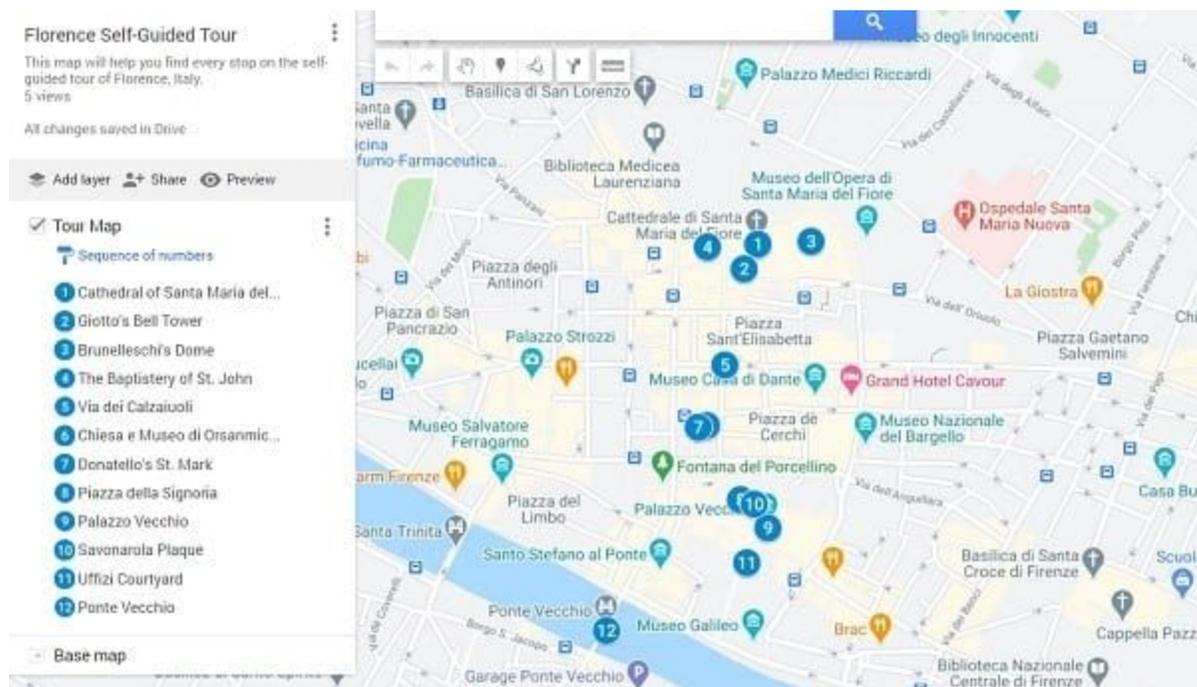


## SELF-GUIDED TOUR OF FLORENCE

This is an alternative to the free guided tours of Florence. This tour will cover multiple notable landmarks and locations in Florence.

Assuming you don't enter any buildings, this walk should take approximately 90 min. The walk is approximately 1.5 km (1 mi.).



**Click on the map to expand or to download to a smartphone.**

We created this walk as a companion to Rick Steves's excellent audio tour of Florence. You can download his audio and his map [here](#).

If you don't have any headphones or you prefer to read instead of listening, this self-guided tour provides a lot of useful information about the history of the city.

For an even more in-depth experience, consider downloading the audio tour.

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## 1. Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore

The first thing you'll notice about this church as you stand in the plaza is its distinctive 15th-century dome, named after the man who engineered the structure, Filippo Brunelleschi.

We'll cover the dome in greater detail a bit later.



The cathedral itself was completed and consecrated in 1436. The architectural styles on display include Italian Gothic, Gothic Revival, and Renaissance.

If you were to look at the building from above, you could see how it was designed to form the shape of the Latin cross. At 8,300 sq metres in size, this is an incredibly large structure.

There are a lot of interesting pieces of art inside, including Donatello's *David* and *Saint John the Evangelist*.

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## **2. Giotto's Campanile**

This large free-standing campanile (or bell tower) is part of the complex of buildings in the area, and it stands right next to the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore.

Designed by Giotto in 1334, this tower is an excellent example of Gothic architecture.

There are a total of 7 bells in the tower which were cast at various times from 1705 - 1957.

There are several beautiful pieces of artwork in the campanile, but they are all copies of the originals which were removed in the 1950s and 1960s.

The hexagonal panels on the lower level depict the history of mankind as described in Genesis, including the Creation of Adam and Eve.

You'll also find four statues in the niches of all four sides of the tower, including figures such as David, Solomon, Moses, Abraham, and more.



