 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), 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; Via Roma 234; adult/child €10/5; ☎ 9am-1pm Tue-Sat, 3-7.30pm Tue, Thu & Sun) is an exhaustive, first-rate museum experience for the natural sciences. Expanded rooms will open in 2008. The highlight of the permanent collection is a 20m-long common whale skeleton called 'Annie'.

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 Italian impressionist Macchiaioli school, led by Giovanni Fattori.

The city's unspectacular **cathedral** is just off Piazza Grande.

Sleeping

Villa Morazzana (☎ 0586 50 00 76; www.villamorazzana.it; Via Curiel 110; hostel dm/d €16/40, hotel s/d/tr €38/60/90, ☎ ☑) A HI-affiliated youth hostel and informal hotel are housed in this attractive 18th-century villa with a huge rear garden. Its Ristorante Lavilla (open for dinner Thursday to Saturday) offers gourmet cuisine and keeps a great cellar of wines and whiskies. Unfortunately, the setting and friendly staff here are overshadowed by the rough rooms, particularly the hostel's dark dorms. Bus 3 runs hourly from Piazza Grande. Driving, take the Montanero exit from the A12.

Pensione Dante (☎ 0586 89 43 70; 1st fl, Scali d'Azeglio 28; s/d €35/41) Overlooking a canal and run by a cheerful old couple, this place has eight large simply furnished rooms with new beds

and corridor bathrooms. It has a friendly, rough-and-tumble family feel about it and is not a bad option if you're euro-economising. There's no breakfast, but the coffee-maker is always on.

Hotel Gran Duca (☎ 0586 89 10 24; www.granduca.it; Piazza Micheli 16; s/d €85/130; ☎ ☑ ☑) Built into the old protective walls of the port, the paint was still drying from renovations when we visited. Fully equipped from top to bottom, there's a Jacuzzi, Turkish bath, fitness centre and wi-fi among the booty. It's opposite the port and has a decent restaurant (meals €32 to €37).

Hotel Città (☎ 0586 88 34 95; www.hotelcitta.it; Via di Franco 32; s €55-89, d €75-120; ☎ ☑ ☑) Family owned and friendly, this is a tempting three-star option in the heart of town. It looks unprepossessing from the outside but rooms, though smallish, are just fine and come equipped with fridge, safe and new bathrooms.

Eating

Il Giro del Cane (☎ 0586 81 25 60; Borgo dei Cappuccini 314; meals €33-38; ☎ Mon-Sat dinner only, closed Aug) A Slow Food–endorsed eatery, serving up classic and delicious Livorno seafood dishes with the occasional creative zap.

Ristorante Aragosta (☎ 0586 89 53 95; Piazza dell'Arsenale 6; meals €28; ☎ Mon-Sat) Right on the waterfront, Aragosta is the place to head for seafood. A nondescript exterior masks inner pleasures, mainly of a fishy kind.

our pick Cantina Senese (☎ 0586 89 02 39; Borgo dei Cappuccini 95; meals from €25; ☎ Mon-Sat) A popular, unpretentious local eatery that's also fabulous for seafood. Squeeze onto one of the long wooden tables and, if you pass by on Friday, try the Livornese speciality *cacciucco di pesce*, a rich fish soup served with garlic bread.

Load up with fresh produce at Livorno's magnificent **Mercato Centrale** (p511).

Getting There & Away

BOAT

Livorno is a major port. Regular departures for Sardinia and Corsica leave from Calata Carrara, beside Stazione Marittima. Some ferries depart from Porto Mediceo, a smaller terminal near Piazza dell'Arsenale, and others 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 €25 to €32, four hours, two/three services per week, daily in summer) and Sardinia (deck class to Golfo Aranci, near Olbia, €25 to €37, six hours express, nine hours regular ferry, four services per week, daily in summer).

Lloyd Sardegna (☎ 0565 22 23 00; www.lloyd Sardegna.it) Daily ferries to Sardinia (Olbia; €29, 11 hours).

Moby (☎ 199 30 30 40; www.moby.it) Has services to Bastia, Corsica (€15 to €30, three to four hours) and Olbia, Sardinia (€24 to €50, eight to 12 hours).

Toremarr (☎ 199 12 31 99; www.toremarr.it in Italian) Daily services to Isola di Capraia (€10.50, 2½ hours).

BUS

ATL (☎ 0586 84 74 08) buses depart from Largo Duomo for Cecina (€2.90, one hour, half-hourly), Piombino (€6.20, 2¼ hours, six daily) and Pisa (€2.30, 45 minutes, half-hourly).

TRAIN

Livorno is on the Rome–La Spezia line and is also connected to Florence and Pisa. Destinations include Rome (€17.90 to €26, three to four hours, 12 daily), Florence (€6.10, 1½ hours, 16 daily) and Pisa (€1.70, 15 minutes, hourly).

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 30,100

Napoleon would think twice about fleeing from Elba were he exiled here today. Though it's a bit more congested now than when he was charitably dumped here 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, all supplemented by some very fine cuisine.

While the dismal remains of the once pre-vailling iron-ore mining industry groan on, the inevitable dominance of tourism has motored ahead. Over a million visitors a year take the one-hour ferry cruise out here, and in Portoferraia, 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 – **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 del 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** run by Il Genio del Bosco (☎ 0565 93 08 37; www.geniodelbosco.it) leads trekking, biking and kayaking excursions around Elba, Capraia, Giglio and Pianosa.

Il Libraio (☎ 0565 91 71 35; Calata Mazzini 10, Portoferraia) 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 Portoferraia are the most frequent, while some call in at Rio Marina, Marina di Campo and Porto Azzurro.

Boats are run by **Moby** (☎ 199 30 30 40; www.moby.it) and **Toremarr** (☎ 199 12 31 99; www.toremarr.it in Italian). Unless it is a summer weekend or the middle of August, when queues can form, simply buy a ticket at the port. Fares (€6.50 to €9.50 per person, €20 to €49 per small car) vary according to the season.

Toremarr also operates a passenger-only hydrofoil service (€10, 40 minutes) all year round, and, between June and August, a fast vehicle and passenger service (two people/car from €69.20 return) to Portoferraia.

Portoferraia

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 makes up for the squeeze.

ELBA TREK

The compact size and myriad transport options of Elba mean that accessing worthwhile walks is a snap. The bountiful website www.elbalink.it and the tourist office provide satisfactory information for well-marked trekking options, though walkers wanting to go where no one has gone before – on *that* particular morning, Elba is only so large – should consider picking up an absurdly detailed trekking map at Il Libraio in Portoferraio (p513).

A few of the more appealing, well-trodden walks include:

- **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.
- **La Parata to Le Panche** A short but resolve-testing two-hour walk along a ridge, through an oak forest, past the hermitage of Santa Caterina and the castle of Volterraio.

INFORMATION

Associazione Albergatori Isola d'Elba (☎ 0565 91 55 55; www.albergatorielbani.it; Calata Italia 20) The island's professional hotel association can reserve accommodation.

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

Info Park Are@ (☎ 0565 91 88 09; Viale Elba; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30pm-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 Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Sun Easter-Oct, 8am-6pm Mon-Sat Oct-Easter) 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, 9am-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, 9am-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.

Acquaviva (☎ 0565 91 91 03; www.campingacquaviva.it; person/tent/car €12/13/3; ☎ mid-Mar-mid-Oct) About 4km west of town is Portoferraio's nearest camp site. A great choice for sunsets over the sea, it's about as close as you can get to the beach without getting your feet wet.

Albergo Ape Elbana (☎ 0565 91 42 45; www.apelbana.it; Salita de' Medici 2; s €40-70, d €60-100; (P) (♿)) In the old town, this hotel overlooks Piazza della Repubblica (where guests can park for free). This 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 looking onto the piazza.

Villa Ombrosa (☎ 0565 91 43 63; www.villaombrosa.it; Via De Gasperi 3; s €52-126, d €78-230; (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 Ghiaie, it also has its own small private beach. Half-board, considerably more creative than many hotels' bland buffet fare, is obligatory in summer.

our pick La Libertaria (☎ 0565 91 49 78; Calata Matteotti 12; meals €30; ☎ Apr-Oct) In the unlikely event that nothing on the menu turns your crank, the kitchen is open to requests! 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.

our pick Cafesccondido (☎ 340 340 08 81; Via del Carmine 65; meals €25; ☎ Mon-Sat) Yes, two 'our pick' restaurants in one place, we just couldn't decide. Way up the hill, toward Fortezza Falcone, the fronting raucous café gives no sign of the superb restaurant in the back. The table wine is surprisingly decent and the chocolate mousse will make you wish weeping with happiness in public was socially acceptable.

GETTING AROUND

Stream around Elba by mountain bike or scooter. Typical high season daily rates are city bikes €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), one of several car-rental outlets; also rents bikes, scooters and even kayaks.

Elba's bus company, **ATL** (☎ 0565 91 43 92), runs an efficient trans-island service. Pick up a timetable from the main **bus station** (Viale Elba, Portoferraio). From Portoferraio (the bus terminal 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 is €19.

In Portoferraio, call ☎ 0565 91 51 12 for a cab.

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.

Casa Lupi (☎ /fax 0565 9 91 43; Località Ontanelli 35; s €30-42, d €45-70; ☎ closed Jan-early Mar; ☎) This is about half a kilometre inland on the road to Marciana. Beside a vineyard, with a garden of peach trees and rose bushes, it's a small hotel in peaceful surroundings. Rooms are no-frills basic but comfortable and clean.

our pick Osteria del Piano (☎ 0565 90 72 92; Via Provinciale 24; meals €29; ☎ Apr-Oct), about halfway between Portoferraio and Marciana Marina, on the road just outside Procchio, has an open-plan kitchen that serves up some aston-

ishing concoctions, such as black-and-white spaghetti in a lobster 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. Try, for something special, the *spaghetto al sugo d'astice* (spaghetti with lobster sauce).

Around Marciana Marina

A twisting 4km ascent brings you to the attractive inland village of **Poggio**, with its steep, cobbled alleys and stunning views of Marciana Marina and the coast.

Publius (☎ 0565 9 92 08; meals €35-40; ☎ closed Mon, Dec-Feb), at the northern entrance to the village, is the place to spill money for a great meal. The plunging views down to the coast should keep your mind off the commensurate steep prices.

Some 750m south of the nearby village of Marciana, a **cable lift** (☎ 0565 90 10 20; one way/return €10/15; ☎ Easter-Nov), with open-barred cabins that look like parrot cages, operates in summer and whisks you almost to the summit of Monte Capanne with views, on a clear day, as far as Corsica.

Marina di Campo

Marina di Campo, on the south side of the island, is Elba's second-largest town. Curling around a picturesque bay, its small fishing harbour adds spunk to what is otherwise very much a holiday town. Its beach of bright, white sand pulls in holidaymakers by the thousands; coves further west, although less spectacular, are more tranquil.

There's a seasonal **tourist office** (☎ 0565 97 79 69; Piazza dei Granatieri; ☎ Jun-Sep) in town.

