



Ponte Vecchio

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FLORENCE: LIVE IT LOCAL ACROSS THE RIVER

Florence, the birthplace of the Renaissance and home to one-third of the most revered art on Earth, attracts some nine million visitors per year. With its compact size and ancient infrastructure, *Firenze* increasingly feels the squeeze trying to balance tourism with preservation.

During high season, the hordes of visitors, near the *Duomo* for instance, can sometimes feel like a sea of humanity. The city has moved to stem some of the tide with a traffic ban, threats to hose down tourists sitting on the steps of the city's beloved churches and launching a new #enjoyrespectfirenze campaign to

remind tourists that their behavior affects residents and the city's treasures.



Santo Spirito

So how can one escape the crowds and delve deeper into the rich layers of local Florentine life? Cross the river and stay where you can "live it local." It takes just a few minutes to walk across the *Ponte Vecchio* to where regular Florentines live and work among artisans and high art. Locals call this area *Oltrarno*, which literally means "across the Arno" or *Diladdarno*. This is also *Santo Spirito*, one of the four major districts of Florence.

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Palazzo Mocenigo

Fashion and Fancy at Venetian Palazzi

Venice immediately wows travelers with enchantments. There's the breathtaking curves of the Grand Canal, stunning architecture of *Piazza San Marco*, dizzying zig-zags of bridges and *calle* that lure you to wander...

Reflections and layers of magic await. Beyond the major sights, (and tourist crowds), are marvelous *palazzi*, turned into museums, where you can have an intimate experience of Venice. Entering these treasures is stepping back in time. Your imagination takes flight, inspired by creations of passionate artists and artisans whose passions bring the city's history to life. Here are two favorites:

Palazzo Mocenigo ↪

For aristocrats, 18th-century Venice was one big party. You can get a blast of it by strolling through this extravagant palazzo that belonged to the *Mocenigo* family, a grand line of soldiers and politicians that boasted seven doges over the centuries of their heyday.

The building was redesigned in the early 17th century, just when a devastating plague hit Venice and the

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Florence is home to 400,000 people.

The Fertility Chair:

The Spanish quarter of Naples reveals nothing sinister at 7 a.m. Even the *o'panar*, the buckets that top floor residents lower down to the street to the fruit and bread vendors, are idly dangling in the thin morning light. The narrow laundry-draped streets were built in the 16th century to house the army of the Spanish King and have long been known for crime, warehouses and good places to eat. Though the garrisons are gone, some of these other conditions persist — but I have come looking for the Fertility Chair.



A friend and native Neapolitan had told me about this miracle-granting seat where *Santa Maria Francesca Della Cinque Piaghe* (Saint Mary Francis of the Five Wounds) would sit while suffering from the wounds of the stigmata. Every morning, pilgrims from all over the world come to sit in this chair which has long been believed to miraculously cure infertility.

My friend joked that the chair might be more useful in the *Vomero* neighborhood, where well-educated, professional women wait until they are 40 to have children, than here in the Spanish Quarter, where girls often become pregnant in their teens.

I find the shrine on *Vico Tre Re*, inside a street-level chapel. The saint lived in the apartment just above the chapel years for 38 years during the mid-18th century. A group of five women are inside priming the spiritual energy for this morning's miracles with a recitation of the Rosary. A nun emerges from a door up a short flight

of stairs and eyes me standing awkwardly in the doorway.

"*Alle nove*," she says with a dismissive wave. At nine, I'll return.

To pass the time, I consider a quick walk to church on *Via San Gregorio Armeno* where the blood of *Santa Patrizia* miraculously liquefies every Tuesday morning. The nuns of Santa Patrizia have also, since the Middle

Ages, produced a special wine so effective at curing infertility that sometimes the nuns themselves would become pregnant.