## Brunelleschi's Dome

This distinctive feature of the cathedral is actually the third tallest dome in the entire world, and it also played an important role in the Renaissance.

The architectural choice to go with this design rather than a Gothic structure was one of the first major events in the Italian Renaissance, as it broke from the traditional style of the time.

Filippo Brunelleschi ran into trouble trying to make the dome a reality due to a variety of issues.

Eventually, he would work with Donatello to build a model that illustrated how the dome could be

constructed.

This model is still displayed at the Museo dell' Opera del Duomo, which is directly behind the cathedral.

Keep in mind that this structure was created before we knew much about the laws of physics and mathematical calculation for such construction.

So, Brunelleschi relied almost entirely on intuition and details he learned from building models such as the one at the museum.

The copper crown at the top was commissioned to Andrea del Verrocchio, who had in their employ a young apprentice by the name of Leonardo da Vinci.

Admission to the dome is included with some [Florence tourist passes](#).

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#### 4. Baptistry & Bronze Doors

Located directly across from the cathedral, this building is the Baptistry of St. John.

As you may have noticed, the church is shaped like an octagon, giving it a unique and interesting style.

Although it is believed there was a Baptistry in this location since the 4th or 5th century, it wasn't until the 13th-century that they expanded upon the original architecture and started constructing the structure that exists today.



One of the most interesting aspects of this building is its three bronze doors. The oldest is the South Gate, and the North Gate was the next one built.

The East Gate was entitled the Gate of Paradise by none other than Michelangelo.

The North Gate depicts scenes from the New Testament while the South Gate shows moments from the life of John the Baptist.

This Baptistery used to house notable works of art like the Silver Altar and Maddalena di Donatello, but you can now see these pieces at the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, located behind the cathedral.

## 5. Via dei Calzaiuoli

This street runs from the cathedral to Piazza della Signoria, and there are a lot of notable sites to see along the way.

Museums of note include the Loggia del Bigallo, Museo della Misericordia, and Chiesa e Museo di Orsanmichele. We will be covering the last museum in greater detail on our next stop.



There is also a lot of great shopping in the area, and you'll note that there are several internationally known stores such as Victoria's Secret, Chanel, the Disney Store, and more.

In addition to all the great shopping, there are also several excellent restaurants along the way serving a variety of dishes such as pizza, gelato, Italian sandwiches, wine, chocolate, and much more.

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## **6. Orsanmichele Church**

There have been many structures on this site in the past.

Before it was a church there was a grain market built here in 1337. Before that, it was actually the kitchen garden of the monastery of San Michele.

The area was converted into a church between 1380-1404, but you can still see elements of its previous use in the arches of the ground floor, as they were originally used for the grain market.



There are several sculptures to see here, but all of them are copies. The originals have since been moved to the museum.

That said, these copies are still beautiful and entirely free to enjoy.

You'll find these sculptures located in niches around the building, including Donatello's *St. Mark* and *St. George*, Andrea del Verrocchio's *Christ and St. Thomas*, and Filippo Brunelleschi's *St. Peter*.

Inside the church, you will find a Gothic tabernacle designed by Andrea Orcagna which has a copy of Bernardo Daddi's painting of the *Madonna and Child*.

Admission to the Orsanmichele Church and Museum is included with some [Florence tourist passes](#).

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## **7. Donatello's St. Mark**

Whether you choose to simply enjoy the copy from outside or enter the museum to see the actual sculpture designed by Donatello, this is an excellent example of his work.

The statue of St. Mark is often regarded as the first Renaissance monument ever created.

One of the most notable features of this piece is its attention to detail and focus on realism.

If you look closely, you'll notice that even the veins on St. Mark's left hand are visible.

This style of realistic artwork was far different from the often unrealistic and dramatic Gothic art and architecture of the era, which is one of the reasons it is often considered one of the first examples of Renaissance art.

The niche where this statue can be found is also quite beautiful, but it was not designed by Donatello.

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## 8. Piazza Signoria

Located at the Southern end of Via dei Calzaiuoli, this plaza sits in front of Palazzo Vecchio, but that isn't the only interesting structure to see in the area.

To the right of the palazzo, you'll find the Loggia dei Lanzi, built in the 14th-century for ceremonial purposes, which now serves as an open-air art gallery with Renaissance-era sculptures.



To the left of the palazzo, you'll see an equestrian statue which depicts Cosimo I, former Grand Duke of Tuscany. The base of the statue depicts scenes from Cosimo's life, including his coronation.

Behind the statue of Cosimo I, you'll find the Gucci Garden, a museum dedicated to the fashion company of the same name which houses classic clothing and handbag exhibits.

