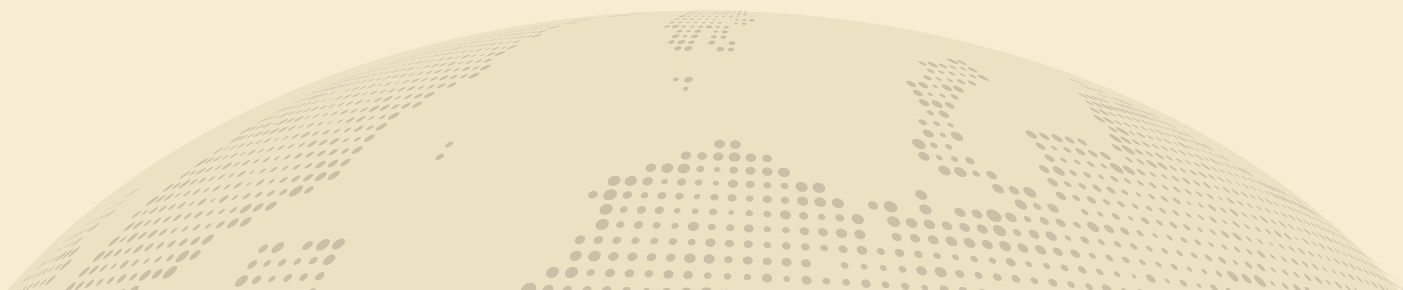


DF

Destination
Florence



**DESTINATION
FUTURE**





DF

Destination
Florence

Issue 11
spring 2024

Free issue

Download PDF

www.destinationflorencecvb.com

Fondazione Destination Florence

Via del Tiratoio 1
50124 Florence (Italy)
+39 055 29881
firenze@conventionbureau.it
www.destinationflorencecvb.com

Editorial office
The Florentine
B'Gruppo srl - Via Valentini 10
59100 Prato (Italy)
+39 055 7093760
redazione@theflorentine.net
www.theflorentine.net
Registrazione Tribunale di Prato
n.4 del 12/09/2006

Advertising
If you would like to advertise in
the magazine, please contact
Destination Florence
Convention & Visitors Bureau.
press@conventionbureau.it

*For over 25 years,
Destination Florence
has been the official
promotion agency for
the city of Florence.*

*Our mission is to
attract quality leisure
tourism, MICE
(meetings, incentives,
conferences, events)
and destination
weddings.*



DESTINATION
FLORENCE
CONVENTION
& VISITORS
BUREAU



The history of Florence's Convention Bureau reaches over 25 years. One of the first to be founded in Italy, it was created as a non-profit consortium company, with the aim of enhancing the destination in the congress sector. Even then, from the very beginning, there was awareness that in order to make a difference, the private and public sectors would have to join forces. Over the years, this awareness has grown and become a solid conviction, which has then led to the entry of public bodies, both in the corporate structure and in the specific activities of each division.

In all these years, the inspiring principles at the base of the company have been cultivated with constancy and determination by many professional figures who have contributed to ensuring that the convention bureau grows, like a plant that grows stronger thanks to its roots, but which projects itself higher and higher. Many projects have been undertaken, which then became the branches of a great tree. In addition to the historic conference division, the mission of increasingly enhancing the destination has led the bureau to deal - in a natural but forward-thinking way - with the destination wedding and leisure sectors, as well as solidifying the ongoing relationship with Florentine and Tuscan institutions. The Destination Florence Convention & Visitors Bureau was therefore born, and has grown to this day.

Personally, in recent months I have had the privilege of working alongside the Destination Florence team, directed by Carlotta Ferrari, and leading the most ambitious stretch of the path of this magnificent project, which today finally becomes a foundation, with the entry of the Municipality and the Metropolitan City of Florence. It is the fulfillment of an ideal collaboration that had its beginnings a long time ago, but which today, more than ever, acquires a profound meaning, and in which I strongly believe. In recent years, Florence has done a lot for individual and conference tourism, investing, organizing and forging alliances. Now, the time has come to manage the results of these efforts with criteria and foresight, and the foundation is the exact instrument capable of dealing with them because it brings its greatest strength to the institutional table: a unique social structure, which boasts many private operators who offer experience, know-how and professionalism, as well as representing the needs of the territory in a widespread manner.

It's time to evolve, and we're ready.
Welcome, Fondazione Destination Florence.

Jacopo Vicini
President of Destination Florence



The past, present and future of Fondazione Destination Florence

The many milestones and steps forward being taken by Destination Florence in its path towards becoming a foundation are recounted by director, Carlotta Ferrari.

Carlotta Ferrari, Director of Fondazione Destination Florence

Since founding Destination Florence until now, what do you regard as being the main milestones in the organization's development, and how have these shaped your role as director?

There have been many moments that we can consider milestones, at least among those that I have witnessed since my arrival in 2010. Those years, 2010 and 2011, were really a way into the region, with former provincial councillor for tourism Giacomo Billi, who was a very significant president for us. That was the first big change. Without a doubt, our first real victory was winning the tender awarded by the municipality of Florence, which, in a certain way, made us part of the municipality. From there, I would say that it was the constant growth of our members and, as a result, our representativity, which therefore increased our importance. This certainly marked a change, including in my role and in my path, in a positive sense, of course, while also making it a little more demanding! We started by following a public mission with the partnership of the city council, but, simultaneously, the number of private members increased significantly, so it was challenging to put the two parts together. However, for me, it was an enormous professional development.

As Destination Florence becomes a foundation this year, what changes will take place internally within the organization as well as your approach to the market? What is involved in the new judicial form?

With the birth of the foundation, we certainly believe that our organization will be more stable and will have, even from an economic point of view, greater resources and, as such, a greater capacity to plan. From the beginning up until now, our consortium was already engaged in multi-year planning. Now, we can carry that out better. Of course, from a certain point of view, we have to maintain the stability of the public-private collaboration, because we have brought along many members, but I believe that we will be engaged in bringing forward new tourism policies with the administration, taking full advantage of the public administration within the organization, being able to work together on things that, until now, we weren't able to, such as tourism flow policies, the improvement of the coexistence between residents and tourists, and, in general, working to make the city more hospitable.

In what way has the mission of Destination Florence altered over time to meet the changing needs of the tourism industry, especially in terms of technological innovation and travel trends? What is DF's mission today?