That mystery was solved with the exploration of the subterranean city beneath the *centro storico*. A secret

Where to Eat Nearby

Visit **Pintauro**, open since 1818, this historic bakery is credited with introducing the *sfogliatella* to Naples, then a little-known pastry invented by a nun of the Amalfi Coast. Get either the *frolla* (shortbread) or *riccia* (flaky pastry) wrapped around piping hot sweetened ricotta and flavored with orange blossom water.
Via Toledo, 25; open 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Trattoria da Nenella is the best *trattoria* in Naples to experience true Neapolitan home cooking. Both tourists and locals dine on red-checked table cloths on classic, hearty dishes like *pasta con patate e provola* and *friarielli* (bitter leaves cooked with garlic) with sausage.
Via Lungo Teatro Nuovo 103/104/105;
39-081-414338



tunnel from the wine cellar was revealed to connect to the neighboring *Monastery of San Lorenzo*. But I decide to stay close by, have another coffee or three and wait.

I return just after nine and the shrine is overflowing. Those in the main pews where the people praying the Rosary are still seated are regulars who confidently speak their parts in the Mass. Along the side are pilgrims like me, here for the first time—save for a woman who holds a Jack Russell Terrier in her lap, as well as the collection plate.

As I slide into the group on the side, we meet each other's wide eyes. Most are women, like me, in their late thirties. There is a couple, perhaps newly married, the woman caressing her wedding ring while her husband keeps his head dutifully bowed.

Another couple sits with their fingers laced tightly together, the man with dark circles under his eyes, his hair and eyebrows lost, maybe to chemotherapy treatments.

The Mass ends and everyone suddenly forms a line in front of the doorway where the nun had appeared earlier. I



The city of Naples has more

Miracles in Naples

jump right in the middle before I can reconsider and the crowd lurches forward. We ascend to Santa Maria Francesca's apartment, where we will all get a turn to sit in the Fertility Chair.

Morning light dapples the mustard-colored walls and rough stone floor. The first room is like a museum with relics displayed in a large credenza, dark Baroque paintings and a terrifying wax figure of the saint with a mystical gaze on her gaunt face.

I see the woman with the Jack Russell ahead of me, offering soft, encouraging words to those who are visiting for the first time. I feel nervous and want to leave, but I also have a Jack Russell at home so decide to interpret the dog as a positive sign.

Personal items like a handkerchief that belonged to the saint are framed and hanging on the walls. And then I spot the Fertility Chair, right next to large window that opens to clean laundry clipped to the line outside. It's not a golden throne like I had imagined when my friend first told me about it. It's small, indistinct and covered with worn, but pretty upholstery. *This could be a chair in grandmother's house, I think.*

One by one, men and women take their turns sitting in the Fertility Chair. The nun asks a question, murmurs a

benediction in a low voice, then holds an elaborate reliquary first to the forehead of the person, then to their breast.

What spell is about to be cast on me?



Curiosity led me here, not the dire circumstances of the man in front of me suffering from cancer or the unwavering imperative to have a child of the couple standing just behind me. I look around for a way that I can gracefully exit but notice only a pronged chain belt in a frame that the saint used to mortify her own flesh.

The nun beckons me to the chair and I dutifully obey. I close my eyes and decide to surrender to whatever is about to happen. I can hear the blood rushing in my ears,

but not the words she is speaking. Only her final few words penetrate my panic.

Church of Santa Maria Della Cinque Piaghe

Vico Tre Re a Toledo, 13

The Sanctuary is open daily from 7 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

The house is open daily from 9:30 a.m. to noon.

On the 6th of every month, it is also open from 4:30 to 7 p.m.

"...if is what you truly wish and if it is God's plan for you, then it will be." She touches the reliquary to my forehead then my breast and I open my eyes. The very time-aware nun shushes me out of the Fertility Chair.

I practically collapse into the next room which is filled with silver ex-votos, symbolic offerings exchanged for divine blessings, next to baby toys and pillows sent from around the world, many of them

stitched with the name "Francesca." Paintings of the saint's miracles adorn the rest of the apartment, all joyful artifacts of graces received.