Thomas Hotel (☎ 0565 97 77 32; www.elbathomashotel.com; Viale degli Etruschi 32; per person €32-62; ☎ mid-Mar-Oct; Ⓟ), barely 100m away, is a three-star hotel, attractively set among pine trees. Popular with scuba divers, it's only a short walk from the beach and is one of the more affordable options in the town itself.

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.

Albergo Villa Italia (☎ 0565 9 51 19; www.villaitaliahotel.it; Viale Italia 41; d/tr/q €80/90/105; ☎ mid-Mar-Oct; Ⓟ ☎ ☎) is a friendly, family-run place. Its

12 clean bedrooms are small but spruce and about the cheapest in town. It's on a fairly noisy road yet scarcely 200m from the beach. Wi-fi is free.

Ristorante Cutty Sark (☎ 0565 95 78 21; Piazza del Mercato 25; meals €32-37; 📞 closed Tue in winter) has a mainly fish menu with a couple of concessions to carnivores. Savour the *raviolini all'Ammiraglia*, large ravioli filled with courgettes (zucchini) and shrimp meat and bathed in a shrimp and tomato sauce.

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.

CENTRAL TUSCANY

Buildings the colour of ripe corn, hills with gentle curves and folds scored here and there by steep ravines, as scarred and eroded as any cowboy badlands; here in the countryside beats the heart of rural Tuscany.

A region boasting Italy's most famous wine, outstanding abbeys, spas, hill-top towns and of course, Siena, whose remarkable comeback after a centuries-long 'time out' enforced by Florence, Central Tuscany just begs to be seen.

IL CHIANTI

Il Chianti, as the gentle hills and valleys between Florence and Siena are called, produces some of the country's best-marketed wines; it's not called Chiantishire for nothing. The most well known is Chianti Classico, a blend of white and red grapes, which is 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 Il Chianti, a wealthy pocket studded with Romanesque churches known as *pievi* and the castles of Florentine and Senese warlords.

Bus-hopping is feasible, but your own wheels – two or four – are the only real way to discover the region. It is also gentle walking country: pick up a copy of *Chianti Classico: Val di Pesa-Val d'Elsa*, a map at 1:25,000 with hiking trails superimposed.

Greve in Chianti

Around 20km south of Florence on the SS222, Greve is the first good base for exploring. Its unusual triangular Piazza Matteotti, surrounded by porticoes, is an interesting provincial version of a Florentine *piazza*. At its heart stands a statue of Giovanni da Verrazzano, a local boy who made good and discovered

STRADA DEI VINI CHIANTI RUFINA

Forget Chianti Classico: blaze an invisible green wine-tasting trail instead through Chianti Rufina land, the smallest of Il Chianti's seven classified wine-growing areas, covering a privileged pocket of 12,482 hectares east of Florence. Dry and red with hints of violets, this wine has been overshadowed by its Classico big sister for centuries.

Yet international wine critics constantly rank its best-known estates – **Fattoria Selvapiana** (☎ 055 836 98 48; www.selvapiana.it; Via Selvapiana, Rufina) and **Castello di Nipozzano** (☎ 055 2 71 41; www.frescobaldi.it) tended by Florence's famous Frescobaldi family (yep, they're up there with the Antinori clan) – among Tuscany's best. The Frescobaldi also tend **Castello di Pomino**, Castello DOC infamously being recognised by Cosimo III in 1716 as one of the four best wine-making spots in Tuscany.

An outstanding *agriturismo* to stay within this little explored wine zone is **Podere Castellare** (☎ 055 832 60 82, 3204 079 592; www.poderecastellare.it; Via Casa Spasse, Diacetto Pelago; d incl breakfast €58-78 per person; 📞 📧 📷), an essential stop for design buffs with its funky design-driven space fashioned in an old farmhouse, among olive groves and saffron cultivation. Also ideal for those wanting to flee Florence at the end of the day, it is about 7km from Pontassieve train station, from where there are frequent trains to Florence (20 minutes). Arriving by car, drive past the eastern end of Diacetto village and turn left.

New York harbour. He's commemorated there by the Verrazano Narrows bridge (the good captain lost a 'z' from his name somewhere in the mid-Atlantic), which links Staten Island to Brooklyn and is printed in the soul and on the soles of anyone who's done the New York marathon.

For a one-stop wine-taste and shop in Il Chianti, there is no better place than **Le Cantine di Greve in Chianti** (☎ 055 854 64 04; www.lecantine.it; Piazza delle Cantine; ☹ 10am-7pm), a commercial *enoteca* with a small wine museum and more than 1200 varieties of Chianti to try and buy. Greve's **annual wine fair**, held during the first or second week of September, is another unrivalled tasting fest.

Alternatively, head 3km north to 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), a castle of an estate where the best of Tuscany – Chianti Classico, *vin santo*, grappa, honey, olive oil and balsamic vinegar – has been crafted for centuries. Tour its historical wine cellars and gardens then taste four different Verrazzano wines (one hour, €16) or go the whole hog and lunch on five estate-produced courses in the company of five different wines (three hours, €42).

The **tourist office** (☎ 055 854 62 87; Piazza Matteotti 11; ☹ 9am-1pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat) 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 2 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.

SLEEPING

Fattoria di Rignana (☎ 055 85 20 65; www.rignana.it; Val di Rignana 15, Rignana; d €95-105, noble villa per wk €3500; P, ♿, ♿) Dip in the infinity swimming pool with sweeping Tuscan views and pretend you're in paradise at this farmstead and noble villa (which sleeps eight) in Rignana, 10km west of Greve in Chianti. Every last detail – from the recycled wine-barrel flooring in the 17th-century frescoed noble villa with two frescoed apartments to the more rustic *fattoria* rooms, once used to store vinegar, *vin santo* and so on – has been thoughtfully renovated using original materials from the estate that Italian-German owner Cosimo Gericke inherited from his father in the 1990s.

Villa Vignamaggio (☎ 055 85 46 61; www.vignamaggio.it; Via Petriolo 5; d €150-200; P, ♿, ♿) 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 S222 south for 2km and turn left towards Lamole.

Albergo Giovanni da Verrazzano (☎ 055 85 31 89; www.albergoverrazzano.it; Piazza Matteotti 28; s/d/tr/q incl breakfast €93/118/155/190; ☹ Mar-Jan; ♿) Run by the same family for three generations. It also has a restaurant and cooking school, and is in Greve's central square.

EATING

Antica Macelleria Falorni (☎ 055 85 30 29; www.falorni.it; Piazza Matteotti 71; ☹ 8am-1pm & 3.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat, from 10am Sun) The two huge chopping tables outside (please don't sit on them) mark the entrance to this centuries-old butchers shop, famed for its quality meat, including traditional *cinta senese* pork.

our pick **La Cantinetta di Rignana** (☎ 055 85 26 01; www.lacantinettadirignana.it; Rignana; meals €25-35; ☹ Wed-Mon) Wild boar carpaccio (raw), warm gooey oven-baked *tomino* (a type of cheese) with locally gathered mushrooms or a slab of meat grilled above an open fire are highlights at this incredible eating spot with a quintessential Tuscan view, 10km west of Greve in Rignana. Complete your feast with a shot of cypress- or juniper berry-flavoured grappa. Wow.

Castellina

The cylindrical silos at the entry to Castellina 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

GET LOST

Chuck this guide and discover Il Chianti on the hoof. Your only companion: a copy of the life-savingly detailed road map *Le Strade del Gallo Nero* (The Road of the Black Cock; 1:80,000), marked up with wineries and every last back road. Buy it for €2.50 at Greve in the Chianti tourist office...even if you don't want to get lost.

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/child €3/2; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Tue-Mon Apr-Oct, 11am-6pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar).

The **tourist office** (☎ 0577 74 13 92; www.essenceof.tuscany.it; Via Ferruccio 26; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-6pm daily Mar-Nov, 10am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Sat Dec & Feb) rents bikes, has an internet station, arranges cookery classes and sports an action-packed agenda of half- and full-day guided tours.

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 incl breakfast €90-140; ☎ Mar-Oct; (P) (🍷)) is a 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 (around €25). To get there, head north along the SS222 from Castellina and turn left to Pietrafitta.

our pick! **Al Gallopapa** (☎ 0577 74 29 39; www.gallopapa.com; Via del Volte 14-16; lunch €20, dinner €40-60, Tuscan tasting menu €65; ☎ Tue-Sun) is in an appealing stone cellar with a piano to tinkle on, and is lovely in any season. Its tables on stone-topped Via del Volte are a summer delight, as are the atmospheric dinners it serves after wine-tasting aperitifs at a nearby wine-producing estate as part of its innovative **Stelle in Cantina** (Stars in the Cellar; www.stelleincantina.it in Italian; €80; advance reservations only ☎ 7.30pm Thu May-Aug) cultural programme.

Radda in Chianti

The tourist hot spot in Il Chianti, surprisingly souvenir-shop-laden Radda sits 11km east of Castellina. Shields and escutcheons add a dash of drama to the façade of 16th-century **Palazzo del Podestà** (Piazza Ferrucci), facing the church on the main square. **Enoteca Toscana** (☎ 0577 73 88 45; Via Roma 29) is the place to taste and buy local wine and olive oil.

Or head 6km north to the hill-top hamlet of **Castello di Volpaia** (☎ 055 73 80 66; www.volpaia.it; Piazza della Cisterna 1, Volpaia), where wine, olive oil and vinegar have been made for aeons. Buy some in its *enoteca* or enjoy a glass over lunch in its *osteria*. Should walking be more to your taste, pick up the booklet in the wine

shop detailing 25-minute to three-hour walks around Volpaia.

Radda **tourist office** (☎ 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) has more information on walking in the area, including several pretty half-day walks from Radda.

Castello di Volpaia has farmhouses and apartments to rent on its estate, as well as an inn with top-end doubles; see its website for details.

Palazzo hotels on Radda's main pedestrian street:

Palazzo San Niccolò (☎ 0577 73 56 66; www.hotel.sanniccolo.com; Via Roma 16; d incl breakfast €120-180; ☎ Feb-Dec; (P) (🍷) (🍷)) Four star.

Palazzo Leopoldo (☎ 0577 73 56 05; www.palazzo.leopoldo.it; Via Roma 33; d incl breakfast €160-230; (P) (🍷) (🍷) (🍷)) Beautiful view from its restaurant terrace.

Contining south to Siena, nip into 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) for a walk on the wild art side around this vast open-air sculpture park, 12km northeast of Siena in Pieveciata.

SIENA

pop 54,400

Historic adversaries, the Siena-Florence rivalry continues to this day, as 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, obviously).

One of Italy's most enchanting cities, Siena's medieval centre bristles with majestic buildings. Its profusion of churches and small museums harbour a wealth of artwork, though equally your day can be effectively filled by simply wandering the snarled lanes of the historic centre, a Unesco World Heritage Site, spending nary a euro on admission fees – or untold hours standing in queues.

