



Villa San Michele

Connoisseur

An insider's guide to the most luxurious hotels in the world



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FLORENCE

Home to the Uffizi and the Accademia, two of the greatest art galleries in the world, Florence is a city where art is evident everywhere, from the charming squares to the frescoed walls of some of its finest hotels. Here are three memorable Florence hotels with strong art associations — perfect bases from which to embark on an art-themed tour of the city.

The Ferragamo-owned **Hotel Lungarno** is located right on the River Arno, 100 metres from the Ponte Vecchio. It features 73 rooms and suites and is packed with some 400 artworks, including a Picasso and three pieces by Jean Cocteau. Room 109 looks out over the Arno immediately below, with Ponte Santa Trinita to your left and Ponte Vecchio on your right. You can run this loop, taking in both bridges and running up Lungarno Corsini on the opposite bank, for a scenic half-hour circuit. The hotel, run by general manager Francesco Roccato, is attached to freestanding Restaurant Borgo San Jacopo — ask to sit on one of the four tables cantilevered out over the river. Guests also have access to another Lungarno hotel, the **Continente**, located across the river, which is home to a gym and spa, and a stunning celeb-packed rooftop bar called La Terrazza.

www.lungarnocollection.com

Four Seasons Hotel Firenze, overseen by scooter-riding general manager Patrizio Cipollini, is an amazing urban oasis of calm, only a 10-minute walk from the Duomo. Dating back to 1430, the 4.5-hectare estate was formerly the Palazzo della Gherardesca.

Many of the 116 unique rooms are breathtaking; room 122 features impressive *trompe l'oeil* art (3D-style painting) and gilded walls, one showing climbing roses and birds. Opulence continues in Il Palagio restaurant (*below*), where designer Pierre-Yves Rochon has installed Murano chandeliers in various shades of grey. In summer, dine outside on the immaculate gravel next to manicured lawns tended by a team of gardeners assisted by hedgehog-like robots. The spa and gym, both in their own two-floor classical buildings, are sensational, and when the weather allows, enjoy the heated outdoor pool, which has an ogee-shaped end and grass-green tiles to match the surroundings. The hotel's history is everywhere you go: many of the ancient trees in the gardens are extremely rare; the four-floor-high ballroom was once a church; and the former chapel located off the lobby is now a business centre with a function room. In all public areas you come across historic sculptures, bas-reliefs and frescoes dating between the 14th and the 18th centuries.

www.fourseasons.com

For a country break, check into Orient-Express' 46-room **Villa San Michele**. It is only a 15-minute drive up steep, winding roads on the outskirts of the city, but you feel far removed as you gaze back down at Florence, through those characteristic Italian pine trees. The property was a Franciscan monastery back in the mid-15th century, and the main building façade is attributed to Michelangelo. Ask general manager Marco Novella for a city-facing view or the three-room Limonaia villa, which comes with a plunge pool and private garden. There are plenty of excuses to stay active, be it exploring the 11 hectares of steeply terraced gardens and woods, or visiting the gym and outdoor pool. The kid's club is found in a former 17th-century Cappellina church. A shuttle runs to the city, but many prefer to stay on site, perhaps taking cooking classes with chef Attilio di Fabrizio. Dining out on the hotel's stone-vaulted and columned terrace and looking down to Florence, far below, is unforgettable. When you leave, be sure to turn around for a last sight of that classic façade.

www.villasanmichele.orient-express.com



Four Seasons Hotel Firenze