

# Florence like a local: The ultimate guide to eating and drinking, from a €6 pasta dish to Tuscan haute cuisine

The Italian city is food heaven, but make sure you plan, book ahead and watch where the locals queue



Florence: Chefs in action at Cestello Firenze, one of the 'sceniest' restaurants in town



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We all know the galleries to visit in [Florence](#), but what about where to eat?

The first thing you need to do in Florence – before galleries, churches or even coffee – is go to [Mercato Centrale](#). Yes, it's full of tourists. Go anyway. This is where Florentines shop and where chefs buy their fish and Chianina beef for bistecca Fiorentina. Designed by Giuseppe Mengoni in 1874, the cast-iron hall houses more than 100 stalls – 70 per cent still run by families, some still calling themselves peasants.

Da Nerbone is the best-known stall in the market – the queue for lampredotto starts before lunch. Florence's signature sandwich dates to the 15th century, when a cow's fourth stomach became a staple of the working poor. If you're not after the photo op, go to Bambi, as we did, the oldest food stall in the market, still using its original marble counter.



A lampredotto, Florence's signature sandwich

The lampredotto is slow-braised, chopped hot, dunked in broth, packed into a roll and finished with salsa verde and chilli. Too much? Order the trippa alla Fiorentina – tomato-based, €7 a portion. For porchetta, head to La Norcineria di Nannoni, where fennel-scented roast pork with crackling is folded into warm focaccia – €6 a sandwich.

If you're self-catering, the central market is the place to shop. Manetti Massimo is the butcher for bistecca, Baroni has more than 100 types of Pecorino, and at Marco Salumi e Formaggi, aged Parmesan starts at €17.90/kg and guanciale at €14.90/kg. Ask for it vacuum-packed and it will travel home happily in your suitcase (I can vouch for this). Vegetable stalls are piled with what's in season – artichokes when I was there – turning up on menus all over town. And do buy cantuccini: Belli Biscottificio Artigianale sells them loose by the kilo, with a €10 bottle of Vin Santo to dunk them in.





Marco Salumi e Fromaggi, Mercato Centrale, Florence

Florentines shop before lunch, so get there by noon; the shutters come down by 1.30pm. And avoid the upstairs entirely – it's a food court and a totally different experience.

For a quieter market, head out from the centre to Sant'Ambrogio, one of the loveliest districts of Florence. Beside the market (also designed by Giuseppe Mengoni), is Semel,



famous for its inventive sandwiches. Order one with a “gottino” of red. It’s far from a secret, but better than the tourist-magnet Vinaio on Via dei Neri.



Mercato Centrale: Eating and drinking in Florence's central market

On the north side of Piazza Ghiberti, L’Ortone is a Tuscan-style bistro with exposed brick, arched ceilings and tiled floors – once part of the “Ortone”, the walled vegetable garden of the Santa Verdiana convent. Produce comes from the market, including the aged beef for the bistecca Fiorentina with fat as yellow as old gold. It’s served charred and rare – rich, smoky and deeply satisfying.

Drop into Gilda Bistrot for coffee and pastries, or Cibrèò Café. Cibrèò runs a whole constellation – a formal restaurant, trattoria, cafe and theatre. Book ahead for dinner at Cibrèò Ristorante, with its ochre walls, wood panelling and scattering of maps and paintings. Featuring regional Tuscan dishes, go a la carte or take on the €90 tasting menu, which, when we were there, included timballo di tagliolini – a dome of pasta filled with molten cheese and prosciutto, artichoke hearts on mash with a yolk, and pigeon stuffed with mostarda di Cremona.



Cibrèo Ristorante: Go a la carte or take on the €90 tasting menu

For something more eclectic, try Podere 39, a Michelin Bib Gourmand spot tucked into Via Senese near Porta Romana, home to some of Florence's oldest buildings. The room walks the line between rustic and curated: stone walls, patched plaster, farmhouse tiles underfoot, shelves stacked with jars, cookbooks and wine. The menu sticks to Tuscan roots, with much of the produce coming straight from their own farm – podere being Italian for exactly that.

Trattoria Sostanza – known to locals as Il Troia – is one of Florence's most enduring, but far from unknown institutions. Ten minutes west of the Duomo, just past Santa Maria Novella station, it's cash only and only takes bookings by phone, old-school style.