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

SIENA

0 0 400 m
0 0.2 miles

A **B** **C** **D**

1 **2** **3** **4** **5** **6**

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it wasn't until the 1st century BC, when the Romans established a military colony there called Sena Julia, that it began to grow into a proper town.

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 Sienese-Gothic style that give the city its striking appearance, including lasting monuments such as the cathedral, the Palazzo Comunale and Il Campo itself.

The Sienese school of painting had its origins at this time with Guido da Siena 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.

Siena was home to Santa Caterina, one of Italy's most famous saints. But saints don't make money. Today Siena relies on tourism for its prosperity and the success of its Monte dei Paschi di Siena bank, founded in 1472 and now one of the city's largest employers.

In 1966 Siena was the first European city to banish motor traffic from its heart. To stroll

its arteries, unclogged by carbon monoxide and unthreatened by speeding vehicles, scooters notwithstanding, is not the least of the town's pleasures.

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 semicircles around Il Campo may confuse you. 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.

If the complimentary tourist office map is not adequate, invest in a copy of the *Siena* (Litografia Artistica Cartografia; €5.50) map at 1:7000 and with a street index.

Information

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

Internet Train (Via di Città 121; Via di Pantaneto 57; per hr €4; ☎ 8am-8pm Sun-Fri) A popular café with cables for laptop hook-ups.

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) Has a prepaid discount card scheme for regular customers.

Onda Blu (Via del Casato di Sotto 17; ☎ 8am-10pm) Laundrette.

Post office (Piazza Matteotti 1)

Tourist office (☎ 0577 28 05 51; www.terresiena.it; Piazza del Campo 56; ☎ 9am-7pm) Helps to reserve accommodation.

Wash & Dry (Via di Pantaneto 38; ☎ 8am-10pm)

Sights

IL CAMPO

Resembling a colossal, medieval bathroom sink, the sloping Piazza del 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. The square'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). The original panels by Jacopo della Quercia are severely weathered and those that clad the fountain are reproductions.

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, 10am-4pm Nov-mid-Mar), 102m high, completed in 1297.

The lower level of the *palazzo*'s façade 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-6.15pm mid-Mar-Oct, 10am-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 his 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 – maybe there's a message there – privations and trials of those subject to bad rule. The chapel has delightful frescoes by Taddeo di Bartolo depicting the life of the Virgin.

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 Papesse (€11, valid for two days)
- Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana, Crypt, Oratorio di San Bernardino, Museo Diocesano (€10 valid for three days)
- Museo Civico, Santa Maria della Scala, Palazzo Papesse, Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana, Battistero di San Giovanni, Museo Diocesano, Chiesa di Sant'Agostino and Oratorio di San Bernardino – the bumper bundle though not including Torre del Mangia (€17, valid for seven days)

CATHEDRAL

The **cathedral** (☎ 0577 4 73 21; Piazza del Duomo; admission €3; ☎ 10.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 1.30-6.30pm Sun Mar-Oct, 10.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 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 façade 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.

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 7 to 22 August each year.

Other draw cards include the exquisitely crafted marble and porphyry pulpit by Nicola Pisano, aided by his equally talented son, Giovanni. Also seek out the bronze statue of St John the Baptist by Donatello, in a chapel off the north transept.

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; Piazza del Duomo 8; admission €6; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mar-May & Sep-Nov,

9.30am-8pm Jun-Aug, 10am-5pm Nov-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 façade. 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 top of the façade of the putative Nuovo Duomo.

CRYPT

Just north of the cathedral and down a flight of steps is the **crypt** (admission incl audio guide €6; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm), 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 square metres worth, depicting several biblical stories, including the Passion of Jesus and the Crucifixion.

BAPTISTRY

Opposite the crypt is the **battistero** (Piazza San Giovanni; admission €3; ☎ 9.30am-7pm mid-Mar-Sep, 9am-6pm Oct, 10.30am-5pm Nov-mid-Mar).

While the baptistry's Gothic façade 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, 10.30am-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; ☎ 8.15am-7.50pm Tue-Sat, 8.15am-1.15pm 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

Within this imposing **church** (Piazza San Domenico; ☎ 7.30am-1pm & 3-6.30pm), Santa Caterina di Siena took her vows. In the **Cappella di Santa Caterina** are frescoes by Sodoma depicting events in her life – and her head, in a 15th-century tabernacle above the altar. She 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 Siennese artists, including Sodoma.

OTHER CHURCHES & PALAZZI

Loggia dei Mercanti, 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 die Servi), with frescoes by Pietro Lorenzetti in a chapel off the north transept, and 14th-century **Porta Romana**.

On the south side and worth a detour is **Chiesa di Sant'Agostino** (Prato di Sant'Agostino; admission €2.50; ☎ 11am-1.30pm & 2-5.30pm mid-Mar-Oct). The second altar on the south aisle has a superb *Adoration of the Crucifix* by Perugino, while the Piccolomini chapel's jewel is Sodoma's *Adoration of the Magi*.

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 Tantucci**, 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 **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; 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

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

Two other reputable Italian language schools with supplementary cultural and culinary options:

Scuola Leonardo da Vinci (☎ 0577 24 90 97; www.scuoleleonardo.com; Via del Paradiso 16)

Società Dante Alighieri (☎ 0577 4 95 33; www.dantealighieri.com; Via Tommaso Pendola 37) Southwest of the city centre.

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**.

Within the Fortezza Medicea, **Associazione Siena Jazz** (☎ 0577 27 14 01; www.sienajazz.it; Piazza Libertà), one of Europe's foremost institutions of its type, offers courses in jazz.

Tours

Treno Natura (☎ 0577 20 74 13; www.ferrovieturistiche.it; 🕒 May, early Jun, Sep & Oct) These 19th-century trains loop south of Siena (Crete Senese) through Asciano, across to the Val d'Orcia and Stazione di Monte Antico and then back to Siena. Trains stop at Asciano and Monte Antico and connect with the service from Florence. They run for only about 20 days each year so check in advance online or at the tourist office. Round-trip tickets cost €15 if you're hauled by a diesel, or €25 if it's a steam train.

Festivals & Events

The Accademia Musicale Chigiana (above) mounts the **Settimana Musicale Senese** in July

IL PALIO

This spectacular event is held twice-yearly on 2 July and 16 August. Dating from the Middle Ages, it features a series of colourful pageants, and a wild horse race around Il Campo.

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. Rivalry is razor keen.

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 make your hair stand on end.

Even if a horse loses its rider, it's still eligible to win. There is only one rule: riders mustn't tug at the reins of other horses.

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. If you can't find a good vantage point, don't despair; the race is televised live (the Senese exact a huge fee from the national TV network, RAI, for screening rights), then played back repeatedly throughout the evening.

A day or two earlier, you might see jockeys and horses trying out in Il Campo – almost as good as the real thing. Between May and October, **Cinema Moderno** (☎ 0577 28 92 01; Piazza Tolomei; admission €5.50; 🕒 10am-5pm) runs a mini-epic 20-minute film of Siena and Il Palio that will take your breath away.

and the **Estate Musicale Chigiana** in July, August and September. Concerts in these series are frequently held in the magnificent settings of the Abbazia di San Galgano (p533), about 20km southwest of the city, and Abbazia di Sant'Antimo (p534), near Montalcino. For information, call ☎ 0577 2 20 91.

In July and August, the city hosts **Siena Jazz**, an international festival promoted by the Associazione Siena Jazz (p523).

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 their website. **Siena Hotels Promotion** (☎ 0577 28 80 84; www.hotelsiena.com; Piazza Madre di Calcutta 5; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat Mar-Oct, 9am-7pm Nov-Feb) has online booking, or book in person (in-person fee €2).

BUDGET

Siena Colleverde (☎ 0577 28 00 44; Via Scacciapensieri 47; per person/site €7.75/7.75; ☎ mid-Apr-mid-Oct; 🚗) Some 2km north of the centre, the camp was closed due to change of ownership when we last passed. Call to check re-opening. Take bus 3 or 8 from Piazza Gramsci or Viale Tozzi.

Ostello Guidoriccio (☎ 0577 5 22 12; Via Fiorentina 89, Località Stellino; per person €14.30) All rooms are doubles at Siena's HI-affiliated youth hostel, about 2km northwest of the city centre. Take bus 10, 15 or 35 from Piazza Gramsci, or bus 4 or 77 from the train station.

Hotel Le Tre Donzelle (☎ 0577 28 03 58; Via delle Donzelle 5; s/d €38/49, d with bathroom €60) Central, friendly and popular, this was originally constructed as a tavern in the 13th century. Rooms are clean and simple and the shared bathrooms are spotless.

MIDRANGE

Albergo Bernini (☎ 0577 28 90 47; www.albergobernini.com; Via della Sapienza 15; s €55-78, d without bathroom €45-65, d with bathroom €75-85; 🍷) A welcoming, family-run hotel (owner Mauro is a professional accordion player who often squeezes out a few tunes for guests). Its tiny terrace has views across to the cathedral and the Chiesa di San Domenico. For space and views, choose room 11.

Albergo Cannon d'Oro (☎ 0577 4 43 21; www.cannonoro.com; Via dei Montanini 28; s €48-80, d €60-99,

tr €77-128; 🍷 🍷) 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 debouch from a narrow alley to face the otherwise amicable reception desk. A few of the rooms have air-con; parking is €15.

Locanda Garibaldi (☎ 0577 28 42 04; Via Giovanni Duprè 18; d €75) Pro: a dozen metres from the spectacle of Piazza del Campo. Con: a dozen metres from the noise of Piazza del Campo. Rooms are big, bright and furnished with a funky flair. They also run the well-patronised ground-floor restaurant (meals €20, closed Saturday).

ourpick Palazzo Bruchi (☎ 0577 28 73 42; www.palazzobruchi.it; Via di Pantaneto 105; s €75-90, d €85-150) Seven rooms in the 'ancient and noble' Landi-Bruchi family home in central Siena. Rooms vary in quality, but the hospitality of Maria Cristina and her daughter Camilla is warmly consistent. There's a shared kitchen and a peaceful inner-courtyard.

Piccolo Hotel Etruria (☎ 0577 28 80 88; www.hoteletruria.com; Via delle Donzelle 3; s/d/tr with bathroom €53/86/114, s without bathroom €48) Another equally 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.

Hotel Antica Torre (☎ 0577 22 22 55; www.antica.torresiena.it; Via Fieravecchia 7; d €90-113; 🍷) This has only eight rooms (book way in advance) and its bathrooms are scarcely large enough to swing a flannel. But this snug place – all exposed beams and brickwork, tucked into a 16th-century tower and hidden down a side street – is a jewel.

Chiusarelli (☎ 0577 28 05 62; www.chiusarelli.com; Viale Curtatone 15; s €70-85, d €95-125; 🍷 🍷) Chiusarelli has been functioning continuously since 1870. It has a pleasant, spacious breakfast room and the rooms are attractive. The rear ones are for lovers of quiet and, on alternate Sundays in season, lucky football fans: they overlook the stadium where Siena, regularly propping up Serie A, plays home matches.

