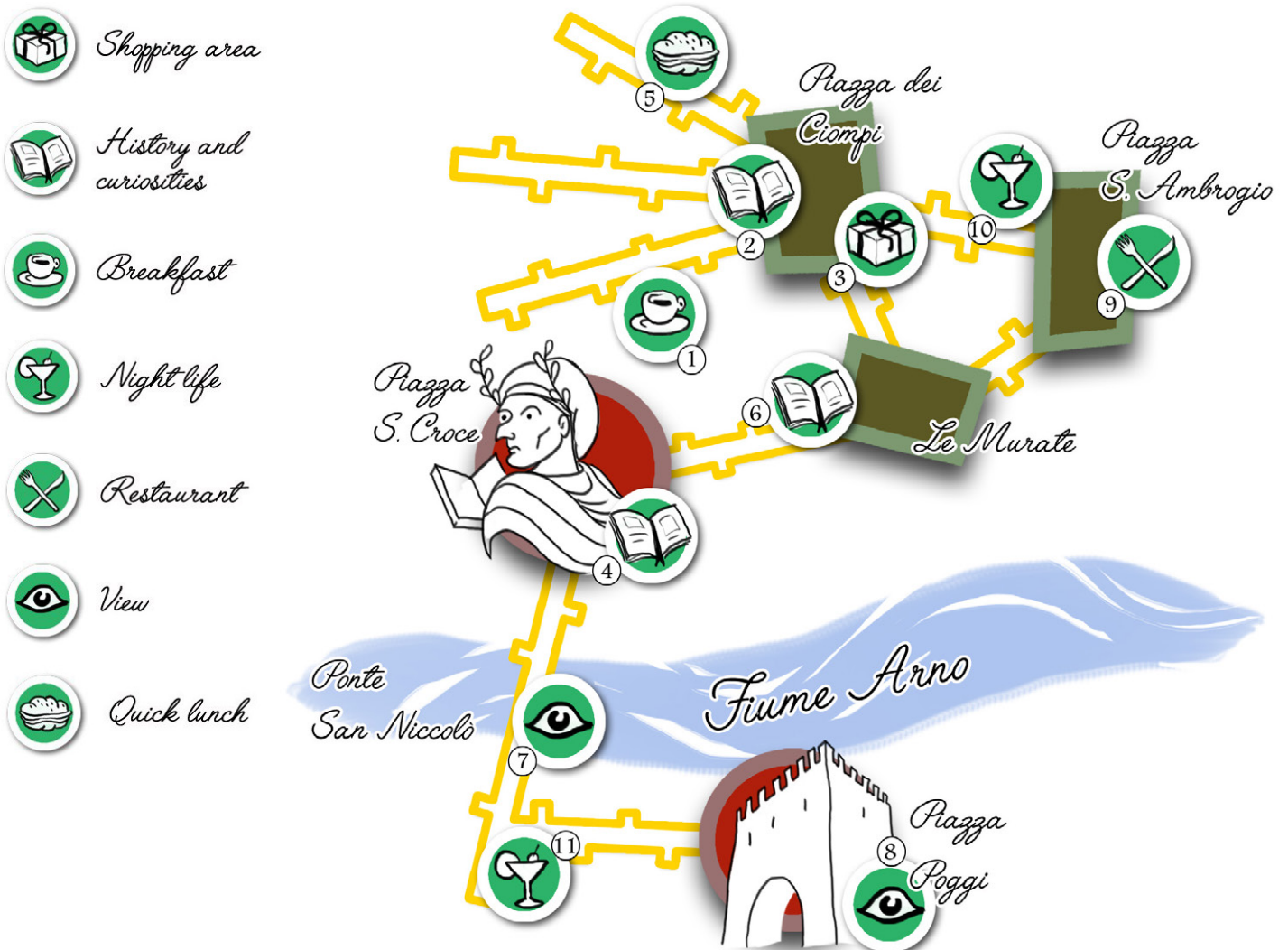


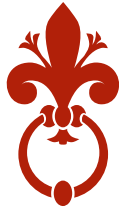
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A day in
Santa Croce
#florencetoptip

Enjoy a full day of explorations in the Santa Croce 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!