It's a good question. We have always adapted to the needs of the market, particularly by listening to our members. This is why, when acting as a consortium, we put great effort into conference tourism. Over the years, we have expanded upon our mission, becoming increasingly occupied with leisure tourism, destination weddings, and also international



Council member Giovanni Bettarini, director Carlotta Ferrari and current president Jacopo Vicini

students. Obviously, all of this was accompanied by a technological evolution in particular on the part of Destination Florence, which therefore has offered commercial opportunities for the final tourist.

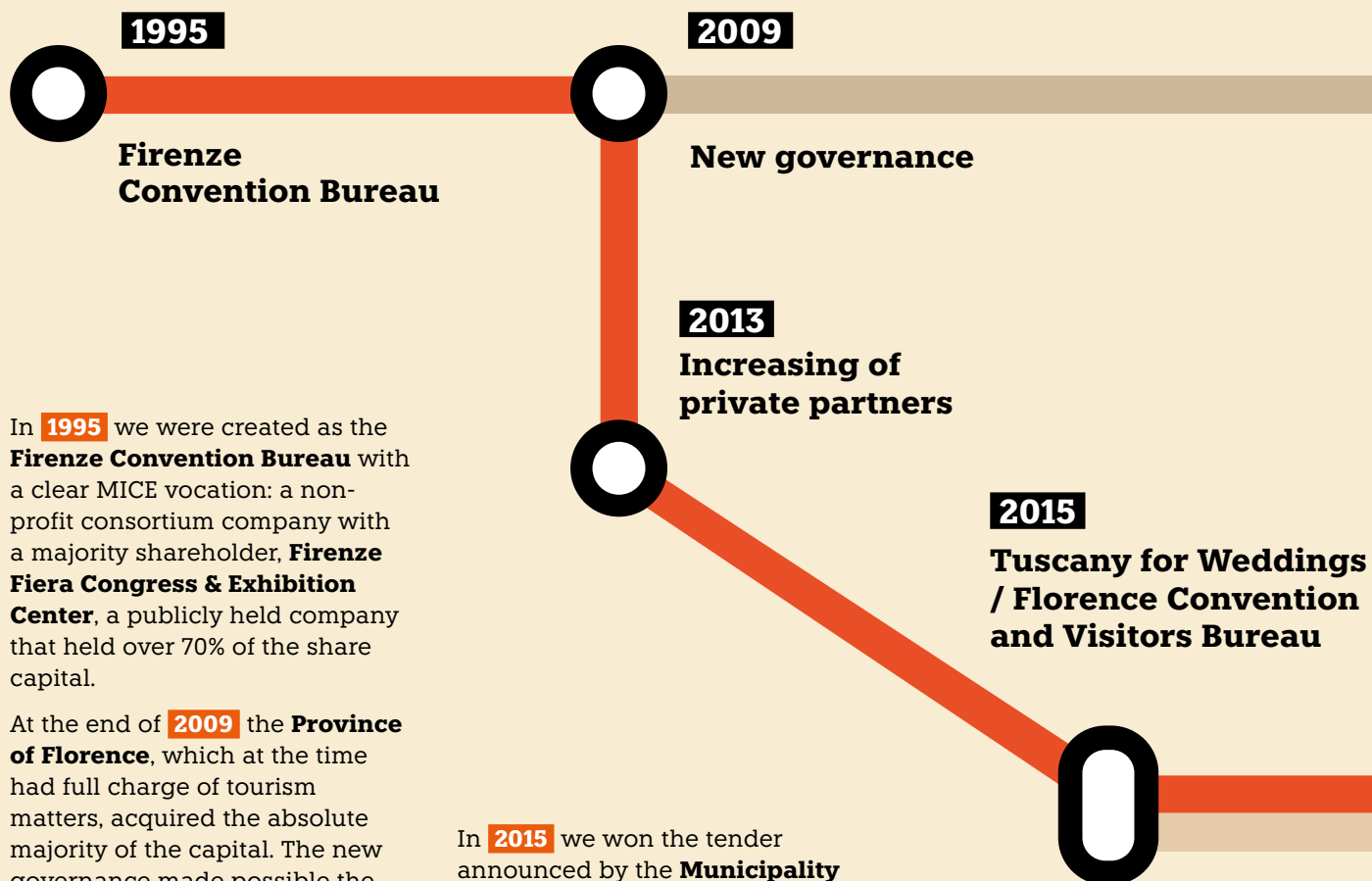
What challenges does the organization now face in its new guise as a foundation, and how do you intend to tackle these challenges to ensure the continued success of Destination Florence?

I would say that the greatest challenge that awaits us is that of working on the governance of tourist flows, and improving the experience of tourists in the city. There is no doubt that our destination is very active and tourist flows are destined to increase, so the new mission and duty of the foundation, we feel, is to improve this experience. It will most certainly be our greatest challenge but to have both public and private entities in the same company is certainly a help.

Considering the current general scenario and recent internal changes, what are the key strategies that Destination Florence will implement to remain competitive and relevant in the industry, especially with the emergence of new destinations and the growing demand for authentic and sustainable experiences?

It has always been very important for us to be competitive, and therefore we are satisfied to have transformed the consortium into a foundation, because it allows us to continue to stay in the market, to respond to our clients needs, and to move forward with all of our activities and all of our brands, as we always have done, so we are ready to welcome all the challenges. The competition is certainly tough, there are many destinations that are growing, but I would say that Florence will always remain Florence.

Long story short



In **1995** we were created as the **Firenze Convention Bureau** with a clear MICE vocation: a non-profit consortium company with a majority shareholder, **Firenze Fiera Congress & Exhibition Center**, a publicly held company that held over 70% of the share capital.

At the end of **2009** the **Province of Florence**, which at the time had full charge of tourism matters, acquired the absolute majority of the capital. The new governance made possible the teamwork between public and private, which has proven to be the true added value for the promotion of the city as an event destination.

At the end of **2013** the Province of Florence decided to withdraw from the corporate structure following national reform, which reduced its functions. Our strategy has been to increasingly involve local operators, who have chosen to invest in our company by effectively acquiring the shares of the Province. Between 2011 and 2014, the **increase in private partners was over 36%**, with 141 partners in total.