I descend the apartment stairs and step out of this little spiritual pocket in the Spanish Quarter, right back into the charge of Naples. A fruit seller places a bunch of bananas in an *o'panar*. He kisses his hand and then touches the picture of Santa Maria Francesca on the door of the shrine before moving along. I do the same.

—Danielle Oteri

Danielle Oteri is a writer and founder of Feast On History Tours in Southern Italy and Arthur Avenue Food Tours in New York. For more information, visit www.feastonhistory.com

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than 50 patron saints.

glory days of the Republic began to fade. Little by little Venice lost its power and possessions in the Mediterranean. By the 18th century, Venetians' fortunes were dwindling. So folks like the Mocenigo decided to make the most of what was left, indulging in pleasures big time.

Venice became the city of *Carnevale*, celebrating for six months, from October until Lent. Everyone wore masks and cloaks around the city, so they could gamble and cavort with courtesans anonymously.

Piazza San Marco was a playground 24/7, filled with fortune tellers, caged lions, trained monkeys, and from the East giraffes and rhinoceroses. Tourists poured in from all over Europe, impressed by the elegant style Venetians brought to hedonistic behavior.

The fun even included wives. Women wanted to party too — go dancing, to the theater and play in the country villas. And since husbands were often away serving the state, or if they were much older than their second wives, since their firsts had died in childbirth, a new position was added to households: the *Cicisbeo*. This was a man servant whose duty it was to escort these wives around.

The *cicisbeo* slipped into a formal arrangement, often part of a marriage contract. Some were gay, others were lovers. Traditionally they lived in a room above the married couple, and were on hand for everything from holding the ladies' fans and perfumes during outings to pleasuring her in the boudoir. The husband-wife-*cicisbeo*

trio made for perfect marriages. Wives were fawned over by their *cicisbeo*, and could party as they pleased, while husbands were free to cavort with courtesans.

The background of all the gaiety was the fantastic Venetian baroque, that's displayed in the immense salons of the Mocenigo palazzo — curvy, gilded furnishings, *Burano* lace tablecloths, sculpted woodwork and *Murano* glass chandeliers shaped like floral bouquets. Mosaic floors celebrate the Mocenigo coat of arms, and ceiling frescos are magnificent, particularly

the *Allegory of Marriage* painted by Jacopo Guarana, to celebrate the wedding of the Doge Alvise IV's nephew to Laura Corner.

The palazzo's unique attraction is that it's also the *Study Center of the History of Fabrics and Costumes*, so rooms come alive with mannequins posed as if at a party, dressed in the formal styles of the day. Ladies' silk gowns are in dreamy ivory and jewel tones, with tight low-cut bodices, and poofed skirts embroidered with pearls and gold. Even menswear became feminine — flared brocade jackets decorated with lace, dazzling vests embroidered with colorful flowers, and elaborate cloaks.

A perfume exhibition completes the sensual experience. Watch the short video to see how the 11th-century Byzantium beauty, Teodora Dukas, is



to thank for bringing perfume to Venice when she married a *doge*. The Venetians disapproved of Teodora's extravagant ways — eating with a napkin and fork — but they did take to her perfume, as it probably was a welcome relief from the canal stench.

With Teodora's inspiration, Venice rose to become the greatest importer of fragrance extracts in Europe. A booming perfume and cosmetic market began here in the Renaissance and lasted until 1797, when Napoleon stormed in and France took over.

Tantalizing rooms in this section (created by Mavive Parfums) of the palazzo celebrate the magic of perfume making — with displays of gorgeous *Murano* glass bottles, a recreation of an alchemists lab, and a perfume maker's

organ where a master would work, blending varieties of scents. There is even an interactive area where you can sniff around 24 containers of essences — from floral to citrus to spicy.