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Starting Point: Piazza del Pesce

Piazza Salvemini ① may not even qualify as a Piazza to a stranger's eye, but as a small triangle nested between via dell'Oriuolo and Borgo Albizi. This little square may also seem like it hasn't got much to offer, but please enter the small Bar **Pasticceria Così** and sit down for a coffee and some pastries. This bar is not fancy or extraordinary looking, but try their espresso with some pastry or a beignet: that's a way to start a day! Our favorite is the **pistachio / white chocolate filled beignet!** The next door Vestri is also a nice breakfast alternative for chocolate lovers, being a famous chocolaterie!

After breakfast, start exploring around!

Right next to Piazza Salvemini is Piazza San Pier Maggiore, a nice small piazza which usually hosts a fresh vegetable stall in the mornings, and a variety of restaurants. Borgo Albizi, aside from being the home of

our central office, is a nice shopping street, with different kind of shops, from antiques to designer jewelry and clothes. The Lions Fountain pub is particularly loved by English and American tourists, while the many restaurants located under the **Arco di San Pierino**, on the right side of the Piazza, are frequented and loved by Florentines also.

Keep on exploring by crossing the street and taking Via Pietrapiana, thus going deeper in the Sant'Ambrogio neighborhood. This area of Florence, attached to Santa Croce, is one of the most lively and typical on this side of the Arno river. For starters, you will reach **Piazza dei Ciompi ②**: a green, colorful and cheerful square.

Market Heaven: Piazza dei Ciompi and St. Ambrogio Market

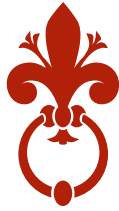
The Loggia you see has just been restored and it is called "**Loggia del Pesce**" (Fish Loggia) because it used to host the Fresh fish market, which was originally set in the Old Florence Ghetto in the area that is now Piazza della Repubblica.

This Loggia, designed and built by Vasari, was then dismantled and hidden away in a storage room: Florence had such big renovation plans to realize, and the Ghetto had to go.

Fortunately, Vasari's Loggia was spared the destruction and was later re-built in Piazza dei Ciompi, now home to the city's biggest Flea Market. **Shopping opportunities ahead ③**, ladies and gentlemen: enter this Brocante's Heaven and snoop around for **good souvenirs of unique pieces of history**. If vintage is your



Vasari's Loggia del Pesce, in Piazza dei Ciompi



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thing, stop by Il Buttero Boutique, right in the middle of the square. Marvelous dresses, hats and a wide variety of colorful vests! Enjoy!

After exploring Piazza dei Ciompi, head on to another Market place, specialized in fresh groceries this time.

Sant'Ambrogio Market, right down the road, is the second fresh goods market in town. Here you will find homegrown organic produce, fresh bread and schiacciata, local cheese and Parmesan, a variety of oriental foods and spices, and also a plants, vintage and used clothes, shoes, linens, bijoux....**this market really has it all!**

Now leave the shopping behind for a moment, and let's head on to **Piazza Santa Croce ④**, one of the most famous squares of the city.