TOP END

Hotel Santa Caterina (☎ 0577 22 11 05; www.hscsiena.it; Via Piccolomini 7; s €85-115, d €98-175; 🍷 🍷) This renovated 18th-century elegant villa, just outside the city walls, is a stone's throw beyond the Porta Romana. Its 22 rooms are tastefully

furnished, the breakfast room is light and airy and there's a lovely garden with open views to the surrounding hills. Parking is €15.

ourpick **Pensione Palazzo Ravizza** (☎ 0577 28 04 62; www.palazzoravizza.com; Pian dei Mantellini 34; s/d/tr €140/180/260; **P** **☎** **☎**) *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 there's a small, leafy garden.

Eating

According to the Sieneese, most Tuscan cuisine has its origins here. Among many traditional dishes are *ribollita* (Tuscan soup), *panzanella* (summer salad of soaked bread, basil, onion and tomatoes) and *pappardelle con la 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

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

La Chiacchera (☎ 0577 28 06 31; Costa di Sant'Antonio 4; pasta €6, meals €15-18; ☎ daily Easter-Oct, Wed-Mon Nov-Easter) *La Chiacchera* is a tiny, informal restaurant run by a young staff. It offers a great menu of local specialities and the wooden tables on a quiet pedestrian street make it a good lunch venue.

ourpick **L'Osteria** (☎ 0577 28 75 92; Via dei Rossi 79/81; meals €25) 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 Cicc (☎ 0577 28 80 26; Via San Pietro 32; meals €25, tourist menu €12; ☎ 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 Castelvechio (☎ 0577 4 95 86; Via di Castelvechio 65; meals €27; ☎ Mon-Sat) Highly regarded by locals, this eatery has a couple of attractive bare-brick rooms. Rumbling tummies should

opt for the constantly changing *menù degustazione* (tasting menu; €25). It's also a good spot for veggies, with at least four meatless dishes normally on offer.

La Pizzeria di Nonno Mede (☎ 0577 24 79 66; Via di Camporegio 21; meals €29) Drop a coin into the well in the floor, then dive into the €7.80 buffet lunch or choose from the exhaustive pizza menu. The reasonably priced menu has a consistent spread of Tuscan favourites and the fantastic view from the terrace is also reliably Tuscan.

Ristorante il Capriccio (☎ 0577 28 17 57; Pian dei Mantellini 32; meals €32; ☎ closed Tue dinner & Wed) This restaurant in *Pensione Palazzo Ravizza* offers fine cuisine and the chance to eat either in its wood-panelled dining room or outside in the wonderful garden.

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

Al Marsili (☎ 0577 4 71 54; Via del Castoro 3; meals €33-38; ☎ Tue-Sun) One of the city's classiest restaurants, here you'll find white-smocked waiters dishing up traditional Sieneese cuisine like *pici all'aglione* (fresh Sieneese pasta, with a garlic and tomato sauce). The restaurant also offers more innovative dishes such as stuffed *panzerotti* (deep-fried pocket of dough with fillings) with truffle.

Antica Osteria da Divo (☎ 0577 28 43 81; Via Franciosa 29; meals €37; ☎ Sun-Fri) 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 like tarragon-scented lamb followed by girth-widening goodies such as a pistachio and vanilla pie with raspberry sauce.

TOP END

Enzo (☎ 0577 28 12 77; Via Camollia 49; meals €37-40, tasting menus without wine €35-55) Classic pictures of Siena decorate the walls, while classy settings decorate the tables. A variety of tasting menus relieve one from the need to choose from the lengthy menu, while curiosities like the 'deconstructed cannoli' will keep you seated for dessert. Dinner reservations are a must.

SELF-CATERING

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

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.

Consorzio Agrario Siena (Via Pianagini 13) For its part, this is a rich emporium of local food and wines.

Drinking

Enoteca Italiana (Fortezza Medicea; ☎ noon-1am Tue-Sat, to 8pm Sun) Northwest of the city centre within the fortress walls; the former munition cellars have been artfully transformed into a classy *enoteca* that carries more than 1500 labels.

Shopping

See above for details about two specialist food shops.

Siena Ricama (☎ 0577 28 83 38; Via di Città 61) Promotes the crafts of Siena, in particular embroidery.

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

Getting There & Away**BUS**

From the **bus station** (Piazza Gramsci), **Tra-in** (☎ 0577 20 42 46) and SITA express buses race to Florence (€6.50, 1¼ hours, up to 30 daily). Other regional Tra-in destinations include San Gimignano (€5.20, 1¼ hours, 10 daily, direct or change in Poggibonsi), Montalcino (€3.20, 1½ hours, six daily) and Montepulciano (€4.50, 1¼ hours).

Sena (☎ 0577 28 32 03; www.sena.it) buses run to/from Rome (€18, three hours, eight daily) and Milan (€25.50, 4¼ hours, three daily) and there are seven buses daily to Arezzo (€5, 1½ hours).

Both Tra-in and Sena have ticket offices underneath the piazza, where there's also a left-luggage office.

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

Tra-in (left) operates city bus services (€0.90). Buses Nos 8, 9 and 10 run between the train station and Piazza Gramsci. Cars are banned from the town centre, though visitors can drop off their luggage at the hotel, then get out.

Perozzi Noleggi (☎ 0577 28 83 87; www.perozzi.it; Via dei Gazzani 16-18) rents mountain bikes (per day/week €10/50) and 50cc scooters (€26/150). If there's no-one in the showroom, pop round the corner to Via del Romitorio 5.

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.

For a taxi, call ☎ 0577 4 92 22.

SAN GIMIGNANO**pop 7400**

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 period; in the 13th century, one *podestà* (town chief) 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.

Information

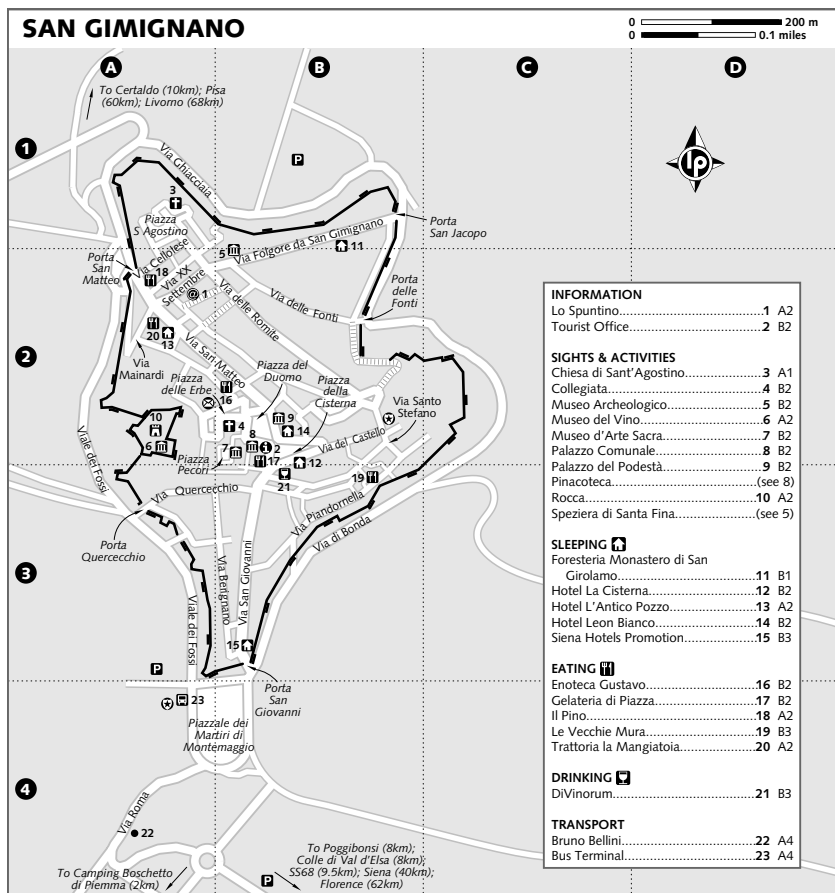
Lo Spuntino (☎ 0577 90 72 99; Via XX Settembre 4b; per hr €4.50; ☎ 10am-8pm Apr-Oct, 2-7pm Nov-Feb) Internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 0577 94 00 08; www.sangimignano.com in Italian; Piazza del Duomo 1; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mar-Oct, 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Nov-Feb)

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 façade belies the remarkable 14th-century frescoes that stripe the interior walls like some 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 façade, extending onto adjoining walls, Taddeo di Bartolo probably scared the daylighters out of pious locals with his gruesome 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 quite 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, 9.30am-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 Siene and Florentine schools of the 12th to 15th centuries. In the main room, the great poet **Sala di Dante** addressed the town's council, urging it to support the Guelphs' 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; Rocca di Montestaffoli; admission free; ☎ 11.30am-6.30pm Thu-Mon, 3-6.30pm Wed Mar-Oct). A sommelier is 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-5.30pm 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** (☎ 0577 94 08 09; www.hotelsiena.com; Via San Giovanni 125; ☎ closed Sun, Tue & Thu mornings) will book hotels and some *affittacamere* for callers-in (€2 fee) or online. The tourist office, for its part, will reserve a wider range of *affittacamere* and also *agriturismi* (farm-stay accommodation) if you call by in person.

Camping Boschetto di Piemina (☎ 0577 94 03 52; www.boschettopiemina.it; per person/tent/car €10/8/4; ☎ Easter-Oct) Located at Santa Lucia, 2km south of town, this is the nearest camp site. Buses stop right outside.

Foresteria Monastero di San Girolamo (☎ 0577 94 05 73; monasteroangimignano@gmail.com; Via Folgore da San Gimignano 26-32; per person €25; ☎ P) This is an excellent budget choice. Run by friendly nuns, it has basic but spacious, comfortable rooms, all with bathroom and sleeping two to five people. Check-in out is 9.30am to 12.30pm and 3pm to 5.45pm.

Two highly recommended hotels flank Piazza della Cisterna, the main square. In both, you pay a little more for superb views.

MONEYSAVERS

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.

Hotel La Cisterna (☎ 0577 94 03 28; www.hotelcisterna.it; Piazza della Cisterna 24; s €60-78, d €85-95, tr €110-128; ☹ ☒) Located in a splendid 14th-century building. Be sure to request a room with a view of the square or the valley or risk getting one facing a dull courtyard. Nearly 100 years in business, it offers 21st-century comfort in quiet, spacious rooms.

Hotel Leon Bianco (☎ 0577 94 12 94; www.leonbianco.com; Piazza della Cisterna 13; s €65-80, d €85-140, tr €110-150; ☹ ☒) 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. Wi-fi extra charge.

our pick Hotel L'Antico Pozzo (☎ 0577 94 20 14; www.anticopozzo.com; Via San Matteo 87; s €80-100, d €110-135, tr €145-160; ☹ ☒) 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. Room 20 has a magnificent domed ceiling.

