

FLORENCE

ENCOUNTER

ROBERT LANDON

Florence Encounter

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Australia Head Office, Locked Bag 1,
Footscray, Victoria 3011
☎ 03-8379 8000 fax 03-8379 8111
talk2us@lonelyplanet.com.au
USA 150 Linden St, Oakland, CA 94607
☎ 510-250 6400
toll free 800 275 8555
fax 510-893 8572
info@lonelyplanet.com
UK 2nd fl, 186 City Rd,
London EC1V 2NT
☎ 020-7106 2100 fax 020-7106 2101
go@lonelyplanet.co.uk

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Colour-Coding & Maps

Colour-coding is used for symbols on maps and in the text that they relate to (eg all eating venues on the maps and in the text are given a green knife and fork symbol). Each neighbourhood also gets its own colour, and this is used down the edge of the page and throughout that neighbourhood section.

Shaded yellow areas on the maps denote 'areas of interest' – for their historical significance, their attractive architecture or their great bars and restaurants. We encourage you to head to these areas and just start exploring!

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ROBERTL ANDON

Ten minutes into his maiden voyage to Florence, Robert was pick-pocketed in the sudden dark of Santa Maria Novella. Despite the band of child-thieves, he's returned obsessively for two decades, including many too-brief visits, a satisfying sojourn in the Oltrarno, a lost weekend in Fiesole, and a long, hot summer funded with misappropriated student loans. Robert studied Italian at Stanford University, and has also lived in Rome. Currently based in Rio, he writes about travel, arts and culture for a range of publications, from the *Los Angeles Times* to *Dwell*. His other Lonely Planet titles include *Brazil*, *Colombia*, *California*, *Portugal* and *West Africa*.



ROBERT'S T HANKS

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THE PHOTOGRAPHER

GIORGIO COSULICH

Giorgio Cosulich works as a freelance photographer and is based in Rome. His career in photography has taken him around the world including to many conflict zones. Giorgio's photos have appeared in many major newspapers and magazines including the *New York Times*, *Stern* and *Time*.

Our readers Many thanks to the travellers who wrote to us with helpful hints, useful advice and interesting anecdotes: Mira Berkley, Sarah Berni, Cecilia Garcia, Richard Hewitt, Judy Packard, Rebecca Renwick, Niccolò Ricci, James Todd

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The Piazza della Signoria (p49) is best appreciated after the crowds have dispersed

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SED VITI MESCLA

CARMI FIDE DA PEVILIGI

STELLA MAFI

THIS IS FLORENCE

For the discerning traveller, Florence asks the question: Is this a living city or a glorified museum? The answer is 'yes' on both counts.

You catch sight of it – just a sun-drenched portion at the end of a dark lane – and can't help but gawk for a moment before redoubling your pace.

When you see it again, it seems further away than before. You curse your map and push through thickening crowds. Then, suddenly, from a labyrinth of medieval streets, you are expelled out on to a single, vast space. And there it is before you, hovering serenely above its thronging admirers in all its rounded, red-hued totality: Brunelleschi's dome.

You ready your camera, but suddenly phalanxes of tourists bear down from every side. You mutter a complaint, then remind yourself this is part of the deal. You must suffer your fellow travellers, queue with them and wade through their vast numbers, if you want to see the most iconic of the Michelangelos and Massaccios, Botticellis and Brunelleschis. Fortunately Florence offers dozens of escape routes that, in minutes, free you from the 'Golden Triangle' – that densely touristed zone stretching from Accademia down to Ponte Vecchio and then over to Santa Croce.

Today you head south, over the bridge to the Oltrarno. What's drawing you? You find the dusty workshops where artisans still defend a way of life that Brunelleschi would find familiar. There they are drilling, firing, hammering and polishing, making spry minds and dextrous hands work in concert until raw materials become objects of beauty.

Towards sunset, you climb up to San Miniato. From here, Florence looks much as it must have in 1550, with its cypress-lined gardens and lazy, dun-coloured river, its stone towers and that great red-tiled dome. Off in the distance, past layers of green hills, lie distant peaks of smoky blue. The whole scene reminds you of a Renaissance painting, which of course makes perfect sense when you think about it. After all, this city – this inventor of Beauty – was only offering us a more perfect reflection of itself.

Top The 15th-century political carousel has been replaced by a more enjoyable one as seen in the Piazza della Repubblica (p49) **Bottom** A sample of Masaccio's wonderful frescoes inside Cappella Brancacci (p123)