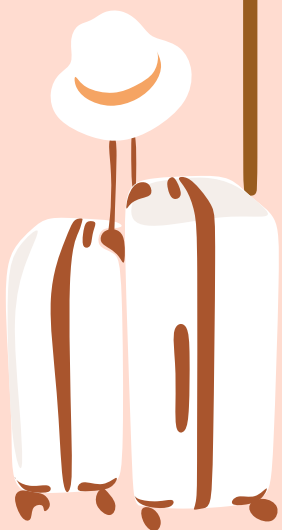




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Travel
with Tashels

MY AFFAIR WITH FLORENCE



So, unlike the other Italian cities, I feature in my guides, I have not actually had extensive amounts of time in Florence. However, I have been there 8 times and my heart holds the most special place for it, as it does for Italy as a whole. I truly believe I must have Italian blood somewhere along my line. I have done 3-4 days max in the city at a time and mostly just for weekends. I have done it with my mother, with my sister and mother, alone, with a lover, and with a friend.

When the world was in total lockdown in June 2020, I was so lucky to still be able to travel for work and Italy was the destination that I was lucky enough to be based. The crazy part, is I was there in the sliver of time when it was open and relatively unrestricted. [Read my blog about that here.](#)

But...there was no tourism and so the streets, normally filled to the brim with instagram obsessed tourists, were dotted with locals. And as I walked along the empty Ponte Vecchio, visited the Uffizi without standing in a queue and tasted wine without a booking in Chianti, my love for Florence deepened. It felt like I got a private tour of her most intimate and vulnerable time.

And so, for me, Florence remains one of my favorite cities in the world.

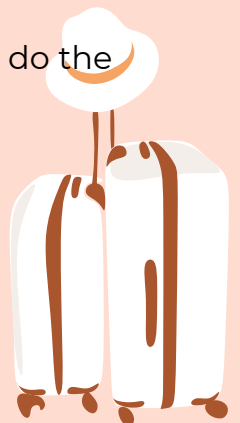
However, I have never approached it as a tourist and rather have done it as a homing spot, a place where I go for my runs, sit in a local coffee shop, engage with the people.

And so, my recommendations come from a place of wondering and curiosity. Of having stumbled across a little gem and fallen in love with the atmosphere and people.

So, please use this guide as a seasoning, a touch of flavour to your trip - do the touristy things, but then try one or two of my suggestions.

From my heart to yours....I present Florence.

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A FEW THINGS TO KNOW (IN MY HUMBLE OPINION)



How to get there?

I have been so lucky in the last few years that I have been staying close enough to do a luxurious drive from the Ligurian coast, through Tuscany to Florence. However, flying into Florence is easy - fly into Aeroporto de Firenze - a small airport with International flights. It can be easier to get flights into Pisa and train to Florence. Personally, I Love the drive through Tuscany and always think renting a car and driving into Florence is the most beautiful way to do it, depending on your time. I use [NVM travel](#) for my flights. Travel agents are the way to go at the moment, with all the covid travel complexities.



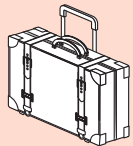
How does the currency fare to Rands?

The local currency is Euro. And while it can be really pricey to do the very touristy things, I have found that grabbing food and wine from a market and sitting somewhere beautiful is an equally wonderful way to spend time there. Flat white around 2-3 Euro (ZAR 33-50).



When is the best time of year to go?

The summer months are typically May-Sept. However, I love the off-season times - April and October. The prices are lower, it's not as hot and there are not as many people. I have experienced the winter months in Florence and it is so beautiful to see it under snow - especially the Santa Maria del Fiore.....dreamy!!!!



Any extras you should pack?

I suggest packing something that you can picnic on - Florence and Tuscany are so wonderful for finding a space to eat and enjoy the views. I would also suggest taking a backpack instead of a handbag - there is so much walking to be done in the city centre and you want to be able to put a snack and camera in your bag.

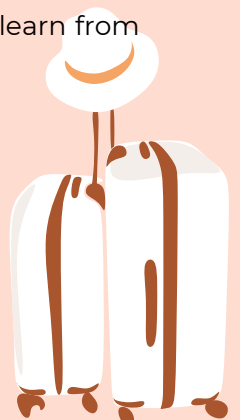


The food you must try?

I mean.....PASTA.....PIZZA.....aperitivo.....gosh, the food in Florence is dangerous for me, I can get lost in their beautiful pastas :)

And if I were you, I would try and do a cooking course while there. How dreamy to learn from an Italian Mama while sipping on some Tuscan wine :)

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WHERE I STAYED....



