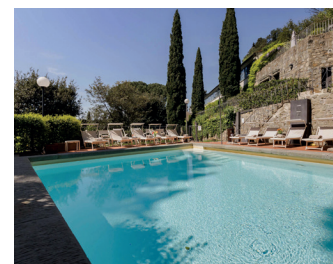




Teen-tested Florence

In an attempt to impart some culture to her adolescents, **Alex Galbinski** took them on a family holiday to Florence



Many people questioned our wisdom in visiting Florence in the August heat, but our concern was our teenagers' limited capacity for sightseeing. Planning was key. So we queued for the Uffizi Galleries while taking in the wonderful view of the Ponte Vecchio. Ancient sculptures and paintings from the Middle Ages to the modern period are found within the Giorgio Vasari-designed building, including those by Botticelli, Correggio, Leonardo, Raffaello, Michelangelo and Caravaggio, as well as works by European painters.

Even on a whistle-stop tour of Florence one must see Michelangelo's David – the original in the Accademia Gallery of Florence and the second version in Piazza della Signoria (Duomo Square).

We got the kids off their phones with a trip to the bell tower of the Duomo (Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore), Florence's magnificent domed cathedral. Construction on the cathedral began in 1296 and took more than 140 years to finish. It has 414 steps and stunning sweeping views.

Jews have lived in Florence and the surrounding areas since the 14th century and there are still 1,000 there today. They were encouraged to come after 1437 by Cosimo il Vecchio de' Medici but were enclosed in a ghetto in 1570. The truly stunning white and pink Great Synagogue was completed in 1882 and features Moresque arches, Venetian-style mosaics and other touches by leading craftsmen. The Jewish Museum of Florence is housed within.

If you keep kosher, you are well catered for; we ate at Ba'Ghetto, which serves delicious Jewish-Roman and Middle Eastern food and is located in front of the synagogue, in the lively Sant'Ambrogio district featuring iconic narrow streets and antique shops.

A must-try are the fried artichokes.

We stayed in the charming Hotel Fiesole FH55, a renovated historic house far from the madding crowd and only five miles (a 20-minute bus ride) from Florence city centre. We were smitten from our first sight of its stunning vantage point in the Tuscan hills with breathtaking panoramic views over Florence and the surrounding countryside.

The four-star hotel only has 32 guest rooms and feels romantic, intimate and cosy; it is the perfect antidote to *la frenesia* of the city and is a 15-minute walk from the gorgeous and historic small town of Fiesole. The hotel's main building was originally a lemon grove used by the monks of the nearby monastery and some of the rooms overlook the city. Our deluxe suite was decorated in the classic style – with terracotta floor tiles, a plush velvet sofa and gorgeous Phytomer and Clarins toiletries; our teens were in the interconnecting junior suite. Both rooms were supremely comfy and spacious and had private terraces; there is also a small outdoor pool.

The Serrae Villa Fiesole Restaurant showcases Tuscany's authentic flavours and recently gained a Michelin star. We enjoyed fabulous breakfasts on its terrace and, later on our trip, we visited Rome and ate in Le Spighe Restaurant at sister FH55 hotel the Grand Palatino, just steps from the Colosseum. We can still taste the delicate seabass carpaccio with nectarine, dill and fennel, beautifully presented aubergine parmigiana in a style none of us had seen before, and perfectly-cooked crispy salmon.

This was a memorable visit to an historic gem in the heart of Italy. We plan a return visit – in spring!

Rooms at Hotel Fiesole FH55 cost from €219 a night. fhhotelgroup.it

TOP: Florence has much to offer travellers of all ages
ABOVE: The outdoor pool at the charming Hotel Fiesole FH55
BELOW: The Great Synagogue of Florence

