

## A Few Days in Florence



September 2009 I spent a few days in Florence. I stayed in a fantastic hostel called Villa Archi Rossi, very close to the train station in the middle of town. The hostel was very clean with many freebies including internet access, breakfast, dinner and walking tours. They also had laundry facilities on site!

My first day I went to the Academe Galleria in the afternoon and found the waiting time to be 3 hours plus. I decided to go back in the morning. I've been told that nothing happens in Italy early in the morning and found this very true but it can be a bonus if you want to get into the museums etc

without the usual crush of tourists. The museum opens at 8.30am and I arrived at 8.15am. There were 10 people in front of me. Once inside, we were the only people for at least ½ an hour. The statue of David without the crowds was just amazing. I spent a good half hour taking in the beauty of this statue. The Galleria itself is a beautiful building but by 10.30am you could barely move and it was time to move on.



I walked the Ponte Vecchio. I have never in my life seen more jewellery in one place. Nor have I seen such extravagant, large and expensive jewellery. The crowds were really thick, and you just shuffle past the amazing sights, but that's part of the fun in a place like this. Hold onto your bags. I saw a number of police chases on this bridge!

With a couple of travellers I met in the hostel, we attended a choir practice (we were told) which was actually a mass service with the choir in a fabulous old church with soaring ceilings. The choir performed Gregorian chants and Handel's Messiah. This was a spectacular event in such surroundings and an

absolute highlight of the trip.

You couldn't go to Florence without going to the markets and they are amazing. I loved the leather jackets, bags, belts etc and the gloves were really beautiful as well. I bought a couple of small bags, soft lovely leather, and a wallet for my son. Not much as I didn't want to carry much with me. Now I'm kicking myself, I should have bought what I wanted and posted it home!

As with the Academe Galleria, I went to the Uffizi Galleria before they opened and again entered without the crowds. What was there was wonderful but I found many rooms and areas closed off to the public as much of the art was on tour around the world! After the Uffizi gallery, I had to get back to the hostel, grab my things and catch a train to Naples. On my way back to the hostel, I had to get through the Florence Marathon crowds! With such narrow streets and people streaming everywhere, I only just made the train but will always remember Florence decked out in Red and White flags, banners, streamers, posters, and t-shirts in the midst of a wonderful festival. I loved the chanting and energy of the crowds and was sorry to leave. The art, architecture, history and people of Florence made this stop a definite highlight of my trip.



Janet Brown