Palazzo Mocenigo

Santa Croce, 1992

(39) 041 721798

www.mocenigo.visitmuve.it

Open daily 10 a.m to 4 p.m., or until 5 p.m. in summer.

After your visit: Visit the Palazzo Mocenigo, then have lunch at *La Zucca*, a charming place that's famous for their extraordinary vegetable specialties — you must have the pumpkin flan. (Calle del Tintor, Santa Croce, 1762; 39-041-5241570; www.lazucca.it; Closed Sunday)



Palazzo Fortuny is one of the

Palazzo Fortuny

Venetians called this place “The House of the Magician.” It’s where *Mariano Fortuny*, who became world famous for his outrageously gorgeous fabrics, gowns, and lamps, set up his home and workshop in 1907.

There was a woman behind his success: *Henriette Negrin*, who he met in Paris in 1897, when she was a French widow, a model and a seamstress. She became his muse, collaborator, and wife — after they lived together for twenty-two years. You’ll see Fortuny’s paintings of Henriette here — some nude, others of her dressed elegantly with her hair swept up, along with photographs of their trips to Greece and Egypt, where Fortuny got lots of inspiration.

In the museum where they once lived and worked together, you enter the world of this eccentric, 20th-century Renaissance man. Fortuny was born in Granada in 1871, to both a father and grandfather (on his mother’s side) who were highly acclaimed painters in Spain. His father died when he was three, so his mother took him to live in Paris, and also traveled about, until they finally settled in Venice, because Fortuny was horribly allergic to horses, and this was the only place around without carriages.

After his early artistic endeavors in painting and photography, and success in designing sets and lighting for theater, Fortuny, at thirty-six years old, began his work on printed fabrics here

with Henriette. He’d already had an attic studio in the Gothic palazzo, and then bought the building that had been cut up

into apartments and gutted it, turning it into a free-flowing creative space.

The walls of the first floor’s large rectangular room are covered with Fortuny’s patterned fabrics, creating a warm, exotic, colorful ambience. His paintings and lamps surround displays of

his models for theatre sets, and his gowns that were worn by such illustrious women as Eleanora Duse, Sarah Bernhardt and Isadora Duncan.

Fortuny broke into the woman’s fashion world in 1907 with his Delphos gown, inspired by tunics from ancient Greek statuary. It was simple and finely pleated, in soft, shimmering colors.

Women happily tore off their corsets to put on the sensational dress that elegantly draped their bodies. He packaged it rolled up in a hatbox, so it was easy and light for travel.

On the second floor of the museum, is Fortuny’s library and personal workshop, where you’ll get a hit of the practical side of this free-spirited artist. It’s packed with volumes of books about artists who came before him, lots of journals where he catalogued designs and colors, his paints and tools. Fortuny’s preferred entrance to this palazzo was climbing through the



lucafasolo, flickr.com



debera, flickr.com

skylight, straight into this workshop.

Depending on what is being exhibited, you may get to see

the expansive top floor of the building. The views from here, through the wavy glass windows, are some of the best in Venice: red roofs, church tops, the ever-changing sky...it’s marvelous to imagine how he was inspired here.

Fortuny’s fabric designs, of intricate swirls, animals and geometric prints, clearly show his influences from Spain and travels to Greece and farther east. But ultimately, they’re completely

Venetian, reflecting the cultural melting pot of the city, with rich colors muted by the city’s fog, or glistening in gold or silver sunlight. He was called “the

magician” because nobody could figure out exactly how he produced these fabrics, and his techniques are still kept secret.

Palazzo Fortuny

San Marco, 3958
(39) 041 5200995

www.fortuny.visitmuve.it

Open daily, except Tuesday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

After your visit: Visit Palazzo Fortuny and have lunch at the elegant *Acquaazza*, serving excellent seafood, cooked in the southern Amalfi Coast style, with Campania wines to match. (Campo Sant’Angelo, San Marco; 39-041-2770688; www.veniceacquaazza.com; Closed Monday)

—Susan Van Allen

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1€ = \$1.17 at press time

largest palaces in Venice.