Hotel Lungarno: 'Probably the most discreet stealth-wealth hotel I've ever stayed in'

It was booked out when I was in town, but the concierge at Hotel Lungarno – probably the most discreet stealth-wealth hotel I've ever stayed in – tipped me off about Trattoria La Grotta Parri. Owned by the Ferragamo family, Lungarno is Succession money with better manners: Ferragamo's original fashion sketches hang in the rooms, the corridors are lined with life drawings (naturally, for a designer), and downstairs you'll spot some Cocteaus and an early Picasso. And of course, there's a rooftop terrace with a view to match.

Well outside the city centre – and worlds away from Hotel Lungarno – Trattoria La Grotta Parri is a no-frills lunch spot where workers in high-vis vests crowd in for proper Tuscan staples. Open since 1948 and still run by the Parri family, it's a matriarchy in the kitchen, with the men on floor duty. The space is tiled, the walls lined with football memorabilia and black-and-white photographs, the television on in the corner, adding to the soundtrack of clattering pans and neighbourhood chat.



Trattoria La Grotta Parri: It's a matriarchy in the kitchen, with the men on floor duty

Rigatoni with sausage and stracciatella (€6) arrived in clear breach of portion control: oozy cheese, crumbled meat, and pasta with just enough bite. The ribollita – the reason we came and also €6 – was scalding, thick with beans and cavolo nero, poured over bread and finished with a swirl of oil. Tiramisu and panna cotta rounded out an absurdly affordable lunch.

No trip to Florence is complete without a proper dive into Tuscan wine. Enoteca Pitti Gola e Cantina, directly opposite the 15th-century Pitti Palace, might look like a tourist trap, but it's one of the city's best spots for exploring the region's wines. Three-glass flights pair beautifully with the charcuterie and pasta, and the sommeliers give sharp, informed commentary with every pour. There are only six tables, so book ahead.

Also with a serious wine list – but on a far glossier level – is Cestello Firenze, set in the former fish market on the piazza beside the old church of San Frediano. It's one of the sceniest spots in town. With high ceilings, exposed stone walls, and industrial touches; there's a cocktail bar as you enter, with a long raw fish counter and open kitchen anchoring the main room.

Cestello's tasting menu shows range, restraint and flashes of real creativity. It opened with clever snacks then moved on to a red prawn empanada – blistered pastry, sweet prawn – followed by squid ink ravioli filled with goat's cheese, topped with red prawn and a goat's milk-yuzu sauce that landed neatly between the Med and Japan. Sturgeon

with lobster-coconut sauce, wasabi mayo and courgette sounded unlikely, but the execution was refined and well judged.



Locale Firenze: Cocktails are spectacular, as are the bar snacks

Also owned by the same group – but far more theatrical – Locale Firenze sits in the historic Palazzo Concini in Santa Croce, just steps from the Duomo. The cocktail bar – on the World’s 50 Best list – opens on to a courtyard where vines claw up stone walls, softening the marble and the high-gloss mixology.

Cocktails are spectacular, as are the bar snacks – deep-fried oysters with ponzu. In a neighbourhood full of indie bars and after-hours energy, Locale is the one with polish – all moody lighting, sharp tailoring and Renaissance swagger.





Manzo sedano e carote at Locale Firenze, owned by the same group as Cestello but far more theatrical

Chef Simone Caponnetto's Tuscan haute cuisine is best approached through the tasting menu, though the a la carte holds its own. His Mugaritz background shows in dishes that nudge boundaries without veering into gimmick. Pine nut burrata, wood pigeon crème brûlée, veal tripe in Parmesan water, reworked ribollita, and pigeon with miso and truffle carved tableside are all clever, focused and driven by flavour. This is Michelin-standard cooking – how it's still unstarred is anyone's guess.

We stayed nearby, at Hotel La Gemma – tucked down a quiet side street near Piazza della Repubblica. It's a boutique spot with art deco rooms and quietly attentive service. A subterranean spa with Turkish bath, private courtyards, rooftop terrace and a first-floor gourmet restaurant are part of the draw.

Chef Paulo Airaudó (Michelin stars in San Sebastián, Barcelona, and Hong Kong) is the executive chef at Luca's at La Gemma. Guests can choose between a tasting menu or a la carte. Highlights include an artichoke consommé with yuzu ferment, mackerel sashimi with tomato water, and red shrimp with beetroot. The pasta dishes – one with potato and taleggio in vin jaune sauce, the other, pigeon cappelletti – were standouts. There's clear Michelin ambition, though a few dishes using sous vide need fine-tuning – they'd be better cooked the old-fashioned way.

