

Shopping in Florence



Potions and perfumes at Officina Profumo Farmaceutica di Santa Maria Novella



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It may not be as popular for shopping as Italy's fashion capital Milan, but Florence is undoubtedly one of the best cities in the world to indulge in some retail therapy amidst incredible art and great architecture. Here's a quick **shopping** guide to help you pick up the best merchandise—both budget and high-end—when in Tuscany's capital next.

Lotions and potions

The Officina Profumo Farmaceutica di Santa Maria Novella is the oldest pharmacy in Florence, and today is less of a shop and more of a **museum**. In the 13th and 14th century, this pharmacy was part of the monastery in the church of Santa Maria. The Dominican monks, who sourced and cultivated herbs for treatments, initially managed it. Then 400 years ago, in 1612, they opened a shop to sell their medicinal products and slowly, soaps, tonics, perfumes and beauty products too. Right from its grand entrance to the vaulted ceiling, colourful frescos, old bottles and stained-glass windows, this place is worth a visit for its remarkable range of perfumes and cosmetic products.

*Officina Profumo Farmaceutica di Santa Maria Novella, Via della Scala, 16, 50123 Florence, Italy
(www.smnovella.it/home.html)*

Curios

A walk down from the Uffizi Gallery, just before the Piazza del Duomo (Cathedral Square), is Armando Poggi. Even with

the Duomo rising up majestically ahead, you will be drawn to the quirky yet stylish window displays of this shop. Yet another entity from the 20th century, Poggi is a family-owned business selling Italian ceramics, Murano glass and Swarovski crystal among other things. For an additional fee, they are happy to ship the goods you buy to your home address anywhere in the world.

Armando Poggi, Via Calzaiuoli 103r, 50122 Florence, Italy (www.apoggi.com)

Jewellery

If it is **jewellery** you are looking for, head straight to Ponte Vecchio. This bridge across the Arno River was built in 1345 and was a market for butchers. The smell, especially in the summers when the mercury touched 40 degrees Celsius, led King Ferdinand I to summon jewellers to take over the shops in 1593. So that is what it is today—a bustling market with glittering stores on either side, each window displaying contemporary jewellery more alluring than the other. Pick up some baubles for yourself, or then as gifts for friend and family.

Ponte Vecchio, 50125 Florence, Italy

Leather bags and accessories

After you've spent enough time at the magnificent Duomo (Basilica of Saint Mary of the Flower), make your way down the road to the San Lorenzo street market. You'll find a row of vendors selling genuine leather products at affordable prices. Be ready to use all your bargaining skills, since the sellers expect it too and are always ready to negotiate and close a deal. Another good place for leather footwear is Romano Firenze, dating back to 1965. Renowned for its customised shoes, it also houses collections by popular and aspiring designers.

Via degli Speziali 10r, Borgo San Lorenzo 13r, Florence, Italy

Designer labels

For high-end shopping, your best bet is Via dei Tornabuoni. The streets here house all the big names, including Prada, Gucci, Ferragamo, Cartier, Bulgari, Dolce and Gabbana. There are smaller **boutiques** around Via della Vigna Nuova and some big brands like Lacoste and Montebianc too. Luisa is another popular shop located at Via Roma, closer to the Duomo, with an impressive range of clothing, accessories and jewellery for both men and women.

Luisa, Via Roma, 19/21r, 50123 Florence, Italy (www.luisaviaroma.com/index.htm)

How to get there

Fly into Rome—the nearest airport—and take Trenitalia's super-fast Frecciarossa train from Roma Termini. The journey takes just an hour and a half, and comes with special offers in the form of discounted car hire and hotel room rates. (www.trenitalia.com)

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