SANTO SPIRITO

The spiritual heart of Santo Spirito (both the district and the smaller neighborhood of the same name) is *Basilica di Santo Spirito*. *Brunelleschi*, famous for the *cupola* of the *Duomo*, designed the church, which has 38 art-filled side chapels. As a teenager, *Michelangelo* studied the anatomy of corpses at the church's convent and created a wooden cross which was rediscovered in 1963 and put over the altar in 2000.

Piazza Santo Spirito bustles day and night with a daily morning market and lively restaurants. The narrow streets surrounding the piazza were once a maze of artisan workshops. Bookbinders to glassblowers moved here in the 16th century to work for the *Medici* family who bought the impressive *Pitti Palace*. Though World War II, the flood of 1966 and ensuing financial crises forced many artisans to close up shop, the resilient remained

and now, there's new blood.

You can see this on *Via dei Velluti*. Meet 80-year-old *Luigi Mecocci* (Via dei Velluti, 82) who studied under famous Florentine artisan *Maioli* and has been restoring antique wood furniture since he was 17. Further down the street, *Renato Olivastrì* also works with and restores wood but specializes in stunning inlaid "paintings" of iconic Florentine scenes. Silversmith *Silvia Nesti* (Via dei Velluti, 15r; www.silvianesti.com) crafts modern jewelry accented with pearls, precious stones and costume elements.

"Silvia is a young, part of a new generation of artisans revitalizing Santo Spirito," says *Federico Bonechi*, manager of *Palazzo Belfiore*, seven vacation



Renato Olivastrì



Clarice, Palazzo Belfiore

apartments in a 14th-century palazzo on the same street.

Spend the night in one of the charming apartments and when you first open your eyes, spotting a wooden beam or frescoed wall, you might just think you've woken up in the Renaissance. But you'll soon realize that this time travel comes with all the comforts of modern life, like a kitchen with microwave, washing machine (fluff-and-fold service for drying if you like), flat-screen TV and fast WiFi.

The detailed amenities at Palazzo Belfiore rival those of any hotel charging twice the price. Guests are greeted with a bottle of *Banfi* or *Strozzi*

Cheat Sheet

SANTO SPIRITO

Stay:

Palazzo Belfiore (Via dei Velluti, 8; 39-055-264415 www.palazzobelfiore.it) offers apartments for 180 to 330€ per night.

Eat:

Il Brindellone (Piazza Piattellina, 10; 39-055-217879) celebrates life Florentine-style with excellent *Bistecca Fiorentina* (Florentine steak) and a devotion to *calcio* (soccer). The walls are covered with violet-colored memorabilia for the local football team *ACF Fiorentina*. This favorite is also where the local team

that plays in in the historic soccer match *Calcio Storico Fiorentino* gets their sustenance.

La Casalinga (Via dei Michelozzi, 9r; 39-055-218624) serves all the Florentine specialties with a friendly staff. Very popular, with locals and visitors alike, so call ahead for a reservation.



Il Magazzino (Piazza della Passera; 39 055 215969) is one of the best places for the Florentine delicacies of *tripe* (first or second stomach of the cow) and *lamprodetto* (fourth stomach of the cow). The unique twist here: delicious fried lamprodetto meatballs. Try them, you might love them!

Shop:

Angela Caputi (Via S. Spirito, 58r; www.angelacaputi.com) has been known around the world for her big, modern, colorful costume jewelry since 1975. This perfect place to buy a statement piece that you or a loved one will treasure for years to come.

Le Zebre (Via Romana, 88r; www.lezebre.it) carries affordable women's clothing and accessories made from fabrics painted by owners/artisans *Matteo* and *Francesca*.

Learn/Make

Officine Nora (Via dei Preti, 2-4r; www.officinenora.it) brings together budding and advanced jewelers in a place to both make and sell their creations. Regular classes and workshops for those exploring silver and metal making.

