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A day in the Oltrarno #florencetoptip

Enjoy a full day of explorations in the Oltrarno area, guided by Apartments Florence's Top Tips to live Florence like a local! Share your experience on Facebook or Instagram with [#florencetoptip](#) and [#apartmentsflorence](#)!



Shopping area



History and curiosities



Breakfast



Night life



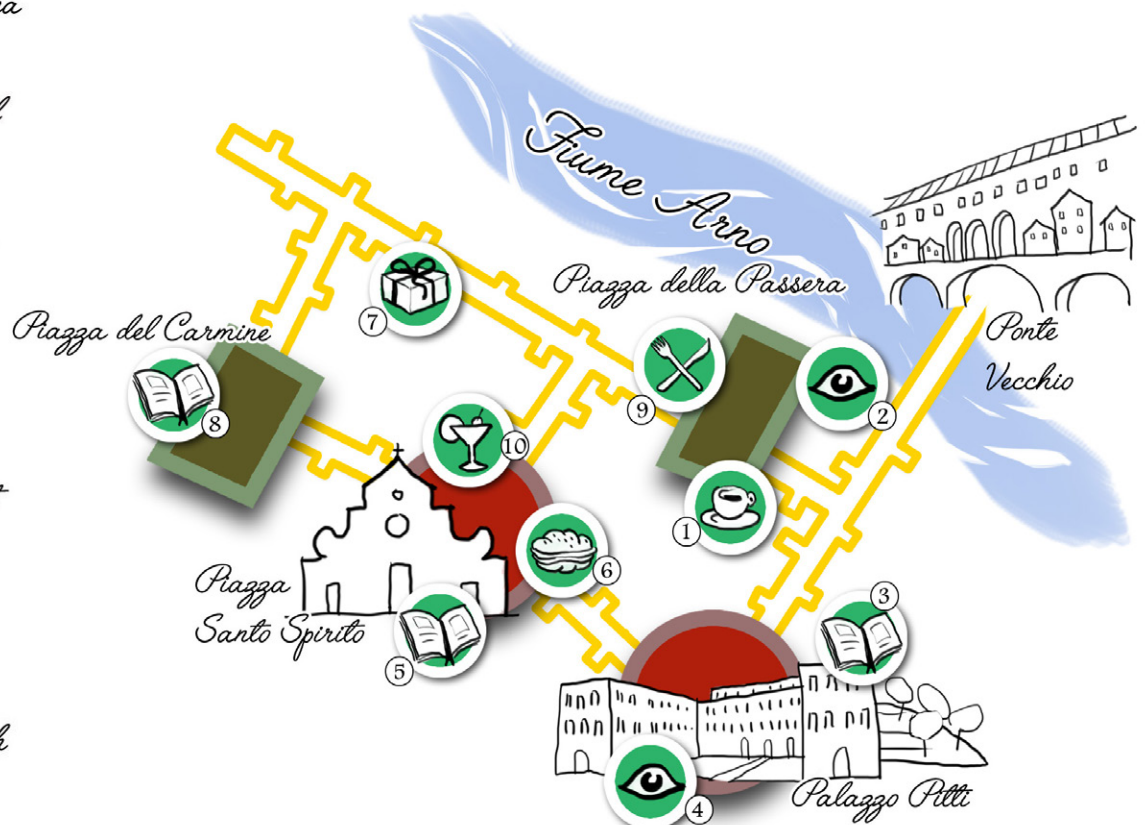
Restaurant

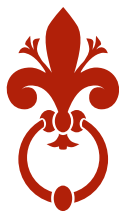


View



Quick lunch





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Starting Point: Piazza della Passera

Starting Point: Piazza della Passera **Piazza della Passera** ① is a lively and characteristic spot of the Oltrarno area, and it's here we suggest you start your day with a nice breakfast at the **Caffè degli Artigiani**. This small charming caffè could feel like you've suddenly been transposed in Paris, immersed in a very bohemian atmosphere. Try their selection of teas, herbal teas of coffee, to go with a tasty brioche or a piece of cake. Either way, Piazza della Passera is filled with restaurants, tiny caffès and a very famous gelateria as well – so take your pick for breakfast time! After breakfast, take a better look at this tiny Piazza. **Wondering what "Passera" means?** Well, if you must know, "Passera" is a colloquial / vulgar expression to indicate either a very good looking woman or a prostitute. The reason why this square is named like this is because it used to be in the center of a rather dissolute neighborhood, filled with brothels – so, that explains it.