Gucci Garden is located in the former Palazzo della Mercanzia, which once served as a courthouse where cases between Florentine merchants were disputed.

The original building was constructed in 1359 and restored in 1905.

To the right of the statue of Cosimo I and right next to Palazzo Vecchio, you'll find the beautiful *Fontana del Nettuno*, which was designed and created during the 16th century.

There is also a plaque in Piazza Signoria dedicated to Girolamo Savonarola, who led the Bonfire of the Vanities in this very location in 1497. We'll cover this in greater detail later.

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## 9. Palazzo Vecchio

Originally built in the 14th century, Palazzo Vecchio is the seat of the Municipality in Florence, and it is one of the most famous civic structures in the world.



Although it served as the seat of the Senate and other civic bodies in the past, most of this building is now used as a museum, but it still serves as the headquarters of the Municipality of Florence.

The statue of *David* by Michelangelo stood by the entrance from the year it was completed in 1504 until 1873 when it was moved to the Galleria dell Accademia.

Today, a copy of the statue remains in its place. Learn about [how to see the Statue of David](#).

Across from David is a statue of *Hercules and Cacus* which was crafted by Baccio Bandinelli.

Look under the arches of the gallery to see a series of nine coats of arms representing a variety of things including the Florentine people, the city, loyalty to the papacy, freedom, and independence, and other concepts.

Built in 1310, the tower of Palazzo Vecchio is around 94 metres high. Unlike other towers, such as Giotto's Campanile, this one actually leans on the walls beneath it.

The museum inside features several beautiful frescoes, niches, tapestries, statues, and other fantastic artwork.

This is also the site of Michelangelo's *The Genius of Victory*, which was originally intended for the tomb of Pope Julius II.

Admission to Palazzo Vecchio is included at no extra cost with at least one [Florence tourist pass](#).

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## 10. Savonarola Plaque

Located in Piazza Signoria, this plaque is dedicated to Girolamo Savonarola, a Dominican friar who worked in Florence in the 1490s.

Although his presence was initially requested, he quickly became an enemy of the Medici house and played a role in their undoing.



Savonarola was not a fan of the Renaissance, and he fought against what he saw as artistic excess and sin.

Starting in 1495, he began to host a bonfire of the vanities in Piazza Signoria during Carnival.

The bonfire of the vanities was an event where paintings, manuscripts, books, tapestries, musical instruments, and other works deemed inappropriate were burned in the public square.

During these bonfires, Savonarola was said to have destroyed the works of notable artists such as Dante, Ovid, Propertius, and more.

In the eyes of many church officials, Savonarola went too far with his approaches, and he was eventually excommunicated in 1497.

He was charged with heresy and sedition, for which he was hung on a cross and burned to death in 1498.

This plaque marks the exact location where his execution was carried out.

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## 11. Uffizi Courtyard

As you walk toward the [Uffizi Gallery](#), you'll see a lot of notable sites alongside the Piazzale degli Uffizi.

The gallery itself is lined with statues of Donatello, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and many other noteworthy Renaissance artists.



Directly opposite the Uffizi Gallery is the Accademia dei Georgofili, an educational institution that has been dedicated to promoting the study of economics, geography, agriculture, and many other subjects since 1753.

The Uffizi Gallery itself was originally established in 1581, and it was one of the first modern museums ever established.

Over 4 million people visit this museum every year, making it one of the most visited museums in the world.

There are a lot of important works of art in the museum, including Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, Andrea del Verrocchio's *The Baptism of Christ*, Michelangelo's *The Holy Family*, Leonardo da Vinci's *Adoration of the Magi*, Raphael's *Madonna of the Goldfinch*, Caravaggio's *Sacrifice of Isaac*, Rembrandt's *Self-portrait as a Young Man* and many more.

Admission is included with some [Florence tourist passes](#), and there is a free audio tour of the Uffizi Gallery by Rick Steves available as well.

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## **12. Arno River & Ponte Vecchio**

This is the largest river in the region, and it crosses the whole of Florence. In historical times, the Arno river flooded this city many times after excessive rainfall.

The Arno river is anything but predictable, as it could be quite slow one day and almost torrent like on the next.

Many consider this the most important river in Italy aside from the Tiber in Rome.



One of the most important bridges to cross the Arno is clearly visible from the riverside view of the Uffizi Gallery, and it is the next stop on this tour: Ponte Vecchio.

There has been a bridge here since at least the year 996, but it didn't exist in its current form until 1218, and even after that it had to be rebuilt in 1345 due to flooding.

Since then, the bridge has largely stood the test of time. Even during WW2, this was the only bridge in Florence that was not destroyed during the retreat of the German army.

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