1€ = \$1.17 at press time

San Frediano is the third

wine, homemade *biscotti* and two types of tea, custom blended just for Palazzo Belfiore by local teamaker *Oronero*. The rooms smell delightful with natural scents from *Aquaflor* (www.aquaflor.com). The palazzo even has its own beautiful magazine, *This Tuscan Life* (www.thistuscanlife.com), giving timely suggestions for seasonal activities in and around Florence.

Each apartment, named for a figure in Florentine history, has its own personality. The two-bedroom *Clarice*, named for *Clarice Orsini*, a Roman noblewoman and the bride of *Lorenzo il Magnifico*, captivates the imagination with frescoed walls and a “secret room” that Bonechi says kids go crazy for. More than 60% of Belfiore’s guests are families traveling with children and it is easy to see why; not only is Palazzo Belfiore affordable for traveling families, but it is a history lesson come alive.

The Renaissance-era stairs are a little more steep than usual and there’s no elevator. For those with mobility challenges, Palazzo Belfiore has one of the few ground-floor wheelchair-accessible apartments in Florence. The kitchen and bathroom of the *Francesco de’ Medici* (he was the Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1574) apartment have been refitted for wheelchairs.

In our Airbnb world, renting an apartment is the new way of “going local,” but Palazzo Belfiore offers something more than just a place to

stay but rather a deeply personal connection to a place and its culture.

Review after review on TripAdvisor, where Palazzo Belfiore has the lauded position of number one for specialty lodging in Florence, raves about the personal attention of Bonechi.



Federico Bonechi



Francesco de’ Medici Apartment

“Federico was an amazing host and his enthusiasm for his city of Florence was infectious,” says one former guest.

“Staying at Palazzo Belfiore is like having “your home away from home,” as one of their tag lines suggests; with Bonechi, it is also like having a good friend in Florence.

Bonechi, who was a tax accountant until four years ago, has an uncanny knack for anticipating the needs of guests. His passion for Florentine culture and history is such that he might be mistaken for a professor.

Bonechi emails guests as soon as they book to help start planning their Florentine adventures suggesting itineraries and restaurants and arranging transfers. He’s developed and personally tested Palazzo Belfiore Experiences which are half-day and day-long tours in and around Florence including an artist-for-a-day experience, child-friendly tours, cooking lessons and excursions to vineyards, food producers and a *terracotta* maker.

“Federico and his team are unusual for hotel management here in that they are so involved in the local community,” says Helen Farrell, editor-in-chief of *The Florentine*. They open their doors with events like “Live It Local,” showcasing local artisans for an evening, and donate to projects like the restoration of the *loggia* of the Pazzi Chapel of the *Basilica of Santa Croce*.

SAN NICCOLÒ

This spring, the owners of Piazza Belfiore have brought their winning combination of local hospitality, top-notch service and apartment living, just a few minutes walk down to road to the *San Niccolò* neighborhood (also part of Santo Spirito), opening *Palazzo San Niccolò* with 22 mid-century modern-style apartments this spring.

“San Niccolò is possibly the most authentic corner of the Florence, with its sleepy sun-kissed streets, lined with artisan ateliers, centuries of culture and even a tower worth climbing for the views of the city space,” says Farrell.

Torre di San Niccolò stands 115 feet tall next to the river and symbolizes the neighborhood.



San Niccolò Tower

Erected in 1324, it was one of the 15 gates leading into Florence and is the only one still standing today in its original form. Visitors can

ascend its 160 steps. Guided tours, in Italian and English, are offered on summer evenings. (39-055-2768224; info.museoragazzi@comune.fi.it)

“You are walking distance to the center yet surrounded by beautiful, lush gardens,” says Lisa Brancatisano, editor

neighborhood in *Santo Spirito*.

of *This Tuscan Life*, who lives in the neighborhood.

