

neighborhood crawl: santo spirito



Distance: 2 km (about 1.2 miles)

Time: 25 minute walk in total, plus time (up to a day!) for leisurely exploring

Cost: \$0

Directions: Start out by crossing the Ponte Vecchio. At the bridge's end, walk straight ahead, looking for a small piazza on your left with a church tucked in the back corner (Sant Felicita). Venture further down Via de' Guicciardini, past Palazzo Pitti, onto Via Romana, until you reach Via del Campuccio. Turn right, and then make the next right again at Via Caldaie. Walk up to Santo Spirito, head out at the far right of the piazza and turn left on Via Maggio. Walk down to St. Mark's Church, cross the street and take that right on Via dei Vellutini down to Piazza della Passera. Take Via dello Sprone back out and follow it until you reach Ponte Santa Trinita.

Places to see:

- **Santa Felicita** – One of the oldest worship sites in the city, although the current structure mostly dates back to the 18th century. Head here when open in the early morning and venture in under the Vasari Corridor (the arch-shaped interruption in the church's facade), which also doubled as a private balcony the Medici could worship from without mingling with ordinary plebs. The inside is certainly inspired by the style of Renaissance heavyweight Brunelleschi – the man who solved the riddle of the cathedral dome. He even designed the chapel immediately to the entrance's right, today known as the Capponi Chapel, which features two masterpieces by Mannerist favorite Jacopo Pontormo.
- **Palazzo Pitti / Boboli Gardens** – While not free, Palazzo Pitti and Boboli Gardens might be Florence's greatest one-two punch. The palace is the second home to Duke Cosimo I de Medici and his wife Eleonora. Skip the lines at the Uffizi and opt for this more palatial experience with Raphael, Michelangelo, Titian, and other Renaissance giants before wandering the serene grounds out back. Or take a seat and people watch from the stone hill.

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- **La Specola** – Take note of this zoology museum – it’s stuffed with specimens and unusual creatures. It does have an entry fee (embalming is apparently expensive).
- **Piazza Santo Spirito** – The main attraction is always the charming, genuine gathering spot in front of Santo Spirito. Here, Italian hipsters and European ex-pats can partake in some of the country’s most celebrated traditions – sitting quietly, chatting with friends, and enjoying the view, food and drink. Neighborhood characters constantly come out of the woodwork to contribute to the piazza’s vibrant evening life, which sometimes features free concerts. Depending on what day and time you happen upon the area, you may run into any number of markets. Each second Sunday morning of each month there is a farmer’s market teeming with fresh produce and local products. And every third Sunday morning of each month there is a lively antiques market brimming with treasures and trinkets. Needless to say, both are free to browse – just try not to drool on the merchandise. But even if you miss the markets (or an eccentric busker or two) the unadorned façade of the church is enough to make you take pause – preferably on the church’s steps, where a number of other visitors will be camped out, just because.
- **Chiesa di Santo Spirito** – Free entry daily from 9:30am – 12:30pm and in the evenings from 4-5:30pm. Avoid visiting on Wednesdays, when the doors are closed for good.
- **Piazza della Passera** – One of Florence’s most enchanting little piazzas – Piazza of the Sparrow, or [insert word for lady’s unmentionables here]. Legend has it that the right person could find a quality brothel nearby, lending the area its unofficial title. Today, the only half-dressed ladies you’ll see are women enjoying sunshine at one of a few charming cafes – Caffè degli Artigiani, 5 e Cinque (a delicious vegan-friendly spot), or perhaps the most famous, 4 Leoni. Anthony Hopkins frequented the last establishment when he filmed *Hannibal* in Florence.