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(Travel)

The Allure Of Florence Beyond The Expected



When one thinks of Florence, Italy, *The Birth Of Venus* by Sandro Botticelli or Michelangelo's *David* may first come to mind. Or perhaps the famed Duomo, with its awe-inspiring neo-Gothic facade and red-tile dome located at the heart of the city center. As the capital of Tuscany, its region globally known for wineries and rustic cuisine, Florence offers much more than what's written in your standard travel guide.

While I do think it's a must to see the aforementioned artworks, there are other other parts to Florence that may appeal to you — and some out of the ordinary. For one, there is the revelatory experience of creating your own scent at [Aquaflor](#), a perfumery known to people in the know — or nose business — that is. Beyond the act of sniffing and selecting scents from a catalogue of smells enclosed in beautiful glass bottles befit for a Medici, the process itself may urge you to delve deeper into your likes and dislikes which may draw on long-forgotten memories and associations.

Another experience that calls on one's senses? How about a visual delight in the form of designer goods in the most calming and zen-like outdoor shopping center? Talk to anyone in the fashion circuit, and the first mention of a trip to Florence will likely lead to [The Mall Firenze](#) as a recommended stop. But this is no typical designer outlet. Set upon the rolling hills of Florence, shopping destination is designed for a pleasant and peaceful experience — no long lines, crowds, or cramped space are found here. With stores such as Bottega Veneta, Loro Piana, and Jil Sander to name a few, this collection of the most-coveted designer brand stores is just a 45-minute jaunt from the city center, with hourly shuttles making it extremely convenient to fit into your schedule.

Seeking more unexpected attractions on your next trip to Florence? Below, a curation of unique experiences that are sure to make a memorable visit.



Go Wine Tasting At A Castle

Completed in the 15th century, Tricerchi castle and the surrounding vineyard, located about an hour and half outside of Florence's city center in Montalcino, is a sight to behold. Slow down and relax while taking in the majestic beauty of the sprawling estate and samplings of Sangiovese wine. Aged in durmast casks and grown from soil with limestone clay and sand, the wines offered vary in complexities, one with hints of red fruits, chocolate, and leather marked with acidity, another balanced and intense with hints of strawberry and cherry jam, lightly spicy with floral and mineral notes. After the tasting, satiate your hunger with a traditional Tuscan meal for a full gustatory experience.

Relax At A Roman Bath-Inspired Spa



But sometimes staying put in the city center and taking in all the wonders Florence has to offer is an experience in itself. Located on a quiet street steps away from Palazzo Strozzi and Brunelleschi's Dome, the iconic 5-star hotel Helvetia & Bristol completed its renovation in 2022 and opened up LA SPA. The Roman Bath-inspired wellness center was built atop the ancient Capitoline Baths of the Roman city of Florentia, offering a tranquil respite after a full day of sightseeing. There are hot and cold wet rooms — Calidarium, Sudatorium, Frigidarium, Tepidarium, Aquae and Lacus Quietis — reminiscent of the ancient ritual along with two swimming pools and treatments such as the Secret of Longevity Facial, Aquamotus (1200 jets of water at various temperatures and intensities along the body), and the Reborn Body Massage. My personal favorite was the ice wall in which I pressed upon after a soothing dip in the hot bath in the Sudatorium chamber.

Hunt For Truffles

If you find yourself in Italy during truffle harvest season — October to early January for winter white truffles, mid-January to late April for summer white truffle, and mid-November to mid-March for black truffles — consider spending time in the woods and hunting for these rare gems in the soil. Guided by a Lagotto Romagnolo, the truffle hunter teaches you what to look out for, the methods in searching, and the techniques involved in retrieving these prized delicacies. After the morning hunt, you are treated to a classic Tuscan lunch cooked using, what else, fresh truffles.

Make Your Own Perfume



Set in the historic cellars of Palazzo Antinori Corsini Serristori, right next door to the aforementioned [Aquaflor](#) laboratories and shop, one can indulge in the experience of creating a bespoke fragrance to take home. With over 60 essences and raw materials to select from, the process begins with the fragrance specialist getting to know you — your likes and dislikes, gravitations and aversions, desires and needs when it comes to smell. From simple descriptions such as, “I don’t like sweet scents” or “I like the smell of morning dew,” Aquaflor’s perfumer Zisis Kapsalis puts you at ease with questions and guidance to help you identify ingredients that you may like. “People seem to love and ask for scents that are actually familiar to them or represent something in their past. Bergamot, vanilla, tobacco, sandalwood, oud and the smell of “clean” are very much requested during our workshops.” One by one, you sniff, guess, yay or nay a range of scents given to you by Kapsalis, and determine which you prefer as the base, middle, and top notes. He walks you through the whole process, suggesting various combinations and proportions to help you create your ideal perfume.

Shop At A Luxury Designer Outlet

You've heard it before: A fleet of shuttle buses, long lines to enter, and crowds that never seem to disperse at the designer outlets in Italy. The Mall Firenze is the antidote to this unpleasant way of shopping. In fact, it's probably the most tranquil experience I've had while perusing the thoughtfully curated racks and merchandised shelves of designer accessories and ready-to-wear from collections that are just a season or two past — and, most importantly, at *very* good discounts. Think runway pieces at 80% off with sometimes additional promotions. But these great finds are not a dime a dozen, there are many coveted items you've most likely considered buying at one point and regret not doing so. From a mega Gucci shop to Celine to Saint Laurent, this is a one-stop center for all your luxury designer shopping during your trip in Italy. To top it off, there is a tax-free lounge for all purchases made during your time at The Mall Firenze so you can avoid the VAT line at the airport, no small thing. And, if any of the previously mentioned experiences in Florence pique your interest during your travels, the concierge at The Mall Firenze can coordinate your booking. Now that's a luxury.