

FLORENCE

Madova

Via Guicciardini 1/r

055 239 65 26; www.madova.com

Closed Sundays.

After you've visited Santa Felicita for Pontormo's frescoes and Pietà altarpiece — and perhaps had a bite to eat at one of the two quite good restaurants to the left and right of the square next to the church — it's an easy stroll to the Palazzo Pitti. On your way there, be sure to stop at Madova, the best glove store in Florence.

Rona Goffen

Art historian

Shopping Spree

... Yet my walk is still not complete. There is one more stop — the large medieval palace at the end of the via Tornabuoni that is closest to the Ponte Santa Trinita. This palazzo is the home of Salvatore Ferragamo, the great shoe designer. Although the store is wonderful, my true interest is in the Museo Salvatore Ferragamo. You must make an appointment at the store to visit the museum, which exhibits all of his great shoe designs and their lasts (blocks or forms in the shape of someone's foot). There, beautifully displayed on the top floor, are shoes that belonged to Audrey Hepburn, Wally Simpson, Judy Garland, Marlene Dietrich, citizens and travelers who found their way to Ferragamo. It is a beautifully appointed museum, and if you love shoes you will not be disappointed.

I always end this walk, or take a luncheon intermezzo before Ferragamo, and it is always to the most lovely Cantinetta Antinori, which is at the opposite end of the via Tornabuoni from the Ponte Santa Trinita. One must pass through a huge arched doorway into a large room much like a cantina. The menu is special everyday and it is not a large menu, but once one discovers this delightful Tuscan ambience, it will be hard to go elsewhere.

Judith DiMaio

Architect

Museo La Specola

Via Romana 17

055 228 82 51; www.oapd.inaf.it and www.msn.unifi.it

Tickets must be acquired at the Oratorio San Michele, Piazzetta San Michele. Closed Mondays.

Tucked into a side road south of the Palazzo Pitti, through a dark courtyard, and up three flights of stairs: La Specola — “the Observatory.”

Florentines know it: they come as schoolchildren to this surpassingly strange, disconcerting museum unlike any other. Part is a hodgepodge collection of taxidermy, gorillas, quetzals, and tapeworms in one silent room after another. The eerie displays smell faintly of preservative, and the visitor wanders in solitude. But this is only the beginning; La Specola's true treasure is waxworks. Since the collection's beginning in 1775, past the death of its founder, Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo di Lorena, in 1792, and through much of the nineteenth century, the collection has continued to grow ...

Sallie Tisdale

Writer

VENICE

An Enchanted Evening

Board no. 1 boat at San Marcuola to San Zaccaria

Board no. 82 for return to San Marcuola

I take my favorite guests for an enchanting night-time boat ride down the Grand Canal on the vaporetto, the public water bus. Armed with luscious gelati from Il Gelatone (Rio Terrà della Maddalena, Cannaregio 2063, 041 72 06 31 — near the Casinò on Strada Nova), we board the No. 1 boat at San Marcuola and try to score a seat out front, where there's nothing between us and the dark water. We cruise past magical palaces and under the Rialto and Accademia bridges to magnificent Saint Mark's.

Disembarking at San Zaccaria, we cross the nearby bridge for the landing stage for line No. 82 (the one via San Giorgio, not Rialto.) This transports us via the broad Giudecca Canal and then the vast silent port precincts, eventually looping back to the railway station and San Marcuola.

Gillian Price

Writer of hiking guides

Museo Correr

Piazza San Marco 52, entrance in Ala Napoleonica

041 240 52 11; www.museiciviviceneziani.it

Venice is beyond belief — more fantastic than one's most fanciful inventions. As most of the city is well-known, I will highly recommend one of its secret places. For reasons I can't begin to understand, the Museo Correr has been practically empty when I've gone to Venice, while the Galleria dell'Accademia has been crowded. The Accademia is a great museum, true, and it should be seen. But the Correr is not far behind. It is in the palazzo that defines one side of the Piazza San Marco, above Florian's, where elegant people sit by an orchestra, watching the theater of

life. Beyond the Correr's Venetian historical collections, at the far end and up the stairs again, there is a beautiful collection with Bellinis and Carpaccios. Carpaccio's Courtesans is one of the most interesting paintings around, to my painter's eye. Easel-sized, mysterious, quiet. Felice Casorati based his 1921 painting *Two Sisters* on this work.

Alan Feltus

Painter

Basilica di San Marco

Piazza San Marco

www.basilicasanmarco.it

The hush of evening falls. The tourists have gone. With the lights dimmed, the dazzling beauty of the church is subdued. A few people come in before the evening Mass and whisper among themselves. Along the wall at the end of the left transept you sit on a long, plain bench, wood mounted on stone. Lean against the cool wall. Touch it. Breathe the silence. Look across the great reach of space toward the high window, where natural light fades. In the mysterious half-darkness, the Madonna Nicopeia looks comfortable in her niche, for she has been at home here for about eight hundred years. Just before the Mass, the lights go on everywhere, blazing on the mosaics and flooding the place with a shower of gold. At a very human level, this is death and rebirth.

Mary Jane Phillips-Matz

Musicologist and biographer

Riviera

Fondamenta delle Zattere Ponte Lungo 1473

041 522 76 21; www.ristoranteriviera.it

Lovely outdoor location on embankment facing Giudecca canal. Limited outdoor seating. Simple pastas and risottos, good fish, chicken with cardoons sometimes, *fegato alla veneziana* usually.

Marcella Hazan

Chef and cookbook author

VENETIAN ISLANDS

Church of the Redentore

1577–1592, *Andrea Palladio*

The church of the Redentore, by Palladio (completed after his death), was built in gratitude for salvation from the Plague and is best visited the third Sunday in July, during the Feast of the Redeemer. You should do it right, starting on the San Marco side of the canal, and crossing the pontoon bridges built for the occasion to take you over the Grand Canal and the

Giudecca Canal to the church. If you do this, you will probably not get the Plague (it's worked for me).

Rona Goffen

Art historian

Watching the Ships Go By

For my money, watching the ships go by is the best thing to be done in Venice, and it is best done by sitting on the quayside below the Dogana, at the tip of the Giudecca. From here you can see in your mind's eye the gilded galleons of *la Serenissima* returning from the east, trailing the ensigns of defeated enemies, and in your real eye the great, gaudy cruise ships which, sailing in hardly less splendidly, bring yet more wondering pilgrims to this seaport of delight.

Jan Morris

Writer

San Lazzaro Monastery

Open 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. daily.

Home of Mechitarists (the Armenian Catholics), San Lazzaro has the third largest Armenian manuscript library in world, a marvelous collection of Kütahya eighteenth-century pottery, and a charming garden. Byron used to row across the lagoon and helped the monks produce the first Armenian/English dictionary. You can take the vaporetto from Venice or hire a rowboat from the Lido.

John Carswell

Curator and art