After breakfast, our suggestion is to take the lovely Via Toscanella and go straight ahead to reach **Borgo San Jacopo**. This street is filled with shops and caffès, but the reason we like Borgo San Jacopo is because it hosts three of the last few examples of medieval architecture in Florence: **Tower Houses** (Case Torri) or, as someone called them, **Medieval Skyscrapers**. Tower Houses were common from Middle Age all the way through Renaissance, usually belonging to noble families, structured on different levels depending on the function of that specific floor. Feuds and rivalries between families often arose, and overcoming the height of the rivals' tower was considered a victory. In Borgo San Jacopo you'll find three well preserved examples of these Tower Houses, originally belonging to three important Florentine families: Belfredelli (Borgo San Jacopo n. 9), Barbadori (n. 54) and Marsili (n. 17). None of these towers has actually preserved its original height, some were severely damaged during WWII, and in some cases they have been incorporated with more recent constructions, making it hard to recognize them.

Right in front of the Belfredelli Tower you'll see a **passage amidst the buildings, leading towards the river, beside a Hotel's entrance**. Take a few steps further and take your

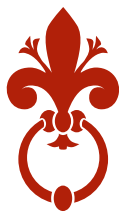
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Stefania will take care of your morning coffee at Il Caffè degli Artigiani



The Oltrarno is full of unexpected surprises..!



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camera with you, for a stunning view of **Ponte Vecchio** ②!
Take a few pictures and head on to the next stop of our day:
Palazzo Pitti ③.

Dive in: Palazzo Pitti and Boboli Garden

The **Pitti family** was one of the most influential and famous during the 1400, along with the Medici and the Strozzi. The Palace was commissioned in 1440 by Luca Pitti to Brunelleschi, with the precise **intention to outstage any other previously built palaces** in town: the whole construction was supposed to be magnificent and intimidating, the courtyard (which is now Piazza Pitti) was specifically designed to contain the whole perimeter of Palazzo Strozzi, and the windows of the facade were specifically requested to be even bigger than the doors of Palazzo Medici. A huge undertaking for old and ill Brunelleschi, who unfortunately died before he could see it finished.

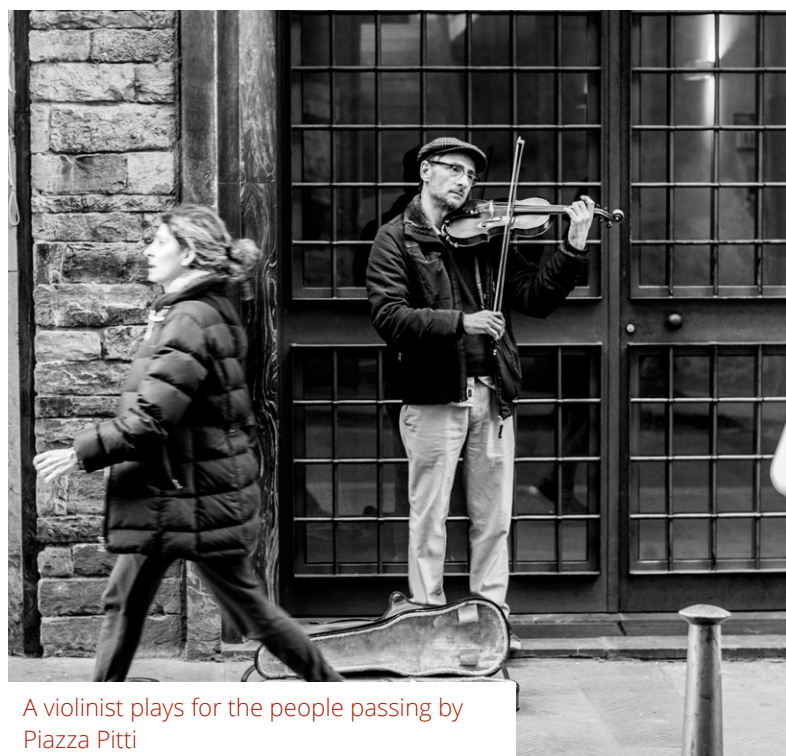
A **curiosity about Palazzo Pitti's facade** is to be found on the left side of the entryway: among the stones used to build the facade you'll notice, near the ground level, a significant discrepancy in size between one very long stone and one very very short. This was supposedly intended as a symbolic representation of Luca Pitti's claim of power and wealth over the other noble Florentine families.