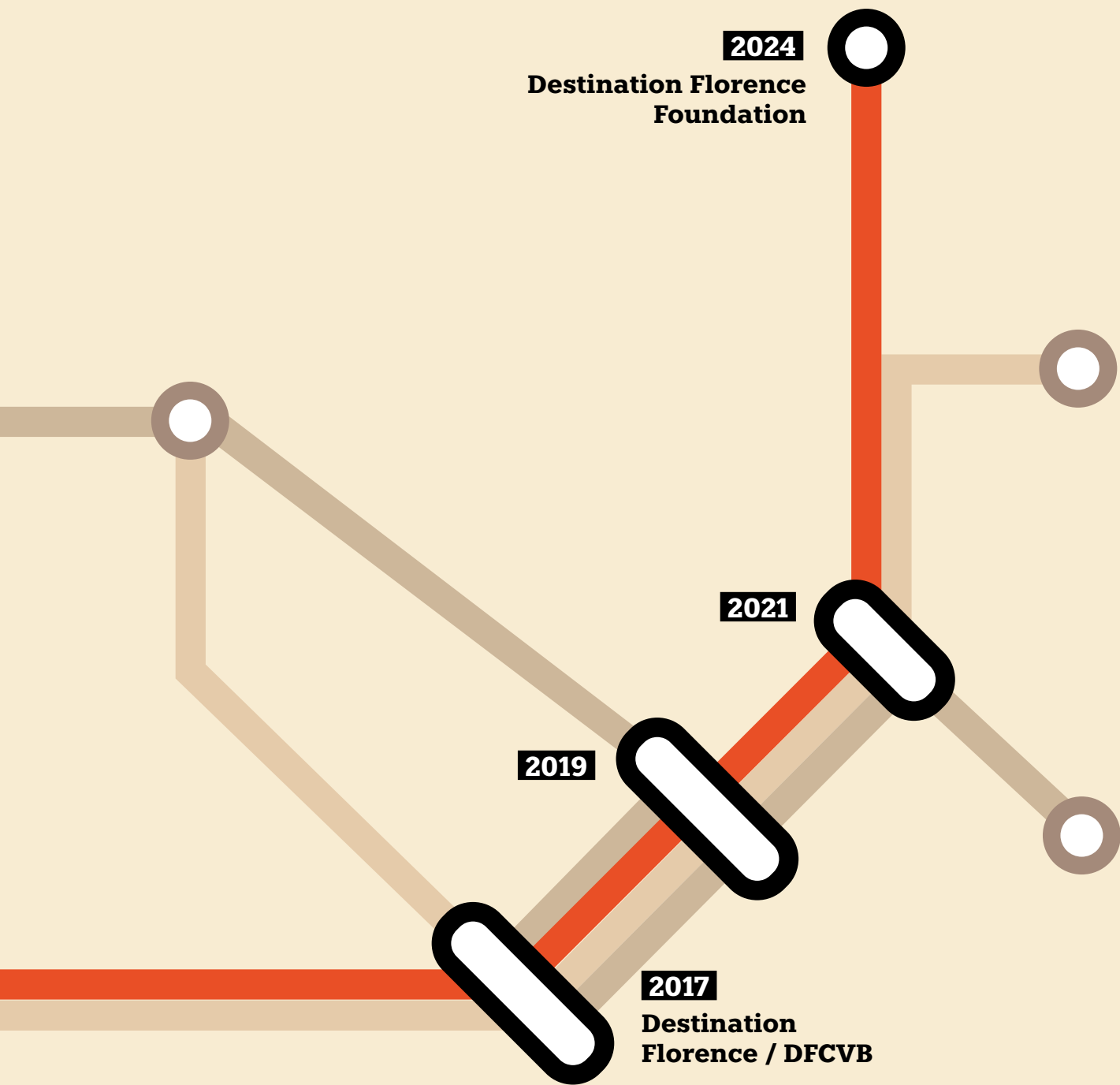
In **2015** we won the tender announced by the **Municipality of Florence** for the promotion of destination Florence, becoming official partner of the city.

We therefore laid the foundations of our future, beginning to lean towards leisure tourism, becoming the **Firenze Convention and Visitors Bureau**.

The official nature of the partnership with the municipality gave us the opportunity to expand membership and open up to new markets, primarily destination weddings, launching the **Tuscany for Weddings** division in partnership with **Toscana Promozione Turistica**.

On January 18, **2017** we launched **Destination Florence**, a new division dedicated to quality leisure tourism. This company growth led to a new name: **Destination Florence Convention and Visitors Bureau**.

The privatization process of the company and the official partnership with the Municipality of Florence were two fundamental stages for our growth: the number of members doubled in four years, reaching **over 300 partners in 2018**.



In **2019** we were confirmed for the second time as the entity chosen by the Municipality of Florence for the **promotion of the destination to attract quality tourism, conferences and destination weddings**. This time, however, the partnership would last three years, with renewal for a two-year period, maintaining our role for the next 5 years.

There are two main innovations in this partnership. The first is that, following the agreement signed in December 2018

between the Municipality of Florence, the Metropolitan City, the Chamber of Commerce and the University of Florence, we were selected as **the sole entity to implement initiatives capable of enhancing congress tourism and promoting interventions to deseasonalize, relocate visitor flows and expand quality tourism**. The second is that our role would be to promote not only Florence but also the metropolitan areas that are suitable for hosting especially corporate events.

This role was strengthened by the memorandum of understanding signed with the tourism sector trade associations: Federalberghi, Confesercenti and Confindustria.

In **2021** the **Tuscany for Weddings** division won a three-year tender for the promotion of Tuscan weddings on behalf of **Toscana Promozione Turistica**.

And now, in **2024** we rebrand as a foundation!

On the occasion of becoming a foundation, the former presidents of Destination Florence reflect on their highlights.

TIMELINE

- July 1995 – December 2007 > **Massimo Papini**
- January 2008 – December 2009 > **Alessandro Tortelli**
- January 2010 – May 2018 > **Giacomo Billi**
- May 2018 – July 2020 > **Italo Romano**
- July 2020 – September 2023 > **Federico Barraco**
- September 2023 – Present > **Jacopo Vicini**



Alessandro Tortelli

I remember my term as president as a period of both challenges and achievements. To begin with, facilitating the entry of the Province of Florence into our share capital was an important step: by transferring the shares from Firenze Fiera we guaranteed greater stability to our share capital, ensuring a solid base for the future. Together, we then carried out the first accurate research on the impact of conference tourism in the city, which pro-

vided us with valuable information that enabled stakeholders and institutions to grasp the importance of the conference sector for Florence.

There were many small and large goals achieved in those two years, but I would like to mention two aspects of my presidency that were extremely significant from both a professional and personal point of view. First of all, nominating, alongside Giacomo Billi, the new managerial figure of the bureau: Carlotta Ferrari. Never has a choice proven to be more far-sighted, considering the constant growth of the convention bureau and the goals which were unthinkable at the time that are today becoming reality with the birth of the Foundation. Secondly, I would like to give a special mention to Gianna Francini, who was an exceptional support for me and a backbone of the entire company for many years, until her well-deserved retirement!