San Niccolò's *Porta San Miniato* leads the way to treasures like Florence's Rose Garden (*Giardino Delle Rose*) with stupendous views and colorful blooms that are best in the month of May. The terraced garden of *Villa Bardini*



Palazzo San Niccolò

(www.bardinipeyron.it) opened in 2006 and is a delightfully undiscovered alternative to the Boboli Gardens. San Niccolò is also the gateway to *Piazzale Michelangelo* (a popular and stunning spot for sunsets) and the *Basilica of San Miniato al Monte*, an exquisite Romanesque church standing on one of the highest points in the city, another great sunset lookout.

Artisans abound in San Niccolò as well. *Alessandro Dari* (Via San Niccolò, 115r;

www.alessandrodari.com) create one-of-a-kind jewelry inspired by alchemy, history and mythology. His neighbor *Clet* (Via

Dell'Olmo, 8r), has gained fame worldwide as a street artist who uses stickers to transform ordinary street signs into political statements.

Within a few feet of these artisans is the entrance to Palazzo San Niccolò. It looks non-descript until you enter through a courtyard and then find a peaceful oasis of a large, walled garden. The décor evokes a feeling of hip, vintage, modern. Each spacious apartment is furnished with original, mid-century modern furniture from the private



Clet street art

collection of one of the owners, as well as a sleek stainless-steel kitchen, flat screen TV and the most comfortable beds you might ever sleep on.

With its trendy vibe, Palazzo San Niccolò has become popular with the fashion crowd attending the shows here in Florence. But as with its sister property, the focus is firmly on the kind of service you rarely get with an

apartment rental; some of the staff has trained at the Four Seasons. Plus, all of the Palazzo Belfiore cultural experiences are also available to guests here, making for a distinctly Florentine stay.



Palazzo San Niccolò

Crossing the river in Florence opens doors to a local, personal and authentic vacation.

1€ = \$1.17 at press time



Stay:

Palazzo San Niccolò (Via di S. Niccolò, 79; 39-055-244509; www.palazzosanniccolo.com) offers apartments for 125 to 325€ per night.

Eat:

La Bottega Del Buon Café (Lungarno Benvenuto Cellini, 69R; 39-055-5535677; www.borgointhecity.com) features new farm-to-table Tuscan cuisine dreamed up by Michelin-starred chef *Antonello Sardi*. Most ingredients come from the boutique hotel/farm *Borgo Santo Pietro* in Tuscany. The

décor emphasizes soft neutrals, brick and views of the river. Try the tasting menu.

Calistro (Lungarno Benvenuto Cellini, 43; 39-055-6812904) brings street food to a storefront with delicious new takes on the likes of *panzanella* (the traditional Tuscan bread salad, made into a sandwich) and *arancini* (rice balls, unusually topped with *burrata* cheese). Delicious spot for lunch after climbing the tower.

Fuori Porta (Via Monta alla Croce, 10r; www.fuoriporta.it) serves up traditional Florentine fare

accompanied by an extensive wine list. Start with any of the *crostoni*, especially with *prosciutto* and sundried tomatoes. Nice outdoor seating.

Zeb Gastronomia (Via S. Miniato, 2r; 39-055-2342864; www.zebgastronomia.com) is part communal dining restaurant, part gourmet food shop. *Alberto* and his mother *Giuseppina* write each day's dishes (like herb-stuffed pork loin or pear and *ricotta ravioli*) on a blackboard in the back. Stop for dinner after a sunset visit to *Piazzale Michelangelo*.



Learn/Make:

Stefano Bemer (Via di S. Niccolò, 2; www.stefanobemer.com) makes elegant and iconic bespoke men's shoes. After Bemer passed away, the family behind the *Scuola del Cuio* (Leather School) in *Santa Croce* took over the brand and added two-month training programs for amateurs and professionals. Actor Daniel Day-Lewis trained under Bemer for 10 months.

Much of *San Niccolò* borders the *Arno*.