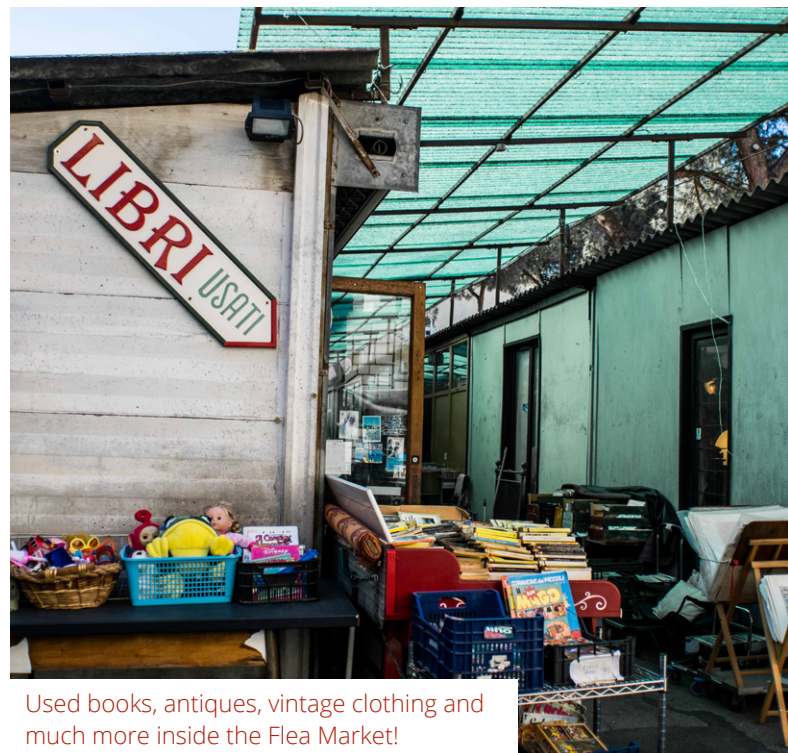
Dive in: Piazza Santa Croce

To reach the piazza, take the lovely quiet **Borgo Allegri**, a nice pause from all the fuss and chaos of the most beaten roads. This nice street also features a small green area, a rarity in downtown Florence, perfect to sit down and take a five minutes pause if need be.

Down the street you will reach the side of Santa Croce's Basilica, dating back to 1443 and presumably designed by Arnolfo di Cambio. Don't rush your way inside, yet. A small detour through a passage in the back of the church will lead you to a hidden gem: **Santa Croce's Leather School**.

This is probably the **finest school in Florence** for all those who wish to learn the art of handcrafting leather and create stylish handbags, book covers, clothes: people come from all over the world to learn from the masters and bring home a truly Florentine tradition. The School also offers **short daily classes** on how to create small crafts that you get to keep as a unique souvenir in the end! If you are not handy, just enjoy the

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Used books, antiques, vintage clothing and much more inside the Flea Market!



At Sant'Ambrogio Market you can find fresh seasonal products



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tour through the school, watch artisans at work and lose yourself in the shop! The Leather School is directly connected to the Basilica, so with one ticket you'll get to see all of Santa Croce's beauties.

Inside the church you'll find all kinds of stunning art works, statues and famous frescoes, but Santa Croce is also famous for being sort of a **Pantheon of Artists**, due to the presence of many funerary monuments dedicated to Italy's most illustrious men, such as **Dante, Gioacchino Rossini, Leonardo Da Vinci, Galileo Galilei, Michelangelo, Canova, Ugo Foscolo**...some of them are only monuments, some of them are actually graves.

Talking in detail about the other masterpieces that this church and its museum have to offer would require a whole book, but let us mention our favorite spots inside the Santa Croce complex.

Make sure to stop by the newly restored **Cappella de' Pazzi** and enjoy the festive colours on the ceiling, knowing that the architect and designer behind this gorgeous chapel was our very own Brunelleschi.

Also, don't miss a nice walk through the outdoor **cloisters and gardens**, oasis of peace and quiet, and be sure you enter into the ancient refectory where you can sit back and admire Taddeo Gaddi's frescoed Cenacolo (**one of the most ancient depictions of the Last Supper**).

After you complete your visit inside Santa Croce, take the time to walk outside and fully appreciate the beauty of the 1863 marble facade. **Dante's marble figure** watches over the Piazza from the top of the stairwell, but was once located right in the middle of the square.

