



Firenze.

Sydney-based Photographer Anthea Williamson writes about Florence, Home of the Medicis, Capital of Tuscany and birthplace of the Renaissance.



If you are a high-season traveler be prepared to share the beautiful ancient Italian city of Florence with swarms of curious tourists drawn to the unique Florentine magic. By flowing with the masses, you'll allow yourself to be captivated by the renaissance city's unique aesthetic so that crowds won't even register.

In the 1400's Florence was a prosperous merchant city with money enough to invest in and cultivate creativity. Driven by the Medici family's patronage, the city was a hotbed of creative and scientific development,

nurturing the arts, literature, architecture and philosophies that influenced the development of the western world. This movement became known as the Renaissance and Florence is famed as its fountainhead.

This medieval cosmos is brimming with celebrated crowd-pleasers such as the Galleria degli Uffizi, The splendid Duomo Cathedral, the statue of David (amongst a plethora of others), the Ponte Vecchio & Basilica di San Lorenzo - all of which are well worth visiting. As an initiation to the spectacle, it is enough to simply stroll around

the conveniently compact Centro storico, sneaking peaks through towering windows & doorways that lead to courtyards of private homes. Saunter down shady narrow cobbled lanes, and you will end up in a magnificent piazza or by a grand old church. Be sure to get some respite, stop & enjoy the local summer staple, an icy gelati.

Find a ringside pew under shade offered by a theatric skyline and let Florence wash over you.

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As well as the churches, bridges, piazzas and artworks do not over-look the markets. The 2 most pressing being San Lorenzo where you can shop for clothes, leather wear & souvenirs and still in the same area, on Via dell'Ariento you'll find the best food market of the city.

Time to rediscover real Italian food. Parma hams jostle side-by-side with fabulous local and regional salamis, bresaola, garlic and onions by the bundle, great wheels of parmigiano, still soft enough to bite. Mozzarella made the day before in Brindisi, the wonderful peppery local olive oils and the mountain cheeses of Piedmont. This is your excuse to really indulge your tastebuds and gather a picnic to take into the glorious surrounding countryside. Some Tuscan wine of course, and why not start with a bottle of the real Chianti, and a loaf or two of fresh-baked bread. Get some oil and the local balsamic vinegar, and ask the wine-seller to recommend some of the very local village wines. Load up with prosciutto ham and other cured meats and cheeses, olives, honey, a jar of artichoke hearts, some pickled fresh walnuts, and all the other delights in jars, preserved in vinegar or oil. Don't forget to try to sample some of the chestnuts and wild mushrooms from the local woods.

Let your nose lead the way to cheeses, cured meats, porcini mushrooms, olive oils & wines this huge covered market is open every weekday morning and will cater for a picnic or fulfil your every Tuscan gastronomic whim.