All the stones used for the exteriors are in **Pietraforte (literally Strong Stone)**, a specific kind of material which was then found right on the spot. If you take a walk into Boboli's Garden you'll certainly stumble into the amphitheater at some point: well, that amphitheater comes as a result of deep excavations and mine working to extract the Pietraforte to build the palace.

The Palace was home to the Pitti family for a short time, after which **economical ruin hit the Pitti** and they were forced to **sell the palace to their archenemies, the Medici**. Cosimo I Medici was so eager to destroy every trace of the Pitti family that he had each and every representation of their family crest dismantled all over Florence. The only survivor is still visible at the corner between Piazza Pitti and Sdrucciolo de' Pitti. From then on, the Palace has been known to be the residence of the Medici family, then to the Lorena, and later on it became



Basking in the sun in Piazza Pitti is every Florentine's custom both in summer and in winter time!



A violinist plays for the people passing by Piazza Pitti



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the Italian Kings residence, when Florence was named Italy's capital. It was Vittorio Emanuele III who donated the building to the city of Florence in 1919 to make it a stunning museum. Nowadays **Palazzo Pitti** hosts a variety of museums: the Palatine Gallery, the Gallery of Modern Art, the Costume museum, the Silver museum, the Porcelain museum, as well as many different themed exhibition during the course of the year.

Boboli Garden is a whole separate museum and a true jewel itself: aside from being one of the most famous and renowned Italian Gardens in the world, they also feature a number of marvelous sculptures, fountains and artworks, and in the summer they sometimes host evening concerts and representations. Our suggestion is to just walk through its meadows, groves, its peaceful avenues punctuated by secular trees up to the top of the hill where you can enjoy a **stunning panorama of Florence** ④. Boboli is a very poetic and soothing treat in the middle of the city!

Lunch Break: Santo Spirito

As you exit Palazzo Pitti and Boboli gardens, make your way to **Piazza Santo Spirito** ⑤, either taking Sdrucciolo de' Pitti – where you'll find a **great artisanal design shop**: Giulia Materia - or taking a long route through Piazza San Felice and Via Mazzetta.

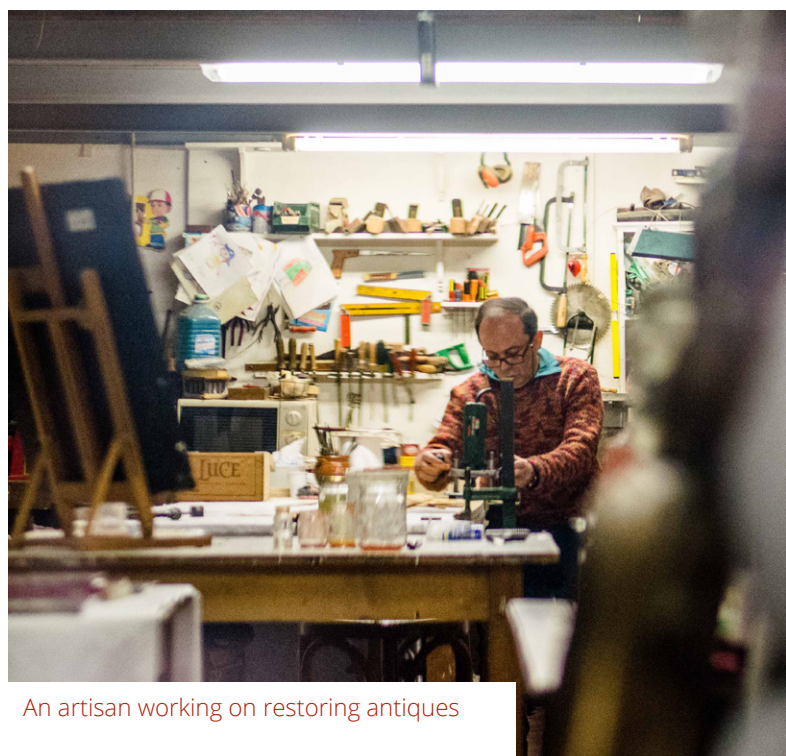
Both this routes will make it easy for you to bump into **Via Maggio**, one of the most famous streets in Florence for **antiques and art galleries**. Just taking a walk through, looking and browsing all the galleries and the restorers' workshops will make you feel as if you've entered an open air museum. Piazza Santo Spirito is one of the **most lively, typical and still authentic places** in Florence.