Eating

Le Vecchie Mura (☎ 0577 94 02 70; www.vecchiemura.it; Via Piandornella 15; meals €30; ☹ dinner Wed-Mon) This is a wonderful spot, especially if you snap up a terrace table on a warm summer's night. The food competes with the phenomenal view of rolling green hills and the wine list has over a dozen varieties of Vernaccia di San Gimignano. The *gnocchi con tartufo e formaggio* (gnocchi with truffles and cheese) is a good start before one of their perfectly prepared beef options.

Trattoria la Mangiatoia (☎ 0577 94 15 28; Via Mainardi 5; meals €36-40; ☹ Wed-Mon Feb-Oct) Serving regional fare like *saccottini di pecorino al tartufo* (ravioli filled with potatoes and pecorino cheese with truffle sauce). With candles flickering and classical music in the background, share it with that special someone. Or hold hands after dark on their delightful summer patio.

our pick Il Pino (☎ 0577 94 04 15; Via Cellolese 8-10; meals €37-42; ☹ Fri-Wed) Il Pino is spruce, vaulted and airy, with fresh flowers on each table. Its *raviolone di pecorino delle crete con lingua stufata e carote e porri all'aneto* (sheep's milk cheese ravioli with stewed meat, carrots, and leeks) may be the most singular pasta adventure in Tuscany.

Gelateria di Piazza (☎ 0577 94 22 44; Piazza della Cisterna 4; ☹ Mar-mid-Nov) As the pictures around 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). There's a variant based on Vernaccia, the local wine, as well as a daring saffron cream.

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

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

Drinking

DiVinum (Piazza della Cisterna 30; ☹ 11am-midnight daily Mar-Oct, Fri-Sun Nov-Feb) 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 & Around

The **bus terminal** (Piazzale dei Martiri di Montemaggio) is beside Porta San Giovanni. Buses run to/from Florence (€5.90, 1¼ hours, 12 daily) and Siena (€5.20, one to 1½ hours, 10 daily). A few buses are direct but most require a change at Poggibonsi. The tourist office has timetables.

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, which has the closest train station.

From Florence or Siena, take the SS2 to Poggibonsi, then the SS68 via Colle di Val d'Elsa.

There's a shuttle service for hotel guests from the car parks (per hour €2) outside the city walls, beside and below Porta San Giovanni. You'll find free parking in the new parts of town, just northwest of the old centre, but competition is fierce.

Bruno Bellini (☎ 0577 94 02 01; Via Roma 41) rents mountain bikes (€15 per day) and scooters (from €31 per day).

VOLTERRA

pop 11,300

A 29km drive from San Gimignano, Volterra's well-preserved medieval ramparts give the windswept town a proud, forbidding air – particularly if you're trying to drive up to your hotel to drop off luggage (forget it). Where San Gimignano has its towers, Volterra has

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 on p540.

ECOMUSEO DELL'ALABASTRO

As befits a town that has hewn the rock from nearby quarries ever since Etruscan times, Volterra has its own **alabaster museum** (☎ 075 98 73 06; Via dei Sarti 1; admission €3; ☹ 11am-5pm daily mid-Mar–Oct, 9am-1.30pm Sat & Sun Nov–mid-Mar), which shares the same building as the Pinacoteca Comunale. On the ground floor are contemporary creations, including a finely chiselled mandolin and a bizarre fried egg, while on the two upper floors are choice examples from Etruscan times onwards and a re-created artisan's workshop.

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 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. Be selective; they all start to look the same after a while. 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, 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.

Sleeping

Camping Le Balze (☎ 0588 8 78 80; Via di Mandringa 15; person/tent/car €7/6/3; ☹ Easter-Oct; 🚰) The closest camp site to town sits right on Le Balze.

Seminario di Sant'Andrea (☎ 0588 8 60 28; semv escovile@diocesivolterra.it; Viale Vittorio Veneto 2; d with/without bathroom €36/28; 📞) 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.villa nencini.it; Borgo Santo Stefano 55; s €60, d €68-83; 📞 🚰) A tranquil family hotel, Villa Nencini is a mere 200m beyond Porta S Francesco yet a world away from the town's summer bustle. Choose the original 17th-century mansion or the recently constructed wing. Grounds are shady, views across the valley magnificent and, with access to its restaurant and impressive collection of wines, you're fully self-sufficient.

Appartamenti l'Etrusca (☎ 0588 8 40 73; letrusca@libero.it; Via Porta all'Arco 37-41; apt for 1/2/3 people €40/70/80) 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 €59, d €78-83, tr €94-98) Nazionale is a late-19th-century hotel where DH Lawrence once stayed. 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.

our pick **Albergo Etruria** (☎ 0588 8 73 77; www.albergoetruria.it; Via Giacomo Matteotti 32; s €60-70, d €80-90; ☑) This is a good-value hotel realised by two friendly English-speaking ladies. There's a self-catering kitchen and, of all things, an ice machine! 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. Closed January.

Agriturismo San Lorenzo (☎ 0588 3 90 80; www.agriturimosanlorenzo.it; d €85, apt €90-110; ☑) Just 3km outside Volterra on the road to Siena is this giddy fusion of sustainable tourism, countryside vistas, mod-cons and wonderful food. The mountain spring-fed biological swimming pool, complete with frogs and salamanders, fronts the converted farmhouse dating from the 1400s. Walking, biking, horse riding and hands-on seasonal olive oil production are available, as are cooking classes with meals served in the 12th-century Franciscan chapel. Curse or blessing, some mobile phone services don't work out here.

Eating

Trattoria del Sacco Fiorentino (☎ 0588 8 85 37; Piazza XX Settembre 18; meals €28-32, tasting menu €23-30; ☑ Thu-Tue) A great little vaulted trattoria that serves up imaginative dishes. Try the *piccione al vino santo e radicchio rosso* (pigeon baked with red radicchio and holy wine) or the mouth-watering gnocchi with baby veg.

Trattoria il Poggio (☎ 0588 8 52 57; Via Porta all'Arco 7; meals €28; ☑ Wed-Mon) Waitresses bustle around and chat with the customers between dashes to the electric dumbwaiter raising food from the subterranean kitchen. There's a set menu and rich dishes such as scampi and rocket or ravioli with asparagus and ham in a parmesan cream sauce.

our pick **Ristorante Don Beta** (☎ 0588 8 67 30; Via Giacomo Matteotti 39; meals €30-35, set menu €13-18; ☑ 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. Alternatively, choose the local *cian-doli alle noci* – little, spring-shaped whorls of curly pasta in a walnut sauce.

Osteria dei Poeti (☎ 0588 8 60 29; Via Giacomo Matteotti 55; meals €30, tourist menu €12; ☑ Fri-Wed) Get here right at midday, before the business lunchers fill the last seat. Typical Tuscan fare, including the *antipasto del poeta*, a rich assortment of canapés, cheeses and cold cuts that is an unexpected delight. Wine pours are generous, possibly to dull the sting of the frosty service.

Pizzeria da Nanni (☎ 0588 8 40 47; Via delle Pregioni 40; pizzas €6-7.50; ☑ 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.

Drinking

Web & Wine (☎ 0588 8 15 31; Via Porta all'Arco 11-13; ☑ 8.30am-1am daily Mar-Oct, closed Thu & Feb) At once an internet point (€4 per hour), a stylish *enoteca* (with a good selection of tipples), a snack stop and hip designer café with underlit Etruscan remains. Surf your way through a foamy cappuccino while checking your inbox.

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 terminal.

The tourist office carries bus and train timetables. **CPT buses** (☎ 0588 8 61 86) connect the town with Saline (€1.70, 20 minutes, frequent) and its train station. From Saline, 9km to the southwest, there are bus connections for Pisa (€4.80, two hours) and Cecina (€3.35), to which there's also a train link.

For San Gimignano (€4.35, 1½ hours), Siena (€4.50, 1½ hours) and Florence (€7, two hours), change at Colle di Val d'Elsa (€2.40, 50 minutes), to where there are four runs daily except Sunday.

By car, take the SS68, which runs between Cecina and Colle di Val d'Elsa.

ABBZIA DI SAN GALGANO

About 20km southwest of Siena on the SS73 is 13th-century **San Galgano Abbey** (☎ 0577 75 67 00; admission free; 🕒 8am–7.30pm), a Gothic ruin that still speaks strongly of its illustrious past. The monks of this former Cistercian abbey were among Tuscany's most powerful, forming the judiciary and acting as accountants for the *comune* of Volterra and Siena. They presided over disputes between the cities, played a significant role in the construction of the cathedral in Siena and built themselves an opulent church.

Nowadays, the walls still stand but the roof collapsed a long time ago. The Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Siena sponsors concerts at the abbey during the summertime (see p523).

On a hillock overlooking the abbey is the tiny, round Romanesque **Cappella di Monte Siepi**, built for the local soldier and saint San Galgano, who lived his last years here as a hermit. A real-life 'sword in the stone' is under glass in the floor of the chapel, plunged there, legend has it, by San Galgano to indicate his renunciation of worldly life.

LE CRETE

Southeast of Siena, this area of rolling clay hills is a feast of classic Tuscan images: bare ridges topped by solitary cypress trees, hills silhouetted one against another as they fade into the misty distance, their gently undulating flanks scored here and there by steep ravines, as scarred and eroded as any cowboy's badlands. Its most harmonious valley, the Val d'Orcia, is the latest Italian area to be declared a Unesco World Heritage Site. Hire a car or bike in Florence or Siena and spend a few days pottering around Le Crete, a Tuscan dialect word meaning clay. In summer, you could book your passage on the Treno Natura (p523).

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 5100

The last wily holdout against Florence, even after Siena had fallen, these days Montalcino

is a retiring hill town. While this is a perfectly nice place to bulk up your calf muscles wandering inhumanly steep 'streets', the real attraction is its internationally coveted wine, Brunello (a bottle costs a minimum of €20 – we did say it was special!) and other local wines such as 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 Municipio 1; 🕒 10am–1pm & 2–5.40pm 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 Ricasoli 31; adult/child €4.50/3; 🕒 10am–1pm & 2–5.50pm Tue–Sun), just off Piazza Sant'Agostino, occupies a former monastery. In addition 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; admission free; 🕒 9am–8pm Apr–Oct, to 6pm Nov–Mar) is an *enoteca* where you can sample and buy local wines. To walk the ramparts (though the view is almost as magnificent from the courtyard) buy a ticket (adult/child €3.50/1.50) at the bar.

A combined ticket giving full access to the museum and fortress costs €6.

There's a vigorous **Friday market** on and around Via della Libertà.

Sleeping & Eating

Il Giardino (☎ 0577 84 82 57; Piazza Cavour 4; s €40–53, d €53) An excellent-value, friendly, family-run, two-star hotel. Occupying a venerable building overlooking Piazza Cavour, its décor has a distinct 1970s feel.