Now, all I can do is wish the whole team good luck for the challenges that this future brings with it, and I'm certain that the birth of the Foundation will be just the beginning. Onwards and upwards!



Giacomo Billi

The first time I heard about the Convention Bureau was in July 2009. I had just become Councilor for Tourism for the Province of Florence, which at the time had full charge of tourism matters, and became the majority shareholder of the bureau. Who would have thought that I would be its president for the next 10 years? Despite the necessary exit of the Province from the social structure following the national reform, a few years later, we managed to create something never seen before in the land of the Guelphs and Ghibellines: a control room that would systematize those who dealt with tourism in the area, both for the leisure and conference sectors.

What makes me most proud, looking back, is that since then the Convention Bureau has constantly grown, step by step, in an escalation as unexpected (for me!) as it is methodical and intelligent, because it has always been firmly anchored to the reality that guided our choices. We dreamed big, also thanks to Carlotta's guidance, and division after division, we came to deal with all the main tourism sectors (conferences, destination weddings in 2015, and lastly, individual), effectively becoming a promotional tool available to the territory, but always with great humility!

There's another aspect that I want to underline regarding these years of presidency: when the Province was forced to leave the bureau, its share was acquired and absorbed by the city's private tourism operators, who took charge of it, becoming for a long time the true majority shareholders. Even then, this team effort was almost miraculous, and it's my duty to give credit to all those who believed in this challenge from the beginning, without whom today we would not be able to talk about the Foundation. Thanks to all the Convention Bureau members, who were dreamers just like us!

Italo Amedeo Romano

A few years have passed now, but I remember with pleasure and a hint of pride the years of my mandate as president. They were brilliant years: the first that comes to mind is the importance of being awarded the municipal tender which, for another 5 years, confirmed us as the sole entity chosen by the Municipality for the promotion of the destination, capable of attracting tourism of greater quality in Florence. It was a turning point for our activities, which strengthened the partnership with institutions and significantly increased the resources at our disposal.

The link with the territory and the institutions



Today, that bond becomes indissoluble, with the birth of Fondazione Destination Florence. For this reason, I can only look confidently to the future of this new entity and of our spectacular city.

Federico Barraco

Looking back on my Destination Florence Convention Bureau experience, a few key dates come to mind. March 9, 2020, when the Italian Government placed the entire country on lockdown. The national reopening phase began on May 18. A return to normality was expected, and an attempt was made to save the summer season. Then, on July 9, 2020, I was appointed president of the DF-CVB, with a second lockdown announced on October 19. Tuscan airports recorded overall traffic of 2.9 million passengers, compared to 8.2 million the previous year. This data leads me to have two reflections: the first pertains more to the statistical-mathematical sphere which can be summarized in the first axiom of Murphy's law, translatable into a more direct: "What on earth!" The second reflection, humour aside, was the one that drove all



our activity during my three-year mandate: gathering strength, creating a system, and making the most of the moment to redesign the role of DF, its modus operandi and its possible development. They were intense years, in which the trust and collaboration of everyone (from employees, to partners, members, board members and institutions) allowed us to throw our hearts beyond the obstacle, to take some risks, and, in spite of

it all, to obtain very significant results. They were years in which we managed to raise an all-time high in funds to finance promotional activities, as well as notable numbers in the conference sphere. We consolidated relationships with local stakeholders, as well as the economic sector, Regione Toscana, Toscana Promozione Turistica, Fondazione CR Firenze, the Municipality of Florence, and Firenze Fiera. And, above all, they were years in which we managed to get the role and importance of a project like DF recognized.

Today, DF takes on other forms which will give greater stability and a greater perspective in the medium and long term. It's a turning point which, I hope, will be able to free DF's energies from the worry of finding resources year after year and bring a breath of fresh air to its mission.



Jacopo Vicini

The foundation fills a void; we have been talking about it for many years, and we are finally here. We needed a place where the world of tourism and public organizations could meet and move towards a stable and structured city with a long-term, systematic strategy. The objectives that we have are those of quality, sustainable tourism, and the best coexistence between residents and tourists.

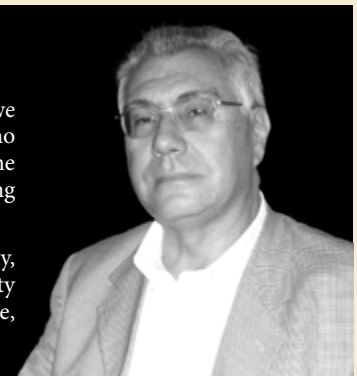
When I took office in September, I had two concerns. One was that the public organiza-

tions would not be able to meet the deadlines that we had given them. Instead, we have managed it in record time. The other was that I feared our members would not follow us, and this didn't happen. There has been hardly any perceptible difference, and this gives us great pride, but also great responsibility. I hope that the foundation can be a model for other cities in Italy. We always imagined the project as something that needed to be shared in order to work, and that the world of tourism can unite as a team, because it is only together that we can reach results

IN MEMORY

Upon the recent, sad passing of **Massimo Papini**, founder of the **Firenze Convention Bureau**, we reflect on his notable career and remember his significant contribution to both the city and those who knew him. Formerly the municipal and provincial councilor for health, he became president of the Congress Centre in 1982, dedicated to greatly increasing conference activities in Florence and creating innovative marketing models to promote the image of the city as a location for congresses.

His creation of the Firenze Convention Bureau in 1995 was a great step in furthering this activity, serving as president until 2007. He was aware of how fragmenting the conference offerings of the city could potentially limit Florence's potential, promoting the unification between the Congress Centre, business, and Fortezza da Basso, which would lead to the creation of Firenze Fiera.



Events in and around Florence

Spring ushers in a busy events calendar, with plenty of dates for your diaries. From the latest exhibition at Palazzo Strozzi to the curated creations of the MIDA International Craftsmanship fair, Florence offers its usual eclectic mix this season.

