

Touring Firenze

My first absolute, absolute, absolute MUST-SEE is the church of San Miniato al Monte. It sits on the hill above the city so I suggest taking a taxi or bus from the train station up to it. (Buy your tickets in the train station.) After touring, go ahead and walk back down the hill. ONE: it is not too far and it's downhill TWO: you'll hit some beautiful views as well as the Piazzale Michelangelo with a panoramic view of the city.

My second MUST-SEE is the famous Duomo. I suggest that you tour the cathedral and if you are willing, make the trek up into the dome. (As a warning, this is a fairly steep climb with several steps and a small passageway. It literally takes you up the walls of the dome to the very tip-top of the Duomo, so the reward is pretty outstanding.) You can definitely skip the Belltower and Baptistry, in my opinion.

MUSEUMS

Uffizi Gallery Houses hundreds of works of art and one the oldest galleries in the Western World. Contains several of DaVinci's, Michelangelo's, Raphael's, and Botticelli's pieces. Some notable works that stick out in my mind are the Birth of Venus, Rembrandt's Self-Portrait, La Primavera, and the Dukes of Urbino. Also don't forget to check out the statues right outside in the Piazza della Signoria. They aren't the real things but pretty close copies. (Originals can be found in the Accademia)

Museo Galileo This is a museum you may not ever hear about in the tour books but was pretty interesting. It is literally a stone's throw from the Uffizi too. Houses several scientific artifacts and tools invented and used by Galileo himself and it also contains three of his fingers... if you are into that.

Galleria dell'Accademia I would suggest booking tickets in advance for this one as it is one of the most popular sites to visit. Houses The David (yes, the REAL David) and other various statues/paintings.

Pitti Palace Worth going to see even if you decide not to tour. It is located on the South side of the River and right down the street off of the Ponte Vecchio. I toured only the costume exhibit but found it very interesting if you are into fashion design and history. Several of the major clothing designers have come from Italy and their originals are kept in this particular exhibit. Pitti is also home to the beautiful Boboli Gardens, which can be found through the portico and on the eastern grounds.

CHURCHES

Santa Croce GO INSIDE! Gorgeous true style gothic cathedral and the burial site of Michelangelo, Galileo, Rossini, and Machievelli. Also houses several awe-inspiring frescoes.

Santa Maria Novella Another pretty church to view from the outside and tour only if you have time. Maybe grab a sandwich and sit outside the front in the modern-inspired piazza.

San Lorenzo This church really interested me because the front façade is only rough-hewn rock while the other sides remain a beautiful example of Brunelleschi's architecture. (This is the same architect who built Florence's Duomo) Michelangelo was commissioned to cover the front of the church, but his piece was never added. He did, however complete the Biblioteca Laurenziana (library) which can be entered from inside the church.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

1. One day go grab lunch from a nearby café and eat outside of the Ospedale Degli Innocenti (Hospital of the Innocents). It is another one of Brunelleschi's early works and was the site of an institution that cared for abandoned children within the city. Just a beautiful little piazza, away from the crowds. Just beware of gypsies in this area!
2. Walk across the Ponte Vecchio and take lots of pictures looking out onto the river. The bridge is home to several of Florence's premier jewelers.
3. Festival del Gelato is the city's best Gelato, and I would know. You must go here!! Located right off the corso in between the Uffizi and the Duomo.
4. There is also a sandwich stand located right around these parts, "I Due Fratellini". It is so good and fairly cheap if you are looking for something to grab-and-go. Off of Via de Tavolini, I believe. Just look for a line and people milling about with sandwiches.
5. Another great grab-and-go food is Doner Kebobs. A Turkish-Italian combination of deliciousness and several locations just north of the Duomo.

