

# Understand Florence & Tuscany

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Its Gothic glories and Renaissance masterpieces give Tuscany an artistic heritage unmatched anywhere in the world.

# Florence & Tuscany Today

**It's not all fabled romance in this land of super wines and enchanting stone farmsteads lost in cinematic rushes of pretty hills, pea-green vineyards and cypress alleys. The Tuscan cart still turns around the same 'go slow' spindle it did three millennia ago – but with diminishing state coffers, increasing globalisation and various economic woes to dodge en route.**

## Best on Film

**Life is Beautiful** (Robert Benigni; 1998) Oscar-winning Holocaust comedy set in Arezzo.

**A Room with a View** (James Ivory; 1985) Exquisitely rendered screen version of EM Forster's 1908 novel.

**Tea with Mussolini** (Franco Zeffirelli; 1999) Semi-autobiographical film, opening in Florence in 1935.

**The English Patient** (Anthony Minghella; 1996) Romantic drama starring Arezzo's Cappella Bacci.

## Best in Print

**The Stones of Florence** (Mary McCarthy; 1956) Timeless portrait of Florence.

**Tuscan Cities** (William Dean Howells) Wonderful travel narrative penned by the American consul to Venice in 1883.

**The Birth of Venus** (Sarah Dunant; 2003) The daughter of a wealthy merchant falls in love with a fresco painter in 15th-century Florence.

**The Decameron** (Giovanni Boccaccio; 1353) A bawdy masterpiece.

**A Tabernacle for the Sun** (Linda Proud; 1997) Book One of the Botticelli Trilogy.

## Modern Museology

As state funds diminish, museums are less able to afford a full quota of staff, and hence they sometimes open certain floors or rooms to visitors for limited hours only. Yet Tuscany remains committed to safeguarding its treasure chest of art.

In Florence, the €65-million 'New Uffizi' refurbishment project continues apace, climaxing in 2016 with the opening of the celebrated Botticelli rooms. All rooms on the 2nd floor are now finished. Dozens more rooms have opened on the 1st floor, bringing the permanent collection from 45 rooms to a staggering 101. State-of-the-art displays using multimedia, sound and film at Florence's outstanding new Museo degli Innocenti are an overdue nod to modern museology; the future Zeffirelli film school and museum, destined to open in the city's former San Firenze courthouse in Santa Croce, promises to be equally innovative. Historic Tuscan coffee-machine maker La Marzocco, headquartered in the Mugello in northeastern Tuscany, has pledged to invest €5 million in a coffee museum and an on-trend 'coffee academy' at its original industrial plant in Fiesole.

In Prato, delayed €9-million renovation works at the Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci have come to an end, and the results are stunning. Unveiled at the end of 2016, the sparkling-gold, spaceship-like piece of contemporary architecture marks a new milestone for contemporary art in a region known predominantly for its Renaissance masterpieces.

## Economic Woes

Tuscany is feeling the strain of Europe's ongoing financial crisis. Italy's debt burden (133% of GDP in 2016) is the highest in the euro zone after Greece; and in 2016, for the first time since 1959, consumer prices in Italy fell as inflation – or, rather, deflation – notched a negative -0.1%. Yet Tuscany remains one of Italy's most prosperous regions,