For a classic Michelin experience, head to Borgo San Jacopo at Hotel Lungarno. The diningroom frames the Arno through a sweeping arched window – just be sure to request a table downstairs, as the upstairs space has a different feel.



### Borgo San Jacopo at Hotel Lungarno

The tasting menu is inventive without tipping into showiness, and there's also an a la carte option. Dishes such as savoury zabaglione, lemon semifreddo with juniper, and chickpea cannolo showed real imagination. Highlights included stuffed quail with foie gras sauce, caviar-topped prawns, and a fragrant strawberry-pistachio dessert. It's food that balances precision with pleasure. Every detail considered – and nothing overplayed.

For a break from the city, Serrae Villa Fiesole is a short, affordable taxi ride into the hills – and worth every cent. The outdoor terrace provides stunning views of Florence, and



chef Filippo Saporito (also chef/patron of La Leggenda dei Frati) brings real clarity to the food. The restaurant earned a Michelin star within months of opening. Dishes are thoughtful without overreaching: oyster with foie gras brûlée was unexpectedly brilliant, chitarra spaghetti with turnip top pesto was quietly assertive, and the sweetbreads were rich but never heavy handed. Red mullet in bisque pushed intensity without losing balance.

These are places for special occasions – but in Florence, Sunday is the tradition that matters. It's a day for walking – dogs, babies, grandparents – all en route to lunch. Trattorias fill with families, three generations and the family mutt in tow. A cliché maybe – but a glorious one.

Ristoro di Cambi, a short walk from Piazza Santo Spirito in the San Frediano district, is the place to go – but do book. Opened in the 1950s as a wine shop serving simple food with Chianti, the room is all arches, exposed brick, and ochre coloured walls with an eclectic mix of paintings.



Ristoro di Cambi, in the San Frediano district, is known for its bistecca alla Fiorentina

It's known for its bistecca alla Fiorentina, reasonably priced at €55 per kilo, served on a wooden board. We explored the lighter classics: courgette flowers stuffed with ricotta and lemon; lardo sliced thick, laid over focaccia with pickled tomatoes, tagliatelle with mushrooms in a delicious sauce, tiramisù with the right hit of booze and bitterness, and cantuccini with Vin Santo.





Ristoro di Cambi



Ristoro di Cambi



Aperitivo isn't optional in Florence – it's architectural. Rooftops fill early, Negronis arrive strong, and golden hour does the rest. Some terraces are residents only, others take bookings – either way, you'll want to plan ahead.

Antica Torre Tornabuoni 1 is ideal if you're staying over – a restored medieval tower five minutes from the Duomo, Piazza della Signoria, and Ponte Vecchio. Rooms are individually styled, with hand-painted murals on the walls and parquet floors, but the real draw is the view: two terraces kept blissfully crowd-free for guests only.

For those not checking in, La Terrazza at Hotel Continentale is the best-known name in town – a sleek rooftop just above Ponte Vecchio, which is open to non-residents, but a reservation is essential. B-Roof, the rooftop bar at Hotel Baglioni near Santa Maria Novella, is another elegant option: part American bar, part restaurant, and a solid bet for celebrations. If you're after something more low-key, The Social Hub rooftop – open to all – has a small pool, skyline views, and basic drinks and snacks.

Everyone knows what galleries to visit in Florence. The challenge is where to eat – and how to do it without getting funnelled into a queue for a sandwich that's been coasting on TikTok since 2018.

Florence doesn't hide the good stuff – but it expects you to know where to look. A proper trip means plotting your days around where you'll sit down: bistecca at Ristoro di Cambi, Sostanza, or L'Ortone; something slow and serious at Cibrèo. Pick one ambitious dinner – Borgo San Jacopo or Locale – then balance it with food stalls in the markets and trattorias where the menus haven't changed in decades. Watch what locals queue for.

And if you're celebrating – really celebrating – get out of town for lunch. Serrae Villa Fiesole is the call, or a quieter spot with a bottle of red, pasta, and a view worth lingering over. Then come back for aperitivo at a place that offers a view, not a queue. Florence does foie gras brûlée and caviar, but also a €6 plate of excellent pasta. You just have to decide which version of the city you want that day – and book accordingly.

