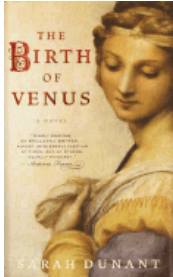


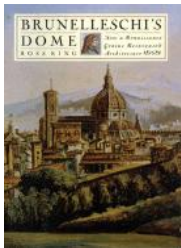
Arro's picks for Firenze (categorized, in order):

Reading before you leave:



The birth of Venus : a novel / Sarah Dunant. (2004).

This is a fun, quick historical novel covering the renaissance and Savonarola's influence on Firenze.



Brunelleschi's dome : how a Renaissance genius reinvented architecture / Ross King. (2004).

This is a great, very-readable history of the construction of the Duomo's dome.

Mornings in Florence: Simple Studies of Christian Art, for English Travellers / John Ruskin (1875–77).

This little Victorian art history book is the genesis for my appreciation for Giotto. I re-read it before each trip.

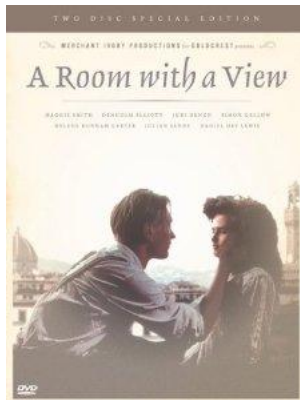
The stones of Florence / Mary McCarthy. (1959).

This is a less-fun, but great social and cultural history of the city. One of my favorites.

Inferno / Dan Brown (2013).

It is awful, but an entertaining page-turner nonetheless and he does discuss the fascinating history of the Medici in Firenze.

Movie to watch beforehand:



Room with a view. (1985). Helena Bonham-Carter in a stunning Merchant-Ivory production of E.M. Forster's Victorian novel.

Art not to miss:

Santa Croce



Cimabue (“Shim-ah-BWAY”—it took David about 5 times to teach me how to correctly pronounce this guy) crucifix at the Santa Croce (in the museum attached). This is newly restored, and gorgeous. This is the beginning of the renaissance: Cimabue’s genius was to make Christ a man. He is even contorted and off-center on the cross.

The Uffizi:

Book tickets ahead of time at www.florence-tickets.com

OK café for lunch.



Don't miss the Botticellis. This is easily the most popular room at the Uffizi, so it's often crowded. Find it when you first get to the museum, and then keep coming back to it until you find a time when there are not hundreds of tourists and their no-necked monster children gawking at it. It is worth the persistence to spend some quality time them.



Also, Cranach's Adam and Eve



Durer's Adoration



Caravaggio's Sacrifice of Isaac



Caravaggio's Bacchus



Giotto Madonna. It is in the same room with a Cimabue Madonna. You can see art “history” happening before your eyes by comparing the two.

At the Museo di San Marco (attached to the cathedral):



There are so many Fra Angelico's that your heart will melt. Take time to see each of the cloister cells (40+) each with a Fra Angelico fresco. This was Savonarola's HQ.

At the Accademia:

Book tickets ahead of time at www.florence-tickets.com



Seeing the real David at the height prescribed by Michelangelo—and not the fake one in the Piazza della Signoria—is truly an amazing experience.

But also look at the Uccellos and the Botticellis.

Pontormo's *Deposition* at Santa Felicity.



Tucked just inside the Oltrarno from the Ponte Vechio is a little church, Santa Felicity. It's free to visit and just inside the door to the right is a remarkable Pontormo (though you will need a Euro coin to switch on the lights). It will make your heart melt.

This chapel was also designed by Brunelleschi, but the top of it (a glazed dome to let in light) was cut off by Vasari to build the Medici passage.

Massacio's frescos at the Brancacci Chapel.



These frescoes are important historically for adding dimension and perspective—he is the next step in the renaissance after Cimabue and Giotto. I love the picture of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. This is how I feel every time I must leave Firenze.

A little modern museum:



Museo Marino Marini is in a deconsecrated church. It is a beautiful space with many fine Marinis.

Architecture (and decorative arts):



Baptistry at the Duomo (Battistero). **Absolutely don't miss.** This is a Byzantine jewelbox. Worth going several times. Outside study the bronze doors (replicas of the originals, now safe inside the Opera Duomo). Inside study the amazing mosaics. Don't forget to look at the floor—the tiling is magnificent.



The dome and cupola of the Duomo. This is a strenuous climb *between* the inner and outer shells of the dome; however, there are resting places with views into the cathedral and outside. Once you get to the top, the views will literally take your breath away. 360° of Tuscany. Unbelievably beautiful.



Pazzi Chapel (attached to Santa Croce). One of the most perfect buildings in existence. Like the Duomo dome, built by Brunelleschi. It's sublime.

Santa Croce – **must see**. Simple and barn-like (very Franciscan). Giotto's in the chapel to the right of the altar. Enjoy the Pazzi Chapel and buy a new belt at the School of Leather, as well. Ruskin recommends you spend your first and third “morning in Florence” here.

San Marco. Beautiful (very Benedictine).

San Miniato – if time permits, take a taxi across the river and up the hill to this charming chapel. Gorgeous cemetery attached. The walk back down and into town is middling strenuous, but beautiful.

Santa Maria Novella—a beautiful Giotto alterpiece. Ruskin wants you to spend your second “morning in Florence” at this church.

Palace Vecchio – this is low on my list; but the rooms are beautiful. I have heard they have special “hidden passages” tours.

Pitti Palace— I go to see the exquisite “Madonna of the Chair” by Raphael. It is one of the most beautiful paintings in the world. Excepting the Raphael, the art is not the greatest, and it’s in poor condition (the art); but the rooms are beautiful if you really like exuberant rococo interior decoration. OK café for lunch. Beautiful gardens. This is also low on my list.

Also, cocktails at twilight

Torre Guelfa, at Borgo SS Apostoli, 8 is a hotel with a great medieval tower. When we stayed there in 2000 they would let non-guests up to the tower for cocktails at sunset and twilight. Beautiful view of the Duomo, Giotto’s Tower, and the Vecchio Palace.



Some notes:

Most Italian churches require trousers and covered shoulders. In the summer, bring a pair of light-weight pants and a button shirt to throw over your tank top. Women can use a silk scarf to cover their shoulders.

Never use the currency exchange services! They are a huge rip-off. Your best value is your ATM card.

THIS IS REALLY IMPORTANT:

Tell your ATM bank, VISA, MC, Amex, etc. that you are going to be using your cards abroad. Most banks restrict foreign charges unless you have made arrangements ahead of time to use your charge plates and ATM cards. Just call the 800 number before you leave and tell them the dates and countries of your travel. Always use a date a couple days past your planned return date—it is really shitty to be stuck in an airport because your flight has been bumped, and not be able to charge anything.