EXHIBITIONS

Mimmo Jodice – Senza Tempo

Villa Bardini

Until July 14, visitors to the picturesque villa perched on its hill can enjoy 80 photographs taken between 1964 and 2011 by the renowned photographer, from his darkroom experiments through to the urban landscapes of later in his career, with a section of works dedicated to the genius of Michelangelo.

www.villabardini.it

Returns: From Modigliani to Morandi

Museo Novecento

Celebrating the 10th anniversary of the museum is a major exhibition that brings together once more the valuable works donated to the city of Florence following the devastating flood in 1966, the Alberto Della Ragione Collection. The 19 works by 20th century Italian masters, on display until September 15, include the masterpiece by Amedeo Modigliani, his *Self-Portrait*, as well as Giorgio Morandi's *Metaphysical Still Life* and Renato Guttuso's *Crucifixion*.

www.museonovecento.it

The Enchantment of Orpheus

Palazzo Medici Riccardi

Until September 8, you can visit various interpretations of the classical myth, with works such as Baccio Bandinelli's 1519 sculpture of Orpheus standing in the central courtyard, leading to 60 works of art that date from the Renaissance to the present day, from painting and sculpture to music and film.

www.palazzomediciriccardi.it



Amedeo Modigliani, *Self-Portrait*

Edocere medicos

Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana

The history of medical and surgical training in Florence is the subject of a special display to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the University of Florence and the founding of the Careggi Hospital, explored through documents dating to the ninth century, finds from private collections and multimedia installations.

Until June 21 / www.unifi.it

FESTIVALS

Bright Festival

Stazione Leopolda and The Social Hub

Digital art, lighting design and electronic music come together in three days of cultural events that feature a wide range of educational activities, exhibitions and performances (see page 30 for more).

April 19-21 / www.brightfestival.com

SPORT

Florence Half Marathon

Whether you're cheering from the sidelines or *get, set, go* yourself, the occasion when runners come together to undertake 21,097 km through the streets and squares of Florence is always worth witnessing.

April 7 / www.halfmarathonfirenze.it

Grand Départ of the Tour de France

June 29 marks a historic occasion for the city, and indeed Italy, with the beginning of the great cycling event from Piazzale Michelangelo, the first Italian starting point in the history of the tour. The route will start with the Florence-Rimini stage, passing in front of the Gino Bartali Museum in Ponte a Ema in honour of the great Florentine cyclist.

June 29 / www.letour.fr/en/

MUSIC

Maggio Musicale Fiorentino Festival

The 86th edition of the high-calibre festival launches its season of operas, concerts and choirs from April 13, inaugurated with a performance of Mahler's No.4 Symphony, conducted by Daniele Gatti.

www.maggiofiorentino.com

Firenze Rocks

The biggest rock festival in Italy comes to Florence's Visarno Arena from June 16-19, with big names in music taking to the stage. This year's headline act is Avenged Sevenfold, with many more to be announced.

www.firenzerocks.it

FASHION

e-P SUMMIT 2024

Stazione Leopolda

The digital future of fashion is at the centre of this Pitti Immagine event from April 9-10, with a focus on artificial intelligence and its applications in the fashion and luxury sector. The latest innovations will be discussed with round tables, presentations and talks.

www.epsummit.pittimmagine.com

Pitti Immagine Uomo

Fortezza da Basso

The highly anticipated fashion event features the best in the business, with the line-up for the 106th edition including guest designer Marine Serre.

June 11-14 / www.uomo.pittimmagine.com

EUROPE

The State of the Union

The 14th edition of The State of the Union conference takes place at Palazzo Vecchio from May 23 to 25. Global leaders and experts from many sectors join with students, policy makers and journalists to reflect on the most pressing issues on the European agenda, with a focus this year on future enlargements of the European Union, demography, democracy and the rule of law, industrial policy, as well as the digital and green transitions in the run-up to the European elections in June 2024.

www.stateoftheunion.eu.eu

Managing Tourism in the Historic Centre of Florence, World Heritage Site

From April 18-19, a workshop meets with the intention of developing local synergies among UNESCO designated sites, with 'Managing Tourism in the Historic Centre of Florence, World Heritage Site' the focus of events at the Chamber of Commerce Auditorium on April 20, with the participation of, Peter De Brine, UNESCO Head of Tourism, and Bert Smit of the University of Breda, among others. Recognizing the challenges posed by mass tourism and the responsible management of visitor flows are at the heart of the sessions.



Anselm Kiefer's Fallen Angels at Palazzo Strozzi

History, memory and war are key themes explored by the German-born, Paris-based artist, whose large-scale works often features references to religion, literature, mythology and philosophy, explored through paintings, sculptures, installations and photography. The seven-metre high installation in the courtyard offers a high-impact introduction to the show, with the highlight inside undoubtedly the room with 60 paintings on the walls and ceilings, and an enormous mirror covering the floor that sends us spinning.