BEAUTIFUL AIRBNB

In 2017 my mum and I stayed at [Claudia's Place](#) on Airbnb and we absolutely loved it. It was such a well-thought-through space with so many beautiful eye-catching nooks and crannies. I do love having the ability to cook myself when I am on holiday and her kitchen was super dreamy. There was also a fantastic wardrobe section in the bedroom. If you don't like walking too much to your accommodation, this is not as central as I have stayed in other places. However, I really enjoyed the walk and found some amazing cafes and stores along the way.



CENTRALLY LOCATED APARTMENT

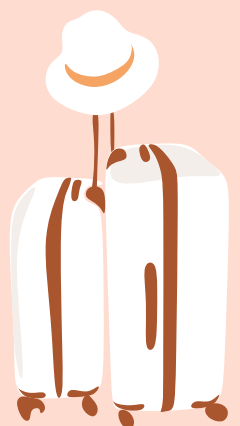
This year, when I went with Daniela (2022), we stayed in such. well-situated [apartment](#) - it was a 5 minute walk from the main train station, right above the Sant Antonio market, a 3 min walk to La Menagere and Tratoria Zaza (a win in my world!!!) and so beautifully decorated, comfortable and has a great view over the piazza for those who love to people watch!



A HOTEL IN THE CITY

In 2020 when I was there during the lockdown, we stayed on the other side of the city from where I normally stay, as we had a car. [Hotel Allegroitalia San Gallo Firenze](#) is the San Marco area, and it was a lovely and quaint little place, with very comfortable beds and spacious rooms. There was a lovely cafe/bar at the bottom of the hotel with a courtyard for slow breakfasts and evening drinks. The location was lovely and it was very easy to walk into town from the Hotel. Around a 15-20 min walk the Historic Centre.

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WHERE I ATE....



CAFES/BREAKFAST

Breakfast/Brunch Suggestions:

I personally don't think that breakfast is the Italian's best offering when it comes to food. For them, a coffee and a croissant is the way breakfast should be. They have rules about what coffee you have at different times of the day - and they would look at you funny if you have a latte after lunch :) Just a warning! But with that said, I found a few places that I really LIKED!

1. La Menagere - story below, love the interior of this cafe - filled with flowers and beautiful ceramics! A Grand piano sits in the back and often there are people playing.
2. Ditto Artigiana - delicious coffee, the breakfast are delicious and it is a great place to sit, read and journal! If you need a break from the hustle.

Health Food Cafes:

Often when I am on my morning runs through the city - I find these little organic spots for healthy lunches and breakfast

1. Albero Cafe - Fresh juice and organic products
2. La Pepiniere - Organic food and beautiful courtyard
3. Raw Vegan Firenze
4. Shake CAfe - A space to sit down and have a smoothie and a raw power ball, if you have been indulging too much in the pastries and gelato.

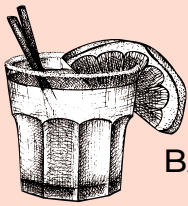
Dinner:

1. Tratoria ZaZa - you have to book, even in the off months. It is insanely popular and worth the wait. It's one of those I would queue for!
2. 4Leoni - a restaurant recommended to me by Italian teacher. The pasta according to her is Magnifique!
3. Brac - I was recommended this by a local, but sadly never made it there.
4. l'Mangiarino - exceptionally good local cuisine - the pasta!!!

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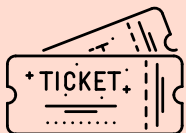
THE BARS I LOVED....



BARS

Aperitivo Bars:

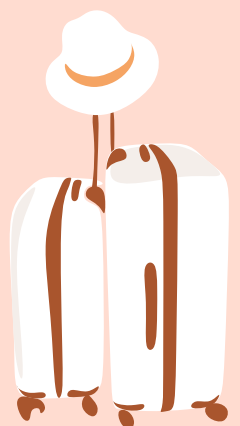
1. I Peccati del Mangiarino - we went here during lockdown and these guys pulled out all the stops for us, we were sipping on Moet and eating their finest aperitivo, honestly, they are SO lovely and welcoming.
2. Hotel La Scaletta Florence - they have a beautiful Rooftop where you can watch the sun set over the city, towering right over a cathedral rooftop, it is exceptional!
3. Grand Hotel Cavour - for a slightly more fancy, but incredible experience, head here. You pay a once off cover charge for the aperitivo, but it is an all inclusive buffet, and the views over the Arno are exceptional.
4. Se'sto on Arno - another amazing rooftop cocktail bar.
5. Simbiosi Cafe - an amazing organic all day cafe and bar. I have such a beautiful story from this restaurant, it is homely and gentle, a beautiful place for meaningful conversation and meeting people.