## **Florence Notebook**

### **Casual**

**Bambi**, Storico Mercato Centrale Firenze, Via dell'Ariento, 50123 Firenze.

**Semel**, Piazza Lorenzo Ghiberti, 44, Firenze.

**Gilda Bistrot**, Piazza Lorenzo Ghiberti, 40-red, 50122 Firenze.

**Café Cibrèo**, Via Andrea del Verrocchio, 5R, 50122 Firenze; +39 055 234 1100; [cibreo.com/sant-ambrogio/caffe](https://cibreo.com/sant-ambrogio/caffe)

**Trattoria La Grotta Parri**, Via Bolognese, 14/r, 50139 Firenze; +39 055 480405; [instagram.com/explore/locations/804636810/la-grotta-parri---trattoria](https://www.instagram.com/explore/locations/804636810/la-grotta-parri---trattoria)

### **Mid-price trattorias**

**L'Ortone**, Piazza Lorenzo Ghiberti, 87/red, 50122 Firenze; +39 055 234 0804; [lortone.it/en](http://lortone.it/en)

**Trattoria Sostanza**, Via del Porcellana 25r, Firenze; +39 055 212691.

**Podere 39**, Via Senese 39r, 50125 Firenze; +39 345 2376137.

### **Sceney**

**Cestello Firenze**, Piazza del Cestello 8, Firenze; +39 055 2645364; [cestellofirenze.com/it](http://cestellofirenze.com/it)

**Locale Firenze**, Via delle Seggioline, 12r, 50122 Firenze; +39 055 906 7188; [localefirenze.it](http://localefirenze.it)

### **Special Occasion**

**Cibrèo Ristorante**, Via Andrea del Verrocchio 8 r, Firenze, 50122; +39 055 234 1100; [cibreo.com/sant-ambrogio/ristorante](http://cibreo.com/sant-ambrogio/ristorante)

**Borgo San Jacopo**, 62/R, 50125 Firenze; +39 055 281661; [lungarnocollection.com/borgo-san-jacopo](http://lungarnocollection.com/borgo-san-jacopo)

**Serrae Villa Fiesole**, Via Frà Giovanni da Fiesole Detto l'Angelico, 35 – 50014 Fiesole; +39 055 597252

### **Wine bar**

**Enoteca Pitti Gola e Cantina**, Piazza Pitti 16, Firenze, 50125; +39 055 212 704; [pittigolaecantina.com](http://pittigolaecantina.com)

### **Roof top bars open to non-residents**

**Terrazza at Hotel Continentale**, Lungarno degli Acciaiuoli 2/r, Firenze, 50123; +39 055 2726 5900; [lungarnocollection.com/la-terrazza-rooftop-bar](http://lungarnocollection.com/la-terrazza-rooftop-bar)

**B-Roof at Grand Hotel Baglioni**, Piazza dell'Unità Italiana 6, Firenze, 50123; +39 055 2358 8560; [b-roof.it/en](http://b-roof.it/en)

### **Where to stay in Florence**

**Hotel Lungarno**, Borgo San Jacopo, 14, 50125 Firenze; +39 055 27261; [lungarnocollection.com/hotel-lungarno](http://lungarnocollection.com/hotel-lungarno)

Rooms from €525 per night, two adults sharing, excluding breakfast

**Hotel La Gemma**, Via dei Cavalieri 2c, 50123, Firenze; +39 055 010 5200; [lagemmahotel.com](http://lagemmahotel.com)

Rooms from €625 per night, two adults sharing, including breakfast.

**Antica Torre di Via Tornabuoni 1**, Via dei Tornabuoni 1, Firenze, 50123; +39 055 265 8161; [tornabuoni1.com](http://tornabuoni1.com)

Rooms from €255 per night, two adults sharing, including breakfast.



**The Social Hub Florence**, Viale Spartaco Lavagnini 70–72, Firenze, 50129; +39 055 062 1555; [thesocialhub.co/florence-lavagnini](https://thesocialhub.co/florence-lavagnini)

Rooms from €63 per night, student rates €45 per night during the summer season.

*Corinna Hardgrave was a guest of Toscana Promozione Turistica and City of Florence. [vetrina.toscana.it](https://vetrina.toscana.it)*