The church's origins date back to the 1200s, when it was still located outside Florence's walls, built by Agostinian friars; but the present appearance is the result of Brunelleschi's remodeling and renovation, realized in 1444. This Basilica was Brunelleschi's last work. **Michelangelo found shelter here** in 1492, when, exiled after Lorenzo de' Medici's death, the Prior decided to help the 17 year old boy, also enabling him to continue his researches and studies on human anatomy

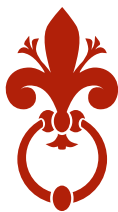
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Piazza Santo Spirito



An artisan working on restoring antiques



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dissecting corpses. As a thank you, the Master left a beautiful crucifix to Santo Spirito's Church, today visible in the sacristy. The Basilica hosts a variety of paintings, frescoes and marble statues, as well as featuring three wonderful cloisters. Aside from the simple but gorgeous church, Piazza Santo Spirito represents Florentines better than any other place in town: **market place and quiet relaxing spot by day, bustling eventful venue by night**. Every morning there's a small local market in the square, with fresh groceries, clothes and other curiosities. The area surrounding the Piazza is dotted with many many restaurants, live music clubs, aperitivo places, cafès and whatnot. If it's **lunch time** and you are searching for a nice place to sit down and rest for a bit, look no further and order your selected Panino at **Gusta Panino ⑥**, right in Piazza Santo Spirito. This vintage-style place offers many combinations for your lunch sandwich, and you can find a nice rustic table outside, to sit in front of the church and enjoy the atmosphere. If you are looking for a nice trattoria, on the other side of the piazza you'll find the **Osteria Santo Spirito**, offering typical Tuscan menu and charming ambiance.

After lunch, our suggestion is to take a walk in Santo Spirito's surroundings: **Via Sant'Agostino hosts a few gems** in terms of shopping. A nice vintage store, an ethnic unusual store and a Florentine institution, **Rolando's bookshop**. Rolando Ugolini born and raised in Oltrarno, opened the bookshop in 1947 after winning the license in a poker game. From then on, he became a librarian, opening his delightful little shop, first with the help of the wife and, in his late years, of his niece. Rolando passed away in 2014, sadly, but his niece continues his work. Enjoy a tour of this small chaotic library, dodging piles of books, cases full of comic books and magazines, searching for the best piece of literature to bring home as a souvenir. When you feel you have snooped around enough, move back towards the church and find the little alley behind it, Via de' Coverelli, which will take you in Via di Santo Spirito, where you'll take a left and move on to enter **Borgo San Frediano ⑦**.

Afternoon: Borgo San Frediano

This street is one **true landmark of the Oltrarno**, together with

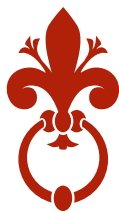
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Three cooks during a break after lunchtime



Stefano, owner of Twisted Jazz Shop, with the shop's mascotte



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via dei Serragli: is hosts a few of the best cafès, clubs, shops etc on this side of the River. Borgo San Frediano, dedicated to the homonymous saint, was always home to the most authentic Florentine spirit – so much so, that **Vasco Pratolini** dedicated a few of his novels to this neighborhood, the most famous being “Le Ragazze di San Frediano”.

This area managed to preserve its originality through the centuries: initially home to workshops, mainly belonging to the Arte della Lana (Whool Guild) and later introducing Tobacco Manufacture, **San Frediano now has re-invented itself** in a more hip and trendy way, including bookshops, trendy cafès, designers’ outlets, artists’ studios and a few vintage, one of a kind stores – **without ever forgetting its popular roots**.

So now, as you walk these streets, can you feel the history? Can you feel the true Florentine wit and hard-working character?

