



This photo taken April 18 shows the old city of Florence, Italy, flanking the River Arno as viewed from the Piazzale Michelangelo. The piazzale, a square in the hills above the city, is a great place to take in the views, especially at sunset.

Galleries to gelato: The best of Florence

By MICHELLE LOCKE
Associated Press

FLORENCE, Italy — The skies were clouding over as I strode briskly across that famous bridge, the Ponte Vecchio, ready for a productive day checking off Florentine must-sees.

Slight problem: The first museum on my list was open, but the ticket office was closed.

OK, then, on to the Uffizi Gallery. Except this time both ticket office and museum were closed; I had forgotten it was Monday.

A fine rain began to fall as I wandered listlessly past the open arches of the building next door, the statue-studded Loggia dei Lanzi. This wasn't going at all as planned.

And then it hit me. Wait. This was the Piazza della Signoria, where novelist E.M. Forster's adorable Lucy Honeychurch witnessed a stabbing moments after complaining about the dullness of life in "A Room With a View." And those had to be THE steps where the brooding George Emerson carried Lucy's fainting form.

Sunshine filtered through. I had found Florence. Or rather, it had found me.

If you're planning a trip here, you could do worse than wander until you find what you didn't know you were looking for. Here are a few starting points.

WHAT'S NEW

The Opera Duomo Museum, devoted to art created for the famous Florence duomo (cathedral), has been given a major makeover and expansion. A highlight is the exhibition hall featuring a replica of the former facade of the cathedral. A 15-euro pass (about \$17) will get you access to the museum as well as the cathedral dome and bell tower, both with steps to the top. Open daily except the first Tuesday of the month, but check website for unexpected closures. Piazza del Duomo 9, <http://www.museumflorence.com/museum>.

The Central Market (Piazza del Mercato Centrale on Via dell'Ariento) has a bright and bustling remodeled second floor, home to food stands, a restaurant, pizzeria,



In this April 22 photo, visitors peek through a doorway at the Tribuna of the Uffizi, a domed octagonal room displaying paintings and statues in Florence, Italy.



In this April 22 photo, visitors to the Accademia Gallery in Florence, Italy, pause to admire and take photos of Michelangelo's David. The 17-foot-high marble statue is a Renaissance masterpiece and a must-see in Florence.

wine academy, cooking school and more. Open daily, 10 a.m.-midnight.

CLASSIC ATTRactions

If there is one must-see in Florence it's Michelangelo's David.

Yes, there are lines, crowds and a forest of smartphones waving in front of you, but all that falls away as you round the corner to the long gallery and confront 17 feet of cool, concentrated, confident youth. Galleria dell'Accademia, Via Ricasoli 58/60. Open Tues-

day-Sunday, 8:15 a.m.-6:50 p.m., about \$14.

The Uffizi Gallery, set in an imposing 16th-century building, is home to outstanding art, including Giotto's altarpiece, the Ognissanti Madonna, which revolutionized painting by portraying the human figure in perspective, not just two dimensions. Piazzale degli Uffizi 6. Tuesday-Sunday, 8:15 a.m.-6:50 p.m., around \$10.

You can't miss the Duomo, the Gothic cathedral encrusted in pink, green and white marble that is a striking feature of the city. The inside is less impressive but is open most days 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and free.

The Ponte Vecchio isn't the most beautiful bridge in the world, but it is interesting, with its lineup of stores, mostly jewelers and souvenir sellers. It was big news in May when a sinkhole opened up, swallowing a score of cars on a stretch of road between Ponte Vecchio and the bridge immediately east, Ponte Grazie. The mayor of Florence vows to repairs completed by November.

Around sunset, head to the Piazzale Michelangelo, on a hill on the south side of the Arno, for terrific views of the city. You can get here by taxi, the No. 12 bus or by walking about 20 minutes from the Uffizi Gallery.

GETTING AROUND

Florence is a walking city; bring comfy shoes. If you have a car or hire a driver, consider emulating Miss Honeychurch and cousin Charlotte and head for the hills. You're in the middle of Chianti wine country with several estates to visit, including Poggio Casciano, a 14th-century villa that is part of the Ruffino wine company and about a 30-minute drive from the city. The estate produces Modus, a "super Tuscan" red blend of sangiovese, merlot and cabernet sauvignon. By appointment only; reserve tastings and tours, <http://www.ruffino.com>.