Hotel Il Giglio (☎ 0577 84 81 67; www.gigliohotel.com; Via S Saloni 5; s/d/tr €70/100/115, annexe s/d €50/70, apt 2–4 people €90–110; 📍) Montalcino's oldest hotel, recently and substantially renovated. Rooms have comfortable wrought-iron beds – each gilded with a painted *giglio* (lily) – and all doubles have panoramic views. Il Giglio also has a small annexe 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; Angolo Via Landi 1; d €150–175; 📍 🕒 🚗 🚶) Just beside the Porta Cerbaia, this is a former olive mill, tastefully restored

with 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.

Both hotels have restaurants that are well worth a visit.

Taverna Il Grappolo Blu (☎ 0577 84 71 50; Scale di Via Moglio 1; meals €28) Does ingenious things with local ingredients – try the juicy *coniglio al Brunello* (rabbit cooked in Brunello wine). We did. And we still remember that evening fondly.

Getting There & Away

Regular Tra-in buses (€3.30, 1½ hours, six daily) run to/from Siena.

ABBAZIA DI SANT'ANTIMO

This beautiful isolated Romanesque church (☎ 0577 83 56 59; Castelnuovo dell'Abate; ☎ 10.30am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 9-10.30am & 3-6pm Sun) lies in a broad valley just below the village of Castelnuovo dell'Abate. It's best visited in the morning, when the sun streams through the east windows.

The exterior, built in pale travertine stone, is simple but for the stone carvings set in the bell tower and apsidal chapels. Inside, take time to study the capitals of the columns lining the nave, especially the one representing Daniel in the lion's den (second on the right as you enter).

Three daily buses (€1.20, 15 minutes) connect Montalcino with the village of Castelnuovo dell'Abate. From here, it is an easy walk to the church.

PIENZA

pop 2300

Pienza is on the primary road to Montepulciano, so pull over and take a few hours to absorb its few but compelling attractions.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0578 74 99 05; Corso Il Rossellino; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-7pm) can be found 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 façade, are a

superb marble tabernacle by Rossellino, and five altarpieces, all by Siennese artists. The cracking and slo-mo collapse of the transept and apse gives one pause.

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 Ves-covile, houses Pienza's small **Museo Diocesano** (☎ 0578 74 99 05; adult/child €4.10/2.60; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-7pm 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*.

MONTEPULCIANO

pop 14,100

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 may leave you breathless but, bordered by the town's finest buildings, it is well worth the exercise.

Information

Strada del Vino Nobile di Montepulciano Information Office (☎ 0578 71 74 84; www.stradavinonobile.it; Piazza Grande 7; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat)

Also books accommodation, arranges cooking courses, Slow Food tours, wine tastings, bike rentals and un strenuous country walks, culminating in lunch.

Tourist office (☎ 0578 75 73 41; www.prolocomonte pulciano.it; Piazza Don Minzoni; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-7pm Easter-Jul & Sep-Oct, 9.30am-8pm Aug, 9.30am-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. Internet per hr €3.50.

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 Marzocca**, erected in 1511 to confirm Montepulciano's allegiance to Florence. It's topped by a splendid stone lion, which is as squat as a pussycat.

Among several noble residences lining the main street is the **Palazzo Bucelli** at 73, whose lower façades are recycled Etruscan and Latin inscriptions and reliefs. The **Palazzo Cocconi**, nearly opposite at 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, a medieval **tower house** is topped by the town clock, which strikes the hours, and the bizarre figure of Pulcinella (Punch of Punch and Judy fame).

Continue up the hill and turn right at the Loggia di Mercato, first left into Via del Poggiolo, then left again into Via Ricci. In the Gothic Palazzo Neri-Orselli is the **Museo Civico** (☎ 0578 71 73 00; Via Ricci 10; adult/child €4.15/2.60; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sun Aug, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sun Sep-Jul). The small collection features terracotta reliefs by the della Robbia family and Gothic and Renaissance paintings.

Overlooking Piazza Grande, which is the town's highest point, is the **Palazzo Comunale** (admission free; ☎ 9am-1.30pm Mon-Sat). Built in the 13th-century Gothic style and remodelled in the 15th century by Michelozzo, it still functions as the town hall. From the top of its **tower** (admission €1.60; ☎ Apr-Oct) on a clear day, you can see as far as the Monti Sibillini to the east and the Gran Sasso to the southeast (entry is on the 2nd floor).

Opposite is the **Palazzo Contucci** and its extensive wine cellar, **Cantine Contucci** (☎ 0578 75 70 06; ☎ 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 façade. Above the high altar is a lovely triptych by Taddeo da Bartolo of the Assumption.

Prominently positioned in the valley below is the domed **Chiesa di San Biagio** (Via di San Biagio; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 3-7pm summer, to 6pm winter), a fine

Renaissance church built by Antonio da Sangallo the Elder; undergoing major restoration when we last passed, its highlight is a stunning marble altarpiece.

Sleeping & Eating

our pick **Bellavista** (☎ 0347 823 23 14; bellavista@bccmp.com; Via Ricci 25; d €56-70; ☎ P) This is an excellent budget choice, where nearly all of its 10 high-ceiling double rooms 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/d €60/95; ☎ 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; ☎ ☎ ☎) 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 *vinò* with a view.

Osteria dell'Acquacheta (☎ 0578 75 84 43; Via del Teatro 22; meals €15-20; ☎ 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 Toscano* (a variety of Tuscan sausages and salamis) to huge steaks.

Trattoria Diva e Maceo (☎ 0578 71 69 51; Via di Gracciano nel Corso 90; meals €24-28; ☎ Wed-Mon) This is an uncomplicated trattoria, popular with locals, that carries a good selection of wines from the region.

La Grotta (☎ 0578 75 74 79; ristorante.lagrotta@tiscali.it; Via San Biagio 2; meals €45-55; ☎ Thu-Tue) Opposite the church of San Biagio, La Grotta is Montepulciano's finest restaurant. Inside this 15th-century building the dining is appropriately elegant while the tables in the garden are tempting for a summer lunch.

Caffè Poliziano (☎ 0578 75 86 15; Via di Voltaia nel Corso 27; meals €24) Established as a café in 1868, Poliziano has been at times a café-cabaret, minicinema, grocery store and, once again since 1990, an elegant café, lovingly restored to its original form. Plan carefully to win a

seat on one of the tiny, precipitous balcony tables with expansive views.

Getting There & Around

Tra-in runs five buses daily between Montepulciano and Siena (€4.50, 1¼ hours) via Pienza. Regular LFE buses connect with Chiusi (€2.20, 50 minutes, half-hourly) and continue to Chiusi-Chianciano Terme train station.

Chiusi-Chianciano Terme, 18km southeast and on the main Rome-Florence line, is the most convenient train station (rather than Stazione di Montepulciano, which has very infrequent services).

By car, take the Chianciano Terme exit from the A1 and follow the SS146. Cars are banned from the centre. There's car parks near the Porta al Prato, from where minibuses weave their way to Piazza Grande.

SOUTHERN TUSCANY

This is a land of lush rumpled hills, distant smoky mountains and ancient hill-top villages. For pure drama, there are Etruscan sites like the enigmatic *vie cave*, or sunken roads, over whose significance archaeologists still puzzle, and the inimitable, looming town of Pitigliano. Dunk yourself in the hot natural pools of Saturnia or laze on the smart marinas and good beaches of Monte Argentario.

The quiet Parco Regionale della Maremma 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 **visitors centre** (☎ 0564 40 70 98; www.parcomaremma.it; 🕒 8am-5pm mid-Mar-Sep, 8.30am-1.30pm Oct-mid-Mar, 8.30am-4pm mid-Mar-Jun) is in Alberese, on the park's northern edge. Park access is limited to 11 signed walking trails, varying from 2.5km to 12km. Entry (by ticket bought at the visitors 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 visitors 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 €19; 🕒 closed Mon & Oct-Mar), in nearby Alberese, has an affordable menu of homemade Tuscan standards like *tortelli ricotta spinace* (pasta with cheese and spinach) and *aquacotta* (soup with bread, onion, tomatoes, celery and egg).

MONTE ARGENTARIO

Once an island but long ago linked to the mainland by a couple of extensive sand bars, the rugged Monte Argentario is popular with holidaying Romans and almost neglected by the rest of the world.

Orbetello

Set on the balance-beam isthmus running through the lagoon, Orbetello is less raucous than the island. The main attraction is its **cathedral** (Piazza della Repubblica; 🕒 9am-noon & 3-6pm), which has retained its 14th-century Gothic façade despite being remodelled in the Spanish style in the 16th century. Other reminders of the Spanish garrison that was stationed in the city for nigh on 150 years include the Viceroy's residence on Piazza Eroè dei Due Mondì, the fort and the city walls, parts of which are the original Etruscan fortification.

Porto Santo Stefano

This one-time fishing port, like its neighbour Port'Ercole, now devotes itself in the main to tourism, much of it upmarket.

INFORMATION

Il Galeone (Lungomare dei Navigatori 40; per hr €6; 🕒 8am-midnight) A bar with a couple of internet points.
Tourist office (☎ 0564 81 42 08; www.lamaremma.info; Piazzale Sant'Andrea; 🕒 9am-1pm & 3.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, 9am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar) Eastern end of the port.

ACTIVITIES

If you have wheels, follow the narrow and sometimes dangerously overcrowded Via Panoramica, a circular route offering great views across to the hazy whaleback of the **Isola del Giglio**, Tuscany's second-largest island after Elba. For another spectacular drive, take a right turn 6km east of Porto Santo Stefano,

up the signed road leading to **Convento dei Frati Passionisti**, a convent with sensational views across to the mainland.

There are plenty of reasonable pebbly beaches; one of the most popular is the long strip of **Feniglia**, northeast of Port'Ercole.

Toremara and Maregiglio sail regularly (adult/child return €10/5) to the Isola del Giglio, which makes a pleasant day trip.

SLEEPING

Camping Feniglia (☎ 0564 83 10 90; www.campingfeniglia.it; person/site €9/13; ☹ year-round) In Feniglia, this camp site is just 50m from the sea. Trouble is, most of it is occupied by permanently planted caravans and family tents. It also has bungalows at weekly rates.

ourpick Pensione Weekend (☎ 0564 81 25 80; www.pensioneweekend.it; Via Martiri d'Ungheria 3; d €50-80; P) This *pensione* is a true gem and the only pseudo-budget option in town. Rooms are small and scrubbed, with new bathrooms. The friendly, polyglot owner can give you a parking permit for the tiny car park across the road.

Albergo Belvedere (☎ 0564 81 26 34; Via del Fortino 51; s €60-70, d €90-100; ☹ Apr-Oct; P ☹) Just 1km east of the harbour, overlooking the water, this is a nondescript but peaceful option with a private beach. Some rooms have balconies.