CONCERTS & ENTERTAINMENT:

1. Maggio Musicale Fiorentino Theatre - I watched an incredible Opera here with my mom, the sound was incredible and the theatre itself was so beautiful.
2. Uffizi Museum - as an art lover the Uffizi is an absolute must! But, book your tickets WELL in advance and be prepared to stand in a cue. It is the city of Art and Uffizi is the art lover's paradise.
3. Giotto's Bell Tower - The Santa Maria Del Fiore is one of my favorite buildings in the world and I believe it is well worth going up the tower to get an incredible view of the city.

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A FEW MARKETS I TRIED....

MERCATO CENTRALE

I haven't been back to Mercato Centrale since 2017, when I went with a partner and his family. It was such a great atmosphere and I really enjoyed it.

It is a stunning food market with a huge variety of vendors that offer everything from Asian dumplings, to fresh fruit, cheeses and meats, pasta and all things in between. The great thing is being able to choose what you want to eat, find a drink that tickles your fancy and then sit in a central location while you and your table either share everything or eat what it is that you desire for that meal.

It is such a beautiful building and at the time that we were there, there was live music playing and a really incredible atmosphere. It is made up of two levels, with a more gourmet offering of your favorite Tuscan dishes on the top level.

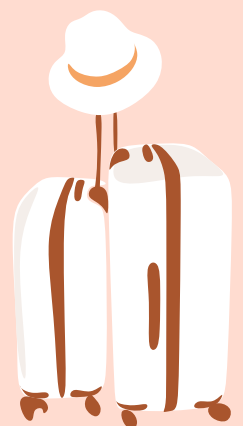
If you feel intimidated by the size of the Italian lunch menu and don't feel like having all four courses for lunch, then try this quick-grab but delicious lunch alternative!

SAN LORENZO OUTDOOR MARKET

We stayed just above this very busy market in 2022. And it fills up with people very early on and does not clear until after sunset. There are so many stalls running with anything "leather" that your heart could desire. Be aware, not all the leather is real and you need to haggle. Do not accept the first price, these guys are very good at what they do.

As with most of these busy public spaces, watch your belongings and keep your wallet and phone close to you.

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My Kind of Morning

For me, a really special morning looks like this:

Firstly, if you want a glimpse of Florence that no one else gets to see, you have to get up early. Just before sunrise. And either take a walk or a run and watch the sunrise and light up the black and white stripes of the Duomo. I have truly never been more in awe of a building as I am of that, as you see the sun hitting all the different artistic feats that are everywhere on its facade. Your eyes are spoiled for choice. But don't get caught staying there too long, because you have to make your way to Ponte Vecchio and be on the bridge as the sun starts to hit the Arno. I always sit in between the arched, string out to the Uffizi and take moment to appreciate this incredible bridge alone. This a moment you will not get for the rest of the day, as tourist floods the bridge with selfie sticks! And then carry on up the banks of the Arno toward Piazza di Michelangelo, past the botanical gardens, and up the grand stairs. Taking moments to look at the city as it starts to wake up below you. It is so beautiful. When you get to the final steps of the Piazza Michelangelo, the view of the city is unreal, you can see the whole city. There will be a view avid photographers, keen joggers and a very dedicated influencer or two, but mostly you will be one of the few up there. And it is spectacular.

Take a slow meander down the opposite side of the way you came up and sneak your head into the botanical gardens, they are so well landscaped and so beautifully maintained. I love them. The rose gardens at the right time of year and too beautiful for words. And there are so many interesting sculptures that purposefully frame different angles of the city in different ways.

And from there, I would wander around the back of Uffizi, making my way down to La Menagere for a delicious coffee. Hoping that the table underneath the incredible flower wall has not been taken. And I would sit and embrace the beauty of the city, before heading off on one of the many suggestions above...so many markets, so many sights, and in fact, just the chance to meander!

If you are a shopper, the options are endless, the streets are filled with every shop your heart could desire. My favorite thing those is to get into the back streets, where the artisan stores are, where the vintage stores are. Be careful of sticking to the main street, because you will find your normal high street shops. Florence's market is also great and you will find beautiful handbags, belts, and wallets.

But for me the beauty is in the craft stores - the hat stores, the leather makers, the cashmere. You have to keep your eyes peeled, as down the tiny alleys, there you will find the gifts of Florence...keep walking, keep your eyes (and wallet) peeled.

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