Farther afield is the Romitorio di Serelle, about 24 miles from Florence, where you can rent apartments by the week or have lunch on the property's wide terrace perched above rolling vineyards. <http://www.romitoriodiserelle.it/>

TIPS

If you're planning on visiting museums, consider buying tickets online; book entrance times to skip long lines.

More into shopping than sculpture? Check out the Santa Maria Novella, an apothecary that traces its history back 600 years. Don't miss the displays of antique remedies such as anti-hysteria pills as well as the beautifully packaged perfumes and other products available for modern consumers. Via della Scala 16.

For a touch of local night life, the Piazza Santo Spirito on the south side of the Arno is lined with cafes and bars.

A hot spot for gelato is La Carraia, Piazza Nazario Sauro 25R. Work up a literary appetite and order something in honor of Miss Honeychurch, who "loved iced coffee and meringues." Enjoy your treats on the nearby Ponte alla Carraia where you'll have more room, and, naturally, a view.

Scrambled eggs baked in muffin tins make mornings easier

By MELISSA D'ARABIAN
Associated Press

When it comes to healthy eating, good intentions and willpower can only take us so far. That's why I believe strongly in making the healthy choice the easy choice, especially when it comes to morning decisions.

Spending a little time to set myself up for success makes a huge difference in my ability to stick to my healthy living plans. For instance, I set out my workout clothes the night before, so rolling out of bed and into them is a no-brainer. Should the extra 15 seconds that it would take for me to open the dresser drawer to grab my exercise clothes be the thing that derails an entire workout? Perhaps not. But alas it does. For me, anyway.

Same thing can happen when it comes to food. When I'm hungry and in a rush, I'm far more likely to grab just anything that will fill my belly. But I'll absolutely eat a healthy protein-filled breakfast if it's all prepped and ready to go.

In fact, my whole family eats better when I invest a little time cooking and stocking my freezer with my own version of "fast food." One of our favorites is the morning egg muffin, which is essentially



Bake-ahead morning egg cups .

scrambled eggs baked up in muffin tins.

I make a dozen or two on weekends to keep in the freezer and in less than two microwave minutes, we have a weekday breakfast that is chock-full of filling protein. My secret: I use two eggs to get some of that luscious fat,

flavor, and color from the yolk and then load up on serious-protein egg whites.

Use whatever veggies you have on hand, and don't be shy about loading up — even my two pickiest kiddos love these little guys! Make several flavors when you find eggs on sale, and you'll have a

veritable morning buffet of protein for weeks. No last-minute drive-thrus to stave off the hunger on the way to work.

Food Network star Melissa d'Arabian is an expert on healthy eating on a budget. She is the author of the cookbook "Supermarket Healthy."

MORNING EGG CUPS

Start to finish: 25 minutes
Servings: 12

- 1 link turkey Italian sausage, about 3 ounces, crumbled
- 1/2 red pepper, chopped
- 2 tablespoons chopped onion
- 1 tablespoons flour (all purpose or rice flour both work)
- 1 1/2 cups baby spinach, washed
- 2 eggs
- 3/4 cup egg whites (about 7 egg whites)
- 1/4 cup lowfat milk
- 1/2 cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese

Preheat the oven to 350 F. In a saute pan, cook the sausage over medium high heat until no longer pink, about 5 minutes. Add the pepper and chopped onion and cook until vegetables begin to soften, about 3 minutes. Sprinkle with the flour and stir in.

Chop the spinach and stir into the pan, and cook another minute for spinach to wilt. Remove from heat and allow to cool a few minutes. In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs, egg whites and milk until pale yellow and smooth. Stir in the sausage mixture and cheese.

Spray a 12-cup muffin tin with nonstick spray. Spoon the mixture into the tin. Bake until eggs are firm but not dry, about 15 minutes. Let cool in the muffin tins for 10 minutes before removing and allowing to cool on a baking rack.

Eat right away, or freeze in a resealable freezer bag. Label well! To microwave for breakfast: Wrap in a paper towel and heat on 70 percent heat until hot, about 90 seconds, depending on microwave strength.

Nutrition information per serving: 60 calories; 28 calories from fat; 3 g fat (1 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 47 mg cholesterol; 109 mg sodium; 2 g carbohydrate; 0 g fiber; 1 g sugar; 6 g protein.