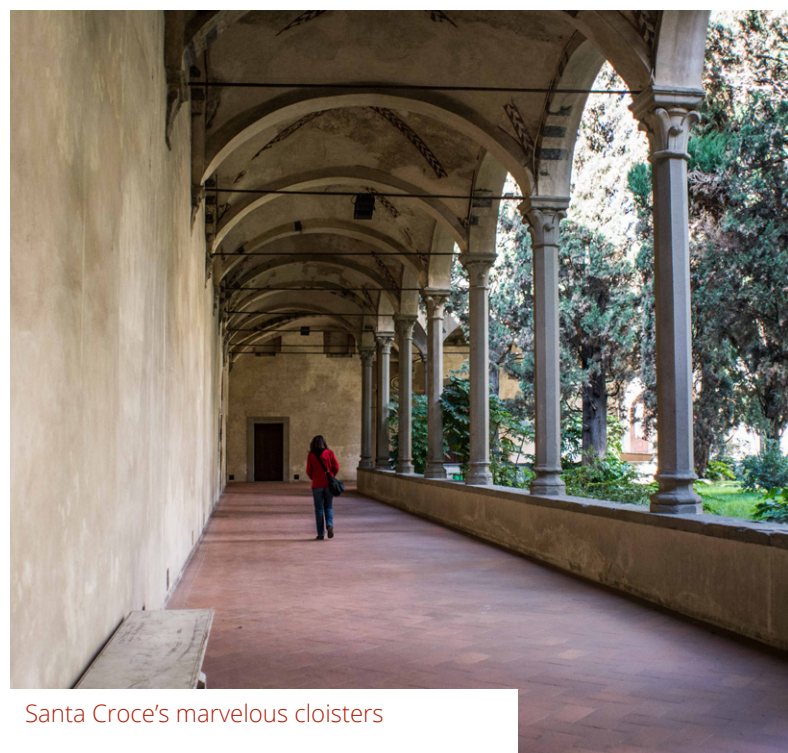
Piazza Santa Croce has many stories to tell, but we choose to tell you just two.

First, you must know that this Piazza has been the theater and stadium for what is now one of the most important **Florentine traditions: the Calcio Storico Fiorentino**, a somewhat popular ancestor of the

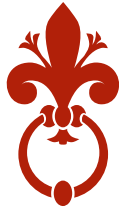
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Cristian works at the Santa Croce complex and knows all the secrets of the place!



Santa Croce's marvelous cloisters



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modern soccer or rugby game.

The game gained popularity in the late 1400, but the most famous match – the one which became reason for re-enactments and parades – was played in 1530 when, in spite of **Carl V's troops besieging Florence**, **Florentines** decided to not give a damn and start **playing ball in Piazza Santa Croce**. Nowadays the four historical neighborhoods of Florence still face each other during a tournament in June, reenacting that famous match. Basically the purpose of the game is to score points by throwing the ball outside the field on the opponents' side, using all means necessary – meaning there are **little to no restrictions** to the use of brutal force and scams.

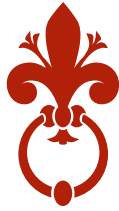
The second story we choose to share with you is more recent, linked to the huge flood that hit Florence in 1966. On **Nov, 4th 1966**, after days and days of pouring rain, the Arno river broke its banks and ran wild through the streets of Florence for hours, causing unmeasurable damages to artistic and historical landmarks as well as houses and, unfortunately, people. Santa Croce and its surroundings were one of the **most damaged areas in town**: the church, all its valuable art pieces, and the **National Central Library** (set just alongside the river, around the corner from the church) were severely damaged and flooded by mud. Luckily, only a few hours after the disaster, help came from all over the city, the region, and later the world: Florence witnessed a massive solidarity mobilization to help the city get back on its feet and recover as much of the damaged art works, ancient books, buildings, personal belongings as possible. Hence, the phrase **"Mud Angels"** was born, referring to all those who donated time, money, resources or their arms' strength to get Florence and the Florentines back on saddle. **Riccardo Marasco**, Florentine songwriter and storyteller, has written a funny song about this tragic moment in the history of the city (it's called *l'Alluvione*), proving once again that Florentines never take anything too seriously for too long.



A side entry into Santa Croce's sacristy



Vittorino's Grocery and Panini Place



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Lunch break : So many choices!

The Santa Croce area is literally filled with small restaurants, pizzerias, panini places: anything you may wish for, you'll find it here.

