

vacation

Travel Back in Time

Old World Wines
Join us as we take a special
tour through the luscious
vineyards of France



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Vacation is a DS Publication
Digital Editor-Della Schapiro

Florence Italy

The Birthplace of the Renaissance

Florence was the birthplace of the Italian Renaissance. Politically, economically, and culturally it was the most important city in Europe for around 250 years; from some time before 1300 until the early 1500s. Renaissance artists flourished in Florence. From Donatello and Massaccio and the various della Robbias; through Fra Angelico and Botticelli and Piero della Francesca, to Michelangelo and Leonardo, the Florentines dominated the visual arts like nobody before or since.

☞ Cathedrals ☞

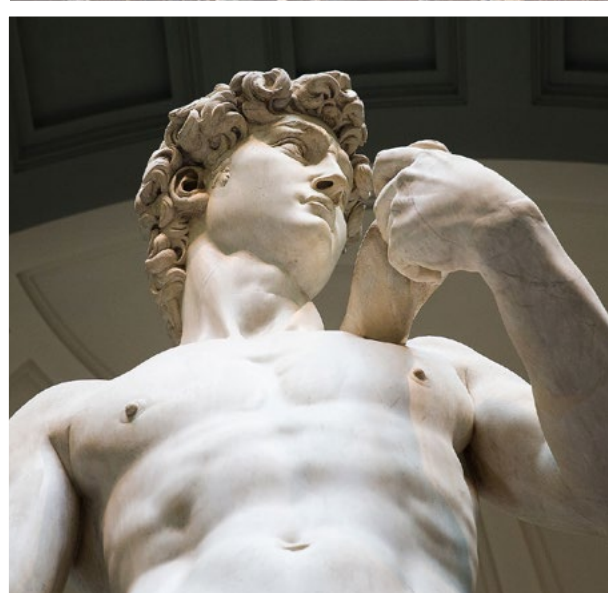
The cathedral topped by Brunelleschi's dome is the third largest Christian church and dominates the skyline. The dome was the largest ever built at the time. In front of it is the medieval Baptistery, where every Florentine was baptized until modern times. The two buildings incorporate the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance in their decoration. In recent years, most of the important works of art from those two buildings and from the wonderful Bell Tower, designed by Giotto, have been removed and replaced by copies. The originals

are now housed in the spectacular Museum of the Works of the Duomo, just to the east of the Cathedral.

Florence is filled with many other churches stuffed with some of the finest art in the world: San Miniato al Monte, San Lorenzo, Santa Maria Novella, Santa Trinita, the Brancacci Chapel at Santa Maria della Carmine, Santa Croce, Santo Spirito, SS Annunziata, Ognissanti, and more.

☞ Art Galleries ☞

Then there are the art galleries. The Uffizi and the Pitti Palace are two of the most famous picture galleries in the world. But the heart and soul of Florence are in the two superb collections of sculpture, the Bargello and the Museum of the Works of the Duomo. They are filled with



the brilliant, revolutionary creations of Donatello, Verrochio, Desiderio da Settignano, Michelangelo, and so many other masterpieces that create a body of work unique in the world. And, of course, there is the Accademia, with Michelangelo's David, perhaps the most well-known work of art anywhere, plus the superb, unfinished prisoners and slaves Michelangelo worked on for the tomb of Pope Julius II.

☞ Museums ☞

In all, Florence has something over 80 museums. Among those at the top of most lists are the City hall, the Palazzo della Signoria (aka Palazzo Vecchio), a wonderful building with magnificent rooms and some great art; the Archeological Museum, the Museum of

the History of Science, the Palazzo Davanzatti, the Stibbert Museum, St. Marks, the Medici Chapels, the Museum of the Works of Santa Croce, the Museum of the Cloister of Santa Maria Novella, the Zoological Museum ("La Specola"), the Bardini, and the Museo Horne.

☞ Quick Links ☞

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The Royal Life

Castles From Around the World

Neuschwanstein Castle

Füssen, Bavaria, Germany

[Website](#)

Seven weeks after the death of King Ludwig II in 1886, Neuschwanstein was opened to the public. The shy king had built the castle in order to withdraw from public life – now vast numbers of people came to view his private refuge.

Today Neuschwanstein is one of the most popular of all the palaces and castles in Europe. Every year 1.4 million people visit "the castle of the fairy-tale king". In the summer around 6,000 visitors a day stream through rooms that were intended for a single inhabitant.



Windsor Castle

Windsor, Berkshire, England

[Website](#)

The largest and oldest occupied castle in the world and still an official royal residence. The original castle was built in the 11th century after the Norman invasion by William the Conqueror. Since the time of Henry I, it has been used by succeeding monarchs.

The castle includes the 15th-century St. George's Chapel. The apartments are furnished with some of the finest works of art from the royal collection, including paintings by Rembrandt, Rubens, Canaletto and Gainsborough.



Kokura Castle

Kitakyūshū, Japan

[Website](#)

Built by Hosokawa Tadaoki in 1602, it was the property of the Ogasawara clan of Harima from 1632 to 1860. The castle was burnt down in 1865 in the war between the Kokura and Choshu clans. The keep was reconstructed in 1959, and the castle was fully restored in 1990. The Matsumoto Seicho museum and castle garden were opened in 1998.



Inside the castle you can see a video show about what Kokura was like during the Edo period, a display of Kokura Castle and its surroundings during the Edo period which is made of many lifelike tiny paper dolls, and you can also ride inside a palanquin like the castle lord would have when traveling. The box rocks back and forth to recreate the motion. It's amusing and free, so enjoy being the daimyo for a minute.



Prague Castle

Prague, Czech Republic

[Website](#)

The main attraction of Hradčany (Castle Quarter or Castle District) is the Prague Castle itself. The Prague Castle is the former seat of the King and is now the seat of the Czech president. This is Prague's number one tourist attraction so expect huge crowds and possibly long lines, especially during high tourist season.

In the center of the castle and the most important cathedral in all of the Czech republic, St. Vitus Cathedral. The oldest parts of the cathedral are from the 14th century, but the cathedral was not completed in the Medieval period. The highest tower was completed in Renaissance and Baroque styles much later.