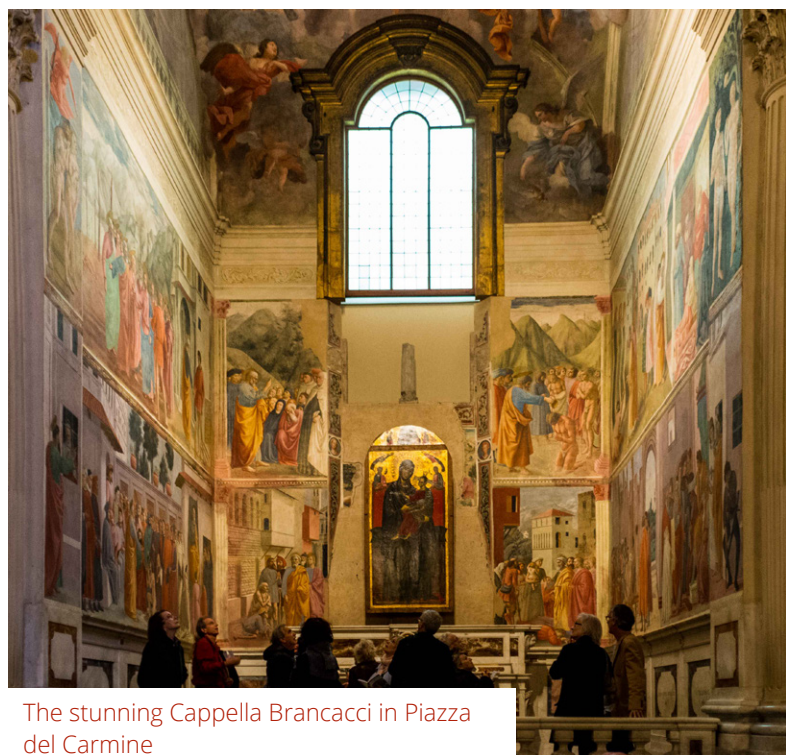
Follow us and discover a few features of the pure Florentine esprit.

In Borgo San Frediano start by entering **La Cité –Libreria Café**. Every Florentine has grown fond of this place quickly, and you will soon understand why: its atmosphere is truly welcoming and soothing, makes you want to sit down, have a tea and read a book, endlessly. Another not-to-miss spot is right in front of la Cité and is **Twisted Jazz Shop**. One of the last standing Vinyl shops, offering a wide choice of genres and styles, and some rarities.

Moving on through Borgo San Frediano you’ll encounter a square: **Piazza del Carmine** ⑧. Inside the church, a true artistic masterpiece awaits: the **Cappella Brancacci**. This Chapel, dated 1424, was designed by **Masaccio** and **completed by Filippino Lippi**. The frescoes depict the “history of men’s salvation”, from the Genesis to the foundation of the Roman Church. This magnificent chapel is very much worth a visit: even the entryway through the cloister is pure art and poetry. After this taste of art, if you’re feeling you may need a snack, you’re in the right place: **Hemingway’s Chocolaterie** is right down the street, in Piazza Piattellina! A heartwarming atmosphere combined with the most fabulous hot chocolate in Florence will surely do the trick and get your strength back for the next few hours.

Our suggestion for the rest of the afternoon is to basically get lost in the Oltrarno streets, continuing exploring San Frediano,

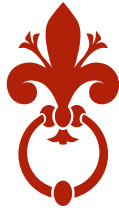
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The stunning Cappella Brancacci in Piazza del Carmine



At Giulia Materia Designer you’ll find the perfect design souvenir!



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Via dei Serragli, Via D'Ardiglione (True gem! Don't miss it!) and Borgo della Stella, finding your favorite spots and with shopping opportunities all around.

Evening and Nightlife

As we mentioned, **nightlife in the Oltrarno has a lively and eventful scene**. Both Piazza Santo Spirito and Borgo San Frediano are full of nice clubs, pubs and restaurants, you could just wander around and take your pick – but we will not leave you alone in this decision: here are a few suggestions. For a typical Tuscan dinner you have two choices: Il **Santo Bevitore** in Via di Santo Spirito, very much loved by Florentines and tourists for its atmosphere and great food, or – for a chic evening – **I 4 Leoni**, in **Piazza della Passera** ⑨ very typical Tuscan food wrapped up in an elegant and refined environment. If it's something more simple but trendy you're looking for, our suggestion is to try out Tamerò in Piazza Santo Spirito: this is a PastaBar, meaning they prepare and serve fresh, handmade pasta with sauce at all times from aperitivo on. Booking in advance would be wise: the place is always packed!

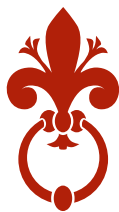
For aperitivo or a nice drink afterward, head on to **Volume** ⑩, in Piazza Santo Spirito: great choice of drinks, big buffet and sometimes a live concert, all in an old carpenter's workshop. Another charming and very Florentine place to go is the **Caffè Notte**, newly reopened, in via delle Caldaie very close to piazza Santo Spirito: here you'll find a **vintage style, fascinating atmosphere**, boardgames, books, poetry clubs and live music from the indie scene in Florence. If it's **live music** you look for, you should check the monthly program at the **NOF Gallery**, in Borgo San Frediano, or La Cité: both these places offer a wide range of musical styles and exhibitions. If you're in the mood for a pint, head to **Archea Brewery**, in Via dei Serragli, just off Santo Spirito and try one of their many artisanally brewed beers: you won't regret it! And, last but not least, if you fancy some theatre or an Opera, you're in the right place. **St. Mark's English Church Theater**, in Via Maggio, offers a variety of classical music or opera nights, in English! If you wish to check out a few Italian productions of local theater companies, look for **Piazza del Cestello**, off Borgo San Frediano, and explore the homonymous theater program.

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Piazza del Carmine and the Dome San Frediano in Cestello at sunset





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Practical Informations

Palazzo Pitti

Being divided in many different museum, please check online the single timing and pricing for the museums you're interested in. Bookings and info: 055 294883

Boboli Gardens

8.15 – 16.30 (November February)

8.15 – 17.30 (March)

8.15 – 18.30 (April, May, September and October)

8.15 – 19.30 (June August)

Santo Spirito's Church

Working days: 9.30-12.30; 16-17.30;

Holidays: 11.30-12.30; 16-17.30

Cappella Brancacci

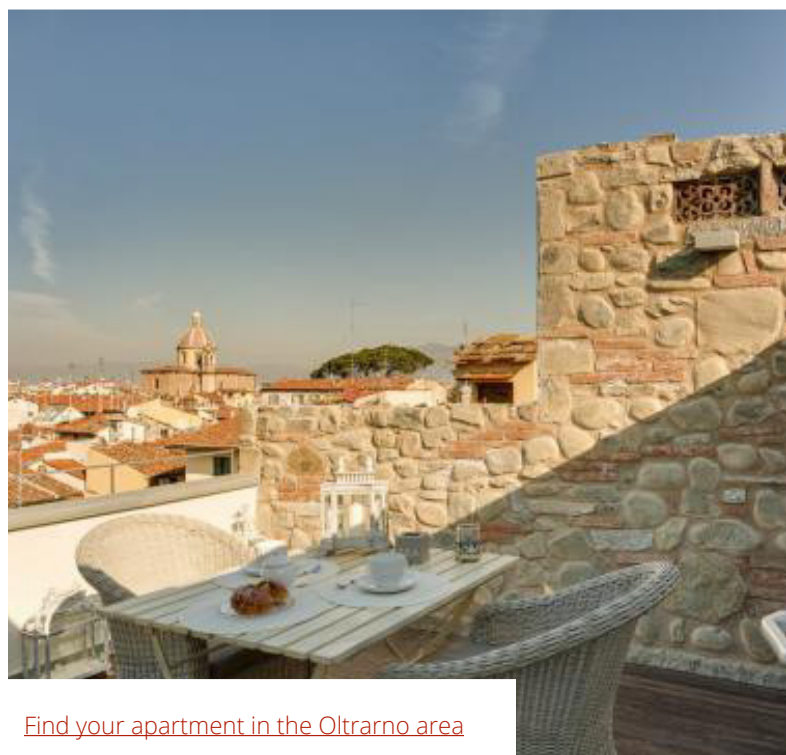
Working days 10-17 (except Tuesday)

Sunday and holidays: 13-17

Seasonal Markets and events

Piazza Santo Spirito hosts a daily morning market, but on the third Sunday of the month, it becomes the home for La Fierucolina: fresh, organic products along with artisanal crafts and home made jam, honey, sauce and many many surprises.

On the second Sunday of the month, it's time for a large Flea Market to take over the Piazza, and also, the Sunday before Christmas, Santo Spirito hosts the Christmas edition of La Fierucola.



[Find your apartment in the Oltrarno area](#)

NB: These informations are provided by Apartments Florence according to the informations found on the official websites of the museums, venues and monuments, but we cannot be held responsible for changes or errors in opening hours or conditions. It's always best to double check timetables and prices before you book a visit or arrange an activity.

Credits:

Photos and copywriting Carlotta Nucci

Map: Niccolò Gambassi

Borgo Albizi,15

50122 Florence, Italy

T+39 055 2479309

info@apartmentsflorence.it

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