Until July 21 / www.palazzostrozzi.org

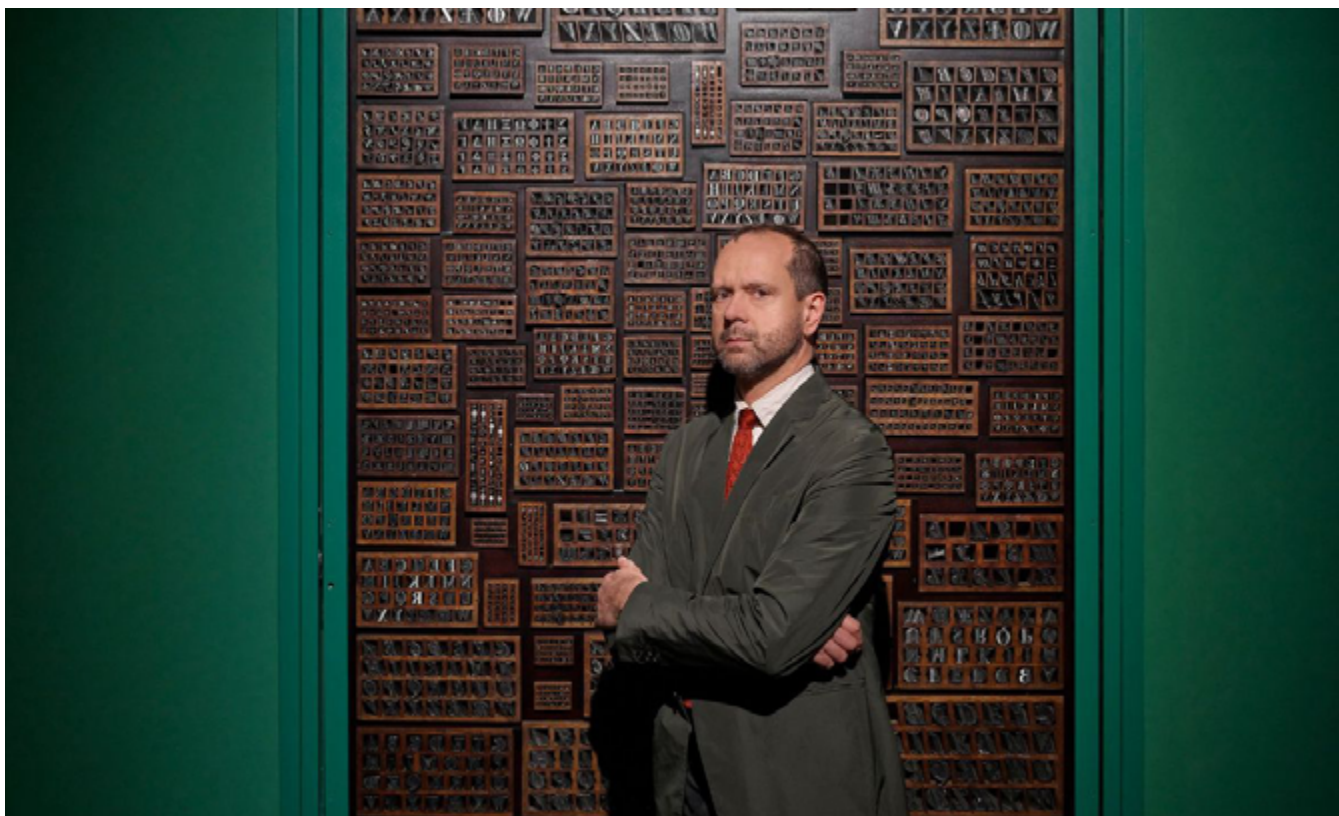


MIDA – International crafts fair

Fortezza da Basso

Open from April 25-May 1, this annual craft exhibition-market by Firenze Fiera is a must for both lovers of quality crafts and foodies alike, with international food stands and the chance to purchase products from all over the world. From experiential workshops led by expert crafters to talks, presentations, exhibitions and more, this 88th edition even features the new addition of the ninth Salone dell'Arte e del Restauro, Italy's leading fair in the fields of conservation, restoration and promotion of global artistic heritage, adding to the intrigue.

April 25 - May 1 / www.mostrartigianato.it



New Director of the Uffizi Galleries

Changes are afoot at the Uffizi with the appointment of **Simone Verde** as the director of Florence's foremost gallery, while **Eike Schmidt** has been designated head of the Capodimonte museum complex in Naples, as announced by the Italian Ministry of Culture.

Simone Verde, 48, comes from the **Palazzo della Pilotta Museum in Parma**, which he has directed since 2017. Prior to this, he was head of scientific research and publications for the Louvre Abu Dhabi (Agence France-Muséums), having studied Theoretical Philosophy in Rome and Paris, and acquiring a doctorate in anthropology of cultural heritage as well as a degree in museology and art history from the Ecole du Louvre.

Upon his appointment, the director stated that "in these first days, the primary project checks will be carried out with the staff. The vision that inspires me is that of a consolidation of the significant results achieved by my predecessor, Eike Schmidt, and a powerful investment in services and museographic and museo-

logical quality, supported by punctual scientific research activity".

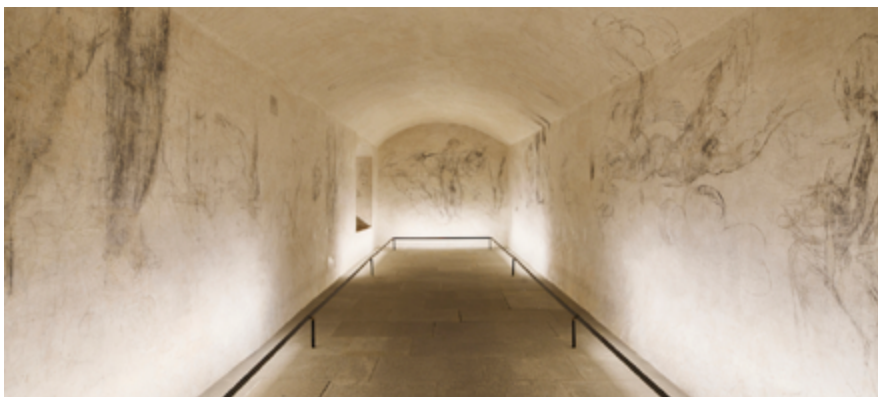
On January 17, 2024, on the occasion of the symbolic handing over of the key to the centuries-old door, there was the announcement of the renaming of the museum auditorium after the renowned art historian, Antonio Paolucci, who passed away on February 4, 2023, inaugurated with a dedicated plaque.

Among the various projects announced by Verde for the near future of the Galleries is "a study centre named after **Antonio Paolucci**, founded on the basis of his book collection donated to the Uffizi, the creation of a section at the Gallery of Statues and Paintings on the history of the collections, an entire relaunch of the Treasury of the Grand Dukes

and of Palazzo Pitti and the launch of an open storage project in Palazzo Pitti to offer the public the possibility of viewing the Palazzo's prestigious heritage of historical furniture". In March, it was announced that paperless tickets will be in effect by May, with museum goers receiving a code by email. Other innovations include nights at the museum every Tuesday from March 26 to December 17, with the hopes that Florentines will make the most of the city's artistic treasure, with the gallery open until 9.30pm.

Uncovering Michelangelo's “secret room”

Opened to the public for regular visits from November 15, for the first time since its discovery in 1975, the tiny space accessible via the **New Sacristy in the Museum of the Medici Chapels** contains **charcoal drawings attributed to Buonarroti** and is open on an experimental basis to small groups of visitors until July 31.



The “secret room” was uncovered in November 1975, while a suitable new exit for the museum was being sought. The then director of the museum, **Paolo Dal Poggetto**, instructed the restorer **Sabino Giovannoni** to carry out cleaning tests in a narrow corridor beneath the apse of the New Sacristy. The small room—10 metres long, three metres wide, and two and a half metres high at the top of the vault—was used to store slack coal until 1955, and then remained unused, sealed and forgotten for decades below a trapdoor blocked by various items of furniture.

Upon removing two layers of plaster, Giovannoni discovered **several figure drawings in charcoal and sanguine**, which Dal Poggetto mostly attributed to Michelangelo. His theory was that they had been carried out while the artist sought refuge in this space in 1530, when the Prior of San Lorenzo, Giovan Battista Figiovanni, hid him from the wrath of **Pope Clement VII**, who was infuriated because the artist (during the period in which the Medici were driven out of the city) had served as supervisor of the city's

fortifications for the short-lived republican government (1527-30).