We'll give you a couple of tips on our favorite places! If it's the real, genuine **Florentine grocery store experience** you are looking for, stop looking and run to Via degli Alfani, corner of Borgo Pinti, and enter **Vittorino's place ⑤**.

Vittorino and his wife Rossana are an institution in the neighborhood: top quality food, cheap prices, heavenly panini and fresh dishes everyday!

If it's pizza you're craving, **La Divina Pizza** is your go-to spot: organic toppings and whole grain and sourdough...this pizza is sure to leave you happy and content! Another top panini place is **Selem**, in Piazza Ghiberti. A tiny, tiny place right in the middle of the market fuss, but still very charming and sure to serve tasty sandwiches!

These are only three options: look around and get inspired by anything you like!

Afternoon: Florence's old Prison and San Niccolò

Not far from Sant'Ambrogio's Market and Piazza Santa Croce there is a peculiar and characteristic place you should pay a visit to: **Le Murate complex ⑥**.

This modern apartments' complex, enriched by the presence of fine restaurants, cafès and art galleries was once **Florence's old prison**. A place of despair, darkness and sadness turned into a lively cultural beacon for the city.

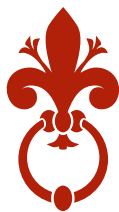
Le Murate wasn't always a prison: originally this was a **convent dedicated to Santa Caterina**, inhabited by cloistered nuns (so-called "murate"; literally: "walled in"), then from 1845 to 1945 the convent was turned into a male prison. It wasn't until the '90ies that the city of Florence decided to do something with this ancient and historical landmark and **turn it into something vital and new**.



One of the internal courtyards at Le Murate hosts the Caffè Letterario



Colourful details in San Niccolò



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Walking inside the two main courtyard, bare in mind that such personalities as **Lorenzo de' Medici** and **Caterina Sforza** have walked in those same places centuries ago, before Le Murate was a prison. You can visit a small part of the old jail floors and the maximum security ward since they are now part of an art gallery that is often open and showcases artworks inside the small cells.

The **Caffè Letterario** inside the main courtyard has one of the **most lively eventful programs** when it comes to music, poetry, readings and art shows: stop by for a coffee or an aperitivo and see what's new!

Moving on, we suggest you end your afternoon explorations in San Niccolò and get a first taste of the Oltrarno feeling. You can reach the neighborhood by crossing Ponte San Niccolò or **Ponte alle Grazie ⑦**, where you'll get a great view of Ponte Vecchio as well. **San Niccolò**, being part of the **Oltrarno**, has a **special fascinating atmosphere** and is filled with restaurants, art galleries and workshops.

Street artist **CLET** has his studio here (if you've seen street signs cleverly modified with stickers, that's him!), and he's often open to visitors, offering also small pieces of his artworks as original souvenirs. Our suggestion is to walk through Via San Niccolò and get inspired by what you see. From here you can also choose to be brave and climb up to **Forte Belvedere**, one of the best panoramic spots on this side of the river. Also, if you happen to be in Florence during the summer, know that you can visit **Torre San Niccolò ⑧**, originally a passage into Florence's medieval walls, and enjoy the breathtaking view of the city from up high.

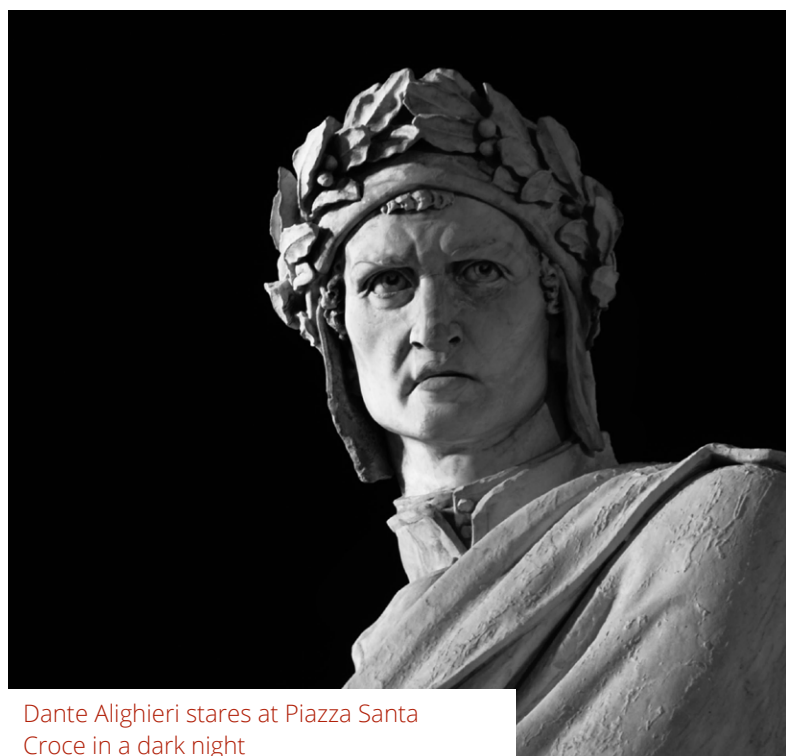
Evening and Nightlife

The Santa Croce area has a **rich and eventful nightlife scene**. A variety of clubs, restaurants, live music bars, pubs await you in the streets surrounding Piazza Santa Croce and Sant'Ambrogio.

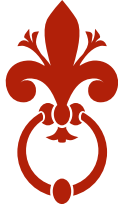
For a nice dinner here are our suggested locations. In Via di Mezzo you'll find one of the most ancient restaurants in Florence, **La Pentola dell'Oro**.



CLET and his studio



Dante Alighieri stares at Piazza Santa Croce in a dark night



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Il Cibreo is a real Florentine institution: caffè, restaurant, snack bar, theater, this polyhedric venue has many sides and many souls, all equally interesting, tasty and original.

For a **luxury dinner** or a special occasion the **Enoteca Pinchiorri** is the place to go: selected gourmet menu and prime choice wines, for an unforgettable experience.

A **less expensive alternative** for dinner is **La Drogheria ⑨**, **stylish restaurant**, grill and bistro in Largo Annigoni. As for **aperitivo, drinks or live music** opportunities, the choice is vast and comprehensive. Here are our top picks for the area.

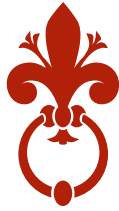
A nice wine bar to kick off the evening is **La Sosta dei Papi ⑩** in Borgo la Croce, just off Piazza Sant'Ambrogio. If you happen to be in San Niccolò the go-to place for aperitivo and drinks is **Il Rifullo ⑪**, other Florentine institution.

For live music the alternatives are many, but we recommend **The Backstage** in Via Fiesolana or **The Speakeasy 23** in Via San Niccolò: both have a diversified musical program every week.

A nice pint can be found at **Angie's Pub**, nested in Via de' Neri, just off Piazza Santa Croce, outside the fuss of Via dei Benci, the most trafficked street for Florence's nightlife during weekends, due to the presence of many clubs and pubs lined up on the same street.

The main rule remains: **follow your instinct** and choose whatever suits you best!





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Practical Informations

Flea Market

Every day 9.00 – 19.30

Last Sunday of the month the market expands to the surrounding streets!

Sant'Ambrogio Market

Every day: 7.00 – 14.00

Santa Croce Opening Hours

Mon. – Sat.: 9.30 – 17.00

Sunday and Holidays: 14.00 – 17.00

Torre San Niccolò – Guided visit to the top

June – September: 17.00 – 20.00

A tour starts every half hour

Forte Belvedere

Check the opening hours for ongoing exhibitions – otherwise is closed to the public.

Le Murate

Spazio SUC – Piazza delle Murate

For informations on opening hours or exhibitions inside the art gallery space inside the Maxxim



[Find your apartment in the Santa Croce 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.

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Map: Niccolò Gambassi

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