Hotel Torre di Cala Piccola (☎ 0564 82 51 11; www.torredicalapiccola.com; Cala Piccola; s €170-310, d €200-370, tr €270-500; ☹ Mar-Oct; P ☹ ☹ ☹) This hotel is a self-contained complex in splendid isolation, built around an old Spanish watchtower, 8km southwest along the Via Panoramica. The dining setting in the garden is particularly glorious. A minibus transports you down the hillside to the hotel's private beach.

EATING

Pizzeria da Gigetto (☎ 0564 81 44 95; Via del Molo 9; pizzas from €7) For a great view without paying panoramic prices, grab a pizza from this pizzeria and munch it on the waterfront terrace, then finish off with an ice cream from Bar Gelateria Chioda, right next door.

Il Moletto (☎ 0564 81 36 36; www.moletto.it; Via del Molo 52; meals €28-32; ☹ Thu-Tue) Among several enticing quayside seafood restaurants, this place wins for its location. At this wooden cabin, set apart from the rest at the end of a mole, you can dine beside a picture window or on the jetty as the evening breeze cools your pasta.

Lo Sfizio (☎ 0564 81 25 92; Lungomare dei Navigatori 26; pizzas from €6, meals €30-35; ☹ daily Jun-Oct, Tue-Sun Nov-Apr) Its corny fish-theme décor and bar of blinking lights looks unpromising, but what draws in diners is the very reasonably priced fish and seafood dishes and the friendly informality of its youthful staff.

Trattoria Da Siro (☎ 0564 81 25 38; Corso Umberto 100; meals €32-37; ☹ Tue-Sun) Overlooking the waterfront, this trattoria manages a good mix of well-prepared fish and seafood, spiced with an impressive seascape.

ourpick Il Veliero (☎ 0564 81 22 26; Via Panoramica 149-151; meals €35-40; ☹ Tue-Sun Feb-Dec) An excellent restaurant, high above the port, that serves the freshest of fare from the sea. It's a steep climb (head up the steps, guarded by a terracotta lion, just above Pensione Weekend) but well worth the exertion. The *pasta fresca alla chitarra* (guitar string pasta with a light tomato-lobster sauce) is heavenly.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Frequent **Rama buses** (☎ 0564 86 79 29) connect most towns on Monte Argentario with downtown Orbetello (€1.50, 20 minutes) and continue to the train station. They also run to Grosseto (€3.40, one hour, up to four daily).

By car follow signs for Monte Argentario from the SS1.

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, 9.30am-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, for that light-as-air feeling, the '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

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 6171 11; ☎ 10.20am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10.20am-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, to 6pm Oct-Mar). The latter's small museum houses a cluttered collection of ecclesiastical objects assembled – you get the feeling – as much to fill the vast empty space as for any aesthetic merit.

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, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar), with a rich display of finds from local Etruscan sites. They're well displayed but the descriptive panels are only in Italian.

Only the tall bell tower remains as a reminder of the Romanesque original of Pitigliano's **cathedral**, with its baroque façade and unexceptional interior.

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 €2.50/1.50; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 4-7pm Sun-Fri May-Oct, 10am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm 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.albergoguas.tini.it; Piazza Petruccioli 16; s/d/tr €37/62/90; ☎ 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. Its highly regarded restaurant also merits a visit.

Osteria Il Tufo Allegro (☎ 0564 61 61 92; Vico della Costituzione 2; meals €27; ☎ 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 buses (☎ 0564 61 60 40) go between Pitigliano and Grosseto's train station (€5, two hours, four daily). They connect Pitigliano with Sorano (€1.10, 15 minutes, seven daily) and Sovana (€1.10, 20 minutes, one daily).

Sovana

Sovana is really little more than a one-street village of butterscotch-coloured sandstone – but, gosh, it's pretty. The **tourist office** (☎ 0564 61 40 74; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun Mar-Dec, 10am-1pm Fri-Sun only Jan-Feb) is in the Palazzo Pretorio.

Opposite, the **Chiesa di Santa Maria** is a simple square-shaped Romanesque church with some rich Renaissance frescoes and, over the altar, a magnificent 9th-century ciborium, or canopy, in white marble.

Walk west along Via del Duomo to reach the imposing Gothic-Romanesque **cathedral**. Although largely rebuilt in the 12th and 13th centuries, the original construction dates back to the 9th century. The striking portal on the north wall is pieced together from fragments of this earlier building – or, as some would maintain, from a pagan temple.

Sovana was the birthplace of Pope Gregory VII; at the eastern end of the village are a cluster of medieval mansions and the remains of a fortress that belonged to his family.

Within the **Necropoli di Sovana** (admission €5; ☎ 9am-7pm daily mid-Mar–Oct, 10am-5pm Fri-Sun Nov–mid-Mar), 1.5km south of the village, are Tuscany's most significant Etruscan tombs, the grandest of which is the **Tomba Ildebranda**, the only surviving temple-style tomb.

The area is famous for its *vie cave*, deep, narrow sunken walkways carved into the rock by the Etruscans. Drovers' roads? Ceremonial passages? Trenches for safe movement in time of attack? To this day no-one knows their purpose. The most spectacular can be as much as

20m deep and run for up to 1km. You'll pass a typical one 500m west of Pitigliano on the road to Sovana.

Albergo Scilla (☎ 0564 61 65 31; Via R Siviero 1-3; d €90; P ♻️) has terracotta-and-white rooms with marshmallow-soft pillows on wrought-iron beds, mosaic bathrooms and a quiet garden. Across the road, enjoy fine fare at its restaurant, *Ristorante dei Merli* (meals €30, closed Tuesday), which has vegetarian options.

Taverna Etrusca (☎ 0564 61 65 31; Piazza Pretorio 9; s/d €70/90; P ♻️ 🍷) is a three-star hotel whose simple but attractive rooms have stripped wooden floors. In its restaurant (meals €40, closed Wednesday) the experienced chef, serves mainly 'creative Tuscan' specialities and has at least one vegetarian option.

Sorano

Sorano is something of the poor relation of the three hill towns. High on a rocky spur, its 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** (Piazza Cairoli; admission €2; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Apr-Sep, 10am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Fri-Sun Oct-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** (admission €2; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun Mar-Oct, Fri-Sun only Nov-Feb), another Etruscan burial area.

EASTERN TUSCANY

Eastern Tuscany holds some cinematic oh-wow moments and with relatively few people bothering to venture beyond Arezzo's historic centre – the heart of both the city and the region – you'll be wowed with plenty of elbowroom.

Cortona wrote the parchment on spectacular, hill-top eeries. Closer to sea level, the Piero della Francesca art trail builds through the towns of Sansepolcro and Monterchi, peaking with his fresco cycle in Arezzo's Chiesa di San Francesco.

AREZZO

pop 94,700

Bombed back to the Renaissance Age during WWII, Arezzo may not be a Tuscan centrefold,

but the surviving parts of the historic centre are worthy competition for any destination in the region: 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.

Arezzo, in its time an important Etruscan town, 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.

It's also the birthplace of the Renaissance poet Petrarch, who popularised the sonnet format, penning his verses in both Latin and Italian, and Giorgio Vasari, the prolific painter and architect who contributed so much to Renaissance Florence.

Arezzo stages a huge, 500-exhibitor antiques fair in 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

Centro di Accoglienza Turistico (☎ 0575 40 35 74; Via Ricasoli; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Jun-Oct, 10am-6pm Nov-May)

Eutelia (Via Guido Monaco 61; per hr €1.50; ☎ 9am-9pm) Internet access and cheap international phone calls.

Post office (Via Guido Monaco 34)

Tourist office (☎ 0575 2 08 39; www.apr.arezzo.it; Piazza della Repubblica 28; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm daily Apr-Sep, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun Oct-Mar) The Colori Toscani representative here can arrange accommodation and tours free of charge.

Sights & Activities

CHIESA DI SAN FRANCESCO

Gracing the apse of this 14th-century church (Piazza San Francesco; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5.30pm Sat, 1-5.30pm Sun) is one of the greatest works of Italian art, Piero della Francesca's fresco cycle of the *Legend of the True Cross*. 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 you need to plan ahead for a **visit with audioguide** (reservations ☎ 0575 35 27 27; www.pierodellafrancesca.it; admission €6; 🕒 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun Nov-Mar). Since 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.

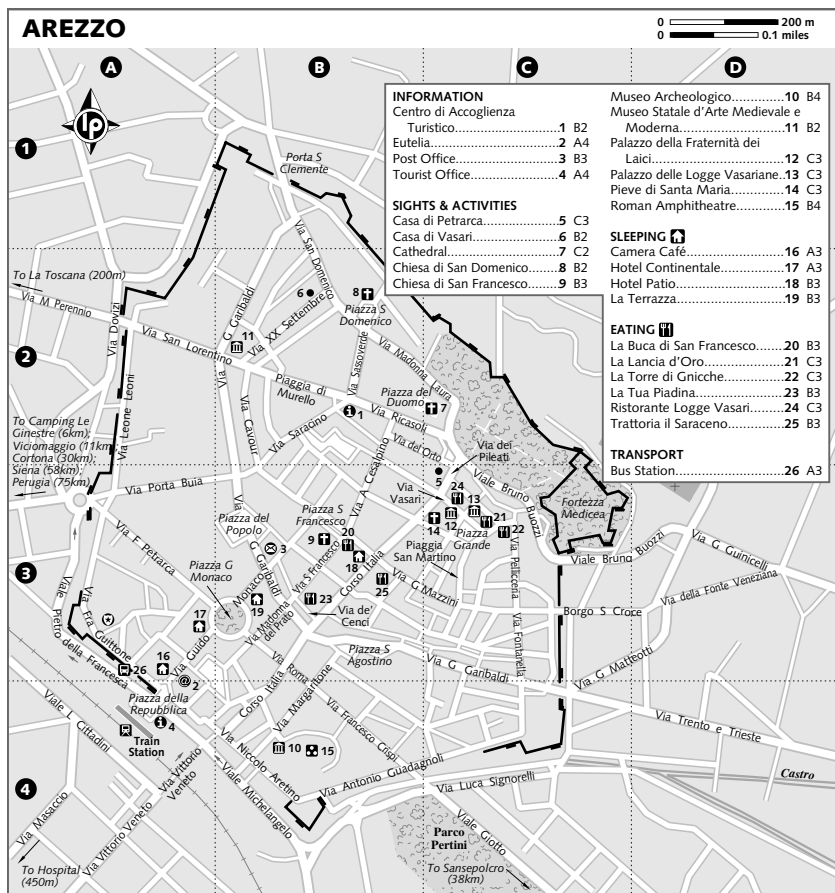
PIEVE DI SANTA MARIA

This 12th-century **church** (Corso Italia 7; 🕒 8am-1pm & 3-7pm May-Sep, 8am-noon & 3-6pm Oct-Apr) has a magnificent Romanesque arcaded façade,

COMBINED TICKETS

You can buy a combined ticket (€12) 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 Museo di Casa Vasari, at any of the four venues.

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



PARCO NAZIONALE DELLE FORESTE CASENTINESI

North of Arezzo is the **Parco Nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi** (www.parcoforestecasentinesi.it), a wooded national park that takes in some of the Apennines' most spectacular scenery. The Tuscan part is gentler than the Emilian side. 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, including foxes, wolves, deer and wild boar, plus nearly 100 bird species. The dense forests are a cool summer refuge, ideal for walking and also escaping the maddening crowds. The Grande Escursione Appenninica (GEA) trekking trail passes through here, and myriad walking paths crisscross the park.

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 façade, 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; ☎ 6.30am-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-7pm) is a must so you can see its haunting *Crucifixion* – one of Cimabue's earliest works, painted around 1265 – which 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, 8.30am-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-7pm 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 **archaeological museum** (☎ 0575 2 08 82; Via Margaritone 10; admission €4; ☎ 8.30am-7pm) is in a convent overlooking the remains of a **Roman amphitheatre** (admission free; ☎ 8.30am-7pm, to 6pm Nov-Mar). Among the highlights of the museum, which has a sizable collection of Etruscan and Roman artefacts, is an exquisite tiny portrait of a bearded man executed on glass in the 3rd century AD.

CENTRO DI ACCOGLIENZA TURISTICO

The centre, which also serves as a tourist office (p539), hires out audioguides on Arezzo (adult/child €5/3). Its 'Room 180' shows a 30-minute film about Arezzo (adult/child €2.50/2) in six languages on a 180-degree, wraparound screen.

Sleeping

Camping Le Ginestre (☎ 0575 36 35 66; www.campingleginestre.it; Via Ruscello 100; person/site €8/6-13; ☎ year-round) From Arezzo train station, take LFI bus to Ruscello and request the camping stop.

La Toscana (☎ /fax 0575 2 16 92; Via M Perennio 56; s/d €35/49; (P)) A little separated from the action, La Toscana is a good budget choice. Its 20 rooms are clean as a new pin. There's a small garden at the rear and free off-street parking.

La Terrazza (☎ 0575 2 83 87; laterrazza@lycos.it; 5th fl, Via Guido Monaco 25; s/d incl breakfast €40/50, d with bathroom €60) Comprised of apartments on two floors, with eight large, bright rooms and a kitchen for guest use, this place is welcoming and a good value. Breakfast features tasty homemade cakes. Go down the passage beside Blockbuster.

our pick Camera Café (☎ 3470 324 405; nicolette.borgogni@fastwebnet.it; Via Guido Monaco 92; s/d €40/55; ☎) Across the street from the train station, the university-dorm-room décor here is supplemented by cushy beds, fat duvets and

terraces with city views. The huge, self-serve kitchen has a gorgeous dining terrace. Some rooms have air-con.

Hotel Continentale (☎ 0575 2 02 51; www.hotelcontinentale.com; Piazza Guido Monaco 7; s/d €74/108; (P) ♻️ 📺) A modern, central, three-star hotel option, with comfy, spotless rooms. There's internet access in every room, a bar that tempts you to linger and a roof terrace with fine views. Valet parking is €15.

Hotel Patio (☎ 0575 40 19 62; www.hotelpatio.it; Via Cavour 23; s/d/st €130/176/224; (P) ♻️ 📺) 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. Valet parking is €18.

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 version of the wrap, from around €3.50.

La Buca di San Francesco (☎ 0575 2 32 71; www.bucadisanfrancesco.it; Via San Francesco 1; meals €23; ♻️ closed Mon dinner & Tue) The walls of this arched and vaulted cellar are decorated with frescoes and copious religious art in deference to neighbouring Chiesa di San Francesco. It does three church-themed – 'friar', 'abbot' and 'prior' – and church-priced menus (€13 to €19). Hesitate and the congenial owner usurps control and designs a menu for you.

La Torre di Gnicche (☎ 0575 35 20 35; Piaggia San Martino 8; meals €25; ♻️ 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 €25-30; ♻️ Thu-Tue) With 60 years in business, 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.

ourpick Ristorante Logge Vasari (☎ 0575 30 03 33; www.cittadiarezzo.com/loggevasari; Via Vasari 19; meals €30-35; ♻️ Wed-Mon) Supplementing the terrace overlooking Piazza Grande are two pleasant interior rooms and classiness that defies stereotypically dire 'piazza cuisine'. The *menu degustazione* (€40, including wine) is a parade

of flavours and interesting flourishes to local dishes. Let your server choose the wine – he'll be right.

La Lancia d'Oro (☎ 0575 2 10 33; Piazza Grande 18-19; meals €45; ♻️ closed Sun dinner & Mon) Your order here is supplemented by excellent snacks and nibbets 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. It has a terrace under the loggia, overlooking Piazza Grande. The owner's brother runs Ristorante Logge Vasari (see below).

A veritable produce melee erupts at Piazza Sant'Agostino's **market** each Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

Getting There & Away

Bus services from Piazza della Repubblica include to Cortona (€2.80, one hour, over 10 daily), Sansepolcro (€3.30, one hour, seven daily) and Siena (€5, 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 (€20.50, two hours) and Florence (€10.10, 1½ hours). Trains also call by Cortona (€2.20, 20 minutes, hourly). Arezzo is just a few kilometres east of the A1 and the SS73 heads east to Sansepolcro.

SANSEPOLCRO

pop 16,000

Sansepolcro is an important stop on an itinerary of Piero della Francesca's work. Between the two, make a brief stop in Monterchi to see the artist's famous fresco **Madonna del parto** (Pregnant Madonna; ☎ 0575 7 07 13; Via della Reglia 1; adult/child €3.10/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.

Sansepolcro is the birthplace of Piero della Francesca. The artist left town when quite young and returned in his seventies to work on his treatises, including his seminal *On Perspective in Painting*.

The newly enlarged **tourist office** (☎ 0575 74 05 36; infosansepolcro@apt.arezzi.it; Via Matteotti 8; ♻️ 9.30am-1pm & 3-6pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun Oct-Mar) is packed with multilingual information.

Within the **Museo Civico** (☎ 0575 73 22 18; www.sansepolcro.net in Italian; Via Aggiunti 65; adult/child €6/3; ♻️ 9.30am-1.30pm & 2.30-7pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-1pm & 2.30-

6pm Oct-May), around the corner from the tourist office, are a couple of 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 beneficiaries.

ourpick **Locanda Giglio & Ristorante Fiorentino** (☎ 0575 74 20 33; Via L Paciolini 60; s/d/tr €50/75/100; P ♻), a very friendly hotel and restaurant, has been in the same family for four generations. The four hotel rooms with their oak floors, under-floor 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 €25 to €30) changes with the seasons (Alessio tells you with pride that there'll never be a freezer in his kitchen).

SITA buses link Sansepolcro with Arezzo (€3.30, one hour, seven daily) and there are several trains daily to Perugia (€3.95, 1½ hours).

CORTONA

pop 22,600

With a layout indicative of someone spilling a bucket of 'Etruscan town' down a hillside, rooms with a view are the rule, not 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.

Large chunks of *Under the Tuscan Sun*, the soap-in-the-sun film of the book by Frances Mayes, were shot in Cortona. (You'll look in vain, though, for the fountain in which the eccentric Englishwoman cavorts; it was built specially for filming and is now dry.)

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. Among other festivities, contestants from the city's traditional neighbourhoods dress up in medieval garb to compete for the *verretta d'oro* (golden arrow).

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. From the piazzale, walk straight up Via Nazionale – about the only flat street in the whole town – to Piazza della Repubblica, the main square.

Information

Telenet (☎ 0575 60 10 96; Via Guelfa 25; internet per hr €3.50; 9am–10pm May–Sep, 9am–8pm Mon–Sat Oct–Apr) A phone/internet shop.

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, 9am–1pm Sat Oct–Apr)

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, 10am–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 Apr–Oct, 10am–5pm 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 Saint Margaret, the paragon 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–Oct), Cortona's highest point, with stupendous views over the surrounding countryside.

Courses

Polymnia (☎ 0575 61 25 82; www.polymnia.net; Vicolo Boni 18) Offers Italian language courses and related cultural and social activities for non-native speakers.

Tours

Cortona Wellness (☎ 0575 60 31 36; www.cortonawellness.it in Italian) Organises guided four- to five-hour hikes (per group €30) in the spectacular countryside around the town.

Sleeping

Ostello San Marco (☎ 0575 60 13 92; ostellocortona@libero.it; Via Maffei 57; dm/d €13/34) An HI-affiliated youth hostel a short, steep walk east of Piazza Garibaldi, this place is a bit run-down and ill cared for, despite its impressive premises.

Hotel San Luca (☎ 0575 63 04 60; www.sanluccortona.com; Piazza Garibaldi 2; s/d incl breakfast €85/120; ♿) Handy for the bus stop and its proximity to free parking, San Luca also has an upmarket restaurant, Torino. Rooms are generally satisfactory, some with great panoramic views.

Hotel San Michele (☎ 0575 60 43 48; www.hotel-sanmichele.net; Via Guelfa 15; s €99, d €109-120; ☒) closed Jan–mid-Mar; ♿) 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. Parking is €20.

Eating

Pane e Vino (☎ 0575 63 10 10; Piazza Signorelli 27; meals €22; ☒ dinner only Tue–Sun) This is a hugely popular dining hall, in the centre of town. For a quick snack of regional specialities, go for the *piatto del cacciatore*, the hunter's platter of wild boar, deer, goose and turkey. There are more than 500 wines to choose from and most of the pasta (€5.20 to €6) is homemade.

Trattoria Dardano (☎ 0575 60 19 44; Via Dardano 24; meals €24; ☒ Thu–Tue) Dardano is just one of several reliable, non-nonsense trattorias that line Via Dardano.

Ristorante Tonino (☎ 0575 63 05 00; Piazza Garibaldi 1; meals €30-35; ☒ closed Mon dinner & Tue) Tonino has magnificent views as far as Lago di Trasimeno from its summer terrace, and specialises in antipasti. Try the *ravioli al tartufo e pecorino* (ravioli with truffles and pecorino cheese).

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 of truffle shavings awaits diners here. Featured in nearly every Italian gastronomic guide, its walls are clad with photos of actors who have dined here. In summer try the *ravioli ai fiori di zucca* (pumpkin-flower ravioli). Watch your head when the unwieldy phallus of a pepperpot is heaved out for random seasoning.

Bottega della Pasta Fresca (Via Dardano 29) Self-caterers should stock up at this glorious little hole-in-the-wall shop that makes its own pasta.

There's a Saturday **market** (Piazza Signorelli), which sells farmers' products.

Getting There & Around

From Piazzale Garibaldi, LFI buses connect the town with Arezzo (€2.60, one hour, over 10 daily), via Castiglion Fiorentino.

The nearest train station on the main Rome–Florence line is about 6km away at Camucia-Cortona, to which shuttle buses (€1, 15 minutes) run at least hourly. Destinations include Arezzo (€2.20, 20 minutes, hourly), Florence (€6.70, 1½ hours, hourly), Rome (€9.40, 2¼ hours, every two hours) and Perugia (€2.80, 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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