He obtained forgiveness after around two months, between the end of June and the end of October 1530, when he was finally free and resumed his duties in Florence until he left the city for Rome in 1534. Dal Poggetto posited the theory that the drawings produced during the artist's “self-confinement” used the walls to “sketch out” some of his projects, such as works from the New Sacristy like **the legs of Giuliano de' Medici, Duke of Nemours, and details such as the head of Laocoön**. The works are still the subject of scholarly debate.

The director general of museums in Italy, **Massimo Osanna**, stated, “The completion of the works on the new exit and the adaptations to align the Museum of the Medici Chapels with safety regulations enable the opening of Michelangelo's Secret Room, an extraordinarily fascinating place that's extremely delicate due to the location of the narrow space in the museum and the need to protect the charcoal drawings found on the walls.”



Director of the Bargello museums, **Paola D'Agostino**, commented, “It was time-consuming, constant and painstaking work, involving various professionals, and I wish to thank all the staff of the Bargello Museums that worked with me over these years to achieve this goal. Among them, I owe special thanks to Francesca de Luca, an art historian and director of the Museum of the Medici Chapels and the Casa Martelli Museum, and to Benedetta Cantini, official restorer at the Bargello Museums, for the special care they have given to this extraordinary space. My deepest gratitude goes to colleagues of the **Opificio delle Pietre Dure** organization.”

The room is accessible by reservation to a **maximum of four people** per guided group, up to a limit of 100 people per week in 15-minute-long visits. The limited number is necessary due to the need for alternate periods of exposure to LED light with extended periods of darkness. Stable temperature and humidity are essential for safeguarding the valuable artifacts, with extensive monitoring carried out by the **Opificio delle Pietre Dure**.

The space was originally opened from November 15, 2023, to March 30, 2024, in order to evaluate the effect of the numbers on the preservation of the space. Due to the extremely high demand and the success of the tests carried out, the visits were subsequently extended to July 31.



La Specola in a new light



Behind a wooden door on via Romana, Florence's beloved **Museo de La Specola** has reopened in an enlightened blend of nature, human ingenuity and art after a **five-year restoration campaign**.

Established by Pietro Leopoldo, Grand Duke of Tuscany as the Royal Imperial Museum of Physics and Natural History on February 21, 1775, the scientific museum remains of international importance 250 years later. Today's La Specola, named after the astronomical observatory perched in the turret, is a cumulative cabinet of curiosities, where visitors can find intricate **anatomical and botanical waxes** based on the earliest dissections alongside elaborate **mineral formations and precious ornaments** from **Lorenzo de' Medici's personal collection**.

late Neoclassical Florentine architecture, and the **Astronomical Tower** designed by Niccolò Maria Gaspero Paoletti with all-round views of the city, add even more spectacle to the awe-inspiring space.

The zoological collection reaches an impressive **4,600 displays in newly-lit, storied glass cases**, where seemingly endless varieties of all kinds of species lay out in front of dazzled visitors. From walruses and tigers to turtles and insects, the museum is a firm favourite for all generations.

A corridor lined with still lives by Medici court painter **Bartolomeo Bimbi** details flowers, fruit and other natural wonders, while the mineralogy section, which returns to La Specola after 150 years at Florence's Natural History, Geology and Paleontology Museum in via La Pira, treats visitors to visions of agate and tourmaline, with light and sound effects adding to the experience.

The **Hall of Skeletons** wows with its monumental mammoth, while **Galileo Galilei's Tribune**, a rare specimen of

Museo de La Specola,
via Romana 17, Firenze
Zoology, Mineralogy, Art + Science Collections / Open Tuesday to Sunday, 9am-5pm
Anatomical Waxes / Open Tuesday to Sunday, by guided tours only
Hall of the Skeletons, Astronomical Tower + Tribune of Galileo / Open Monday to Friday, 9am-1pm, upon appointment



DESTINATION FLORENCE

Inaugurated on January 19, 2024, the 1,100 square metre space at the **Santa Maria Novella complex** is open to visitors. 300 works are currently installed in the recently renovated rooms that are spread across three floors, with many more to join them over the coming months, set to reach **over 4,500 works** that are normally hidden from public view.



Depository of the Florentine civic museums open to the public

The works had formerly been held in storage due to a lack of adequate space for their display, but now occupy the large rooms in the Santa Maria Novella complex, allowing for a **high quantity of artworks to be collected in optimal conservation conditions**. The new depository was created as part of a project by the Technical Services and Culture and Sport Departments, in a redevelopment campaign of the rooms that were vacated in 2016 by the Carabinieri Marshals and Brigadiers School.

On the ground floor, a large vaulted room reaching 290 square metres houses the **sculpture gallery**, with platforms, bases and shelves for statues, busts and various stone materials. The storage areas on the first floor consist of 650 square metres across 9 rooms, with self-supporting metal structures and large double-sided sliding grilled panels on which paintings can be hung on both sides. In this first phase, around 300 works belonging to the **Alberto Della Ragione collection** and other 20th century collections are already arranged,

with works by **Fontana, Guttuso, Carrà, De Pisis, Mafai, Cagli and Morandi** on show. They will be joined by the remaining part of the 20th century collection, 19th century works from the former Museo del Risorgimento, paintings by the Macchiaioli, the unexhibited works of the former Historical-Topographical Museum, and many more.

The visits organized by **MUS.E** will give the chance to discover the works as well as the 'behind the scenes' of a modern museum repository.



Revised Orsanmichele: new museum setup for the former monastery

Orsanmichele, the city's former monastery and grain store, reopened to the public on January 19, 2024, with an impressively revised museum layout. After being closed for over a year, the church and museum have undergone an **extensive restoration campaign** that sees the medieval complex returned to full glory. Mechanical ratchets keep the impressive wooden doors open in via dell'Arte della Lana, allowing passersby to peer into the church, while inside, state-of-the-art lighting accentuates the **vaulted brick**

ceilings and sculptural masterpieces. The captivating presentation unleashes the full force of the statues that were formerly displayed in the niches on the edifice's facade.

Giambologna's Saint Luke impresses with its sheer bulk, his gaze directed at **Verrocchio's adjacent Incredulity of Saint Thomas**, while **Ghiberti's Saint John the Baptist** looks towards the Duomo. The central section, which forms the rear of the museum layout, shows short and effective explanatory panels in

Italian and English separated by the four surrounding streets: **via Calzaiuoli, via dell'Arte della Lana, via Lamberti and via Orsanmichele**. Up the iconic staircase designed by **Archizoom** dating to the 1960s, the top floor reveals singular perspectives on Florence's cityscape. Deep in the undeniable heart of the medieval commune, the arched windows frame highlights such as the Palazzo Vecchio, the triumphal arch of Piazza della Repubblica and Giotto's bell tower.



Bloomberg predicts that the **global generative AI market** will become a 1.3 trillion US dollar market by 2032.

How AI can benefit destinations

Virtual assistants, online travel agencies and an overhauled user experience are already changing the way people book and experience their holidays. Behind the scenes, generative AI is allowing travel professionals to **customize processes, improve interactions and analyze future trends** before they happen.

“ChatGPT and the latest integrations imply that the future of online distribution is here, and that hotels can benefit from it,” writes **Mirko Lalli**, founder and CEO of The Data Appeal Company and Travel Appeal in a blog post. “Imagine you’re looking for the right hotel for your next vacation. Instead of browsing countless websites, comparing rates and amenities, you ask an **AI chatbot for help**. After a short exchange, you get a list of the best hotels personalized to your needs in the destination of your choice. This is no longer a dream, but a reality due to the introduction of ChatGPT and other chatbots based on Large Language Models (LLM).”

Chatbots are something that global hotel group Marriott has already put into practice. “AI offers very interesting opportunities,” comments **Fernando Pane**, general manager of Sina Villa Medici, Autograph Collection, which is part of Marriott Hotels & Resorts. “At present, we are approaching this innovation by exploring the benefits, making use of the research that Marriott is conducting thoroughly at an

international level. At the moment, the introductions are minimal, simply as replies to the chats that guests open before, during and after their stay.”

Lungarno Collection, which comprises the five-star Hotel Lungarno, four-star Hotel Continentale and Gallery Hotel Art, all in Florence, as well as the five-star luxury Portrait establishments in Florence, Rome and Milan, is testing AI chatbot solutions to harness the technology in order to communicate with clients through touchpoints like their website. “In actual fact, we are testing Google’s AI potential to **manage PPC [Pay Per Click] campaigns**,” remarks CEO **Valeriano Antonioli**. “Likewise, our Revenue Management System contains an AI component for dynamic price management. At the same time, we are also testing the AI potential of OTA [**Online Travel Agencies**] for the automatic ordering of photos of our hotels. All this is aimed at increasing conversions.”

Upping the conversion rate lies at the core of how AI can potentially benefit the hotel industry, but it will involve a sea change. Up until now—and for the foreseeable future until other payment-based methods become mainstream—SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and SERP (Search Engine Results Pages) have been fundamental in securing bookings for hotels. Launches such as TripGen pose the question of whether OTAs and traditional search

engines like Google could soon be replaced by conversational online travel agencies (COTA), hence changing the way users search for information and transforming how hotels distribute their availability and sell their rooms. In the meantime, the hotel industry continues to work on its online presence, furnishing quality contents and offers that meet customer expectations. “The more targeted and clearer the content, the more it will be used to train LLMs and improve their ability to meet the requests of users,” comments Lalli.

Staying up-to-date with the advancements in Artificial Intelligence is important for the tourism industry, especially for Destination Management Organizations and Destination Companies. That’s why Fondazione Destination Florence is taking part in **AI Opener for Destinations** organized by the Group NAO in association with City Destinations Alliance. This 12-month peer-to-peer course involves various European destinations and DMOs to address issues such as AI tools and trends; trailblazing destination case studies; learning how to prompt effectively; real life application in event organization, guest services and destination planning; virtual influencers; ethics and strategy.



Florence's Central Market celebrates 150 years

The historic Mercato Centrale has stood in **San Lorenzo for 150 years**, with a wide-ranging programme planned to mark the occasion. **Over 30 events will be held from March to December**, including a day in which the main markets from all over the world will meet in Florence. Special guests make their way to the city, with a dedicated film and book detailing the market's long history.

Selling fruit, vegetables and all manner of other foodstuffs for one and a half centuries, the neighbourhood is defined by the **striking 19th-century iron and glass pavilion by Giuseppe Mengoni**. Inspired by Paris' central fresh food market, Les Halles, the structure bears some similarities to the architect's famous Galleria Vittorio Emanuele in Milan. The San Lorenzo Mercato Centrale **opened in 1874** on the occasion of the International Exposition of Agriculture, a loggia with ten classic arcades and slender pietra serena

columns extended outwards on each side of the building. Butchers, bakeries and fishmongers all occupied their own dedicated areas, while greengrocers were situated in the triangular-shaped piazza until 1979, when they moved to the first floor of the building. In 2014, the first floor was taken over by entrepreneur **Umberto Montano**, transforming it into an artisanal food court.

"We thank all the neighbourhood's institutions and associations for having taken part in creating the 150th anniversary events

calendar," commented **Massimo Manetti, president of Consorzio dello Storico Mercato Centrale**. "The celebration belongs to the entire city because the market is an open space for the whole community. Above all, I want to thank all the stallholders at the Storico Mercato Centrale, who generation to generation have rolled up their sleeves to allow Florentines to carry on shopping and bring the best produce to their tables in the best possible conditions and, as a result, to attract residents back to the centre."

Destination Florence collaborated in the organizing of the celebrations in Palazzo Medici Riccardi's spectacular Sala Luca Giordano on April 4, the official start of the celebrations, in which presidents and directors of markets around the world were present, including Barcelona, Copenhagen, Kyoto, Oslo, Sweden, Ireland, Berlin, Jerusalem, Riga and Santander, with the aim of establishing an association of historic markets to achieve UNESCO recognition.

For the occasion, a line of **limited-edition souvenirs** emblazoned with the special anniversary logo are now on sale at the consortium's shop. Events planned include a historic procession complete with musicians and drummers on May 11, with the full programme available at www.storicomercatocentrale.it



The greener future for transport in Florence

A **contactless payment system** was recently brought into effect on all buses and trams in **Tuscany**. All travellers to the region can hop on board and pay for passage with a single tap.

The EMV contactless payment system means that travellers can pay onboard using a debit, credit or prepaid card as well as with digital wallets on smartphones or smartwatches. This new digital payment method is in addition to the Tabnet app, SMS (in city centres and at a surcharge), and the traditional sale of paper tickets from 35 ticket offices, approximately 3,000 authorized retailers throughout Tuscany and the electronic ticket machines at all tram stops in Florence.

Travellers who use a Visa card (physical or digitalized on a device) via the contactless payment system on Tuscany's public transport system can ride for free from April 10 to May 5, 2024, thanks to the "free ride" campaign sponsored by Visa. This is the first time that a free ride campaign has been activated at a regional level. The aim is to demonstrate how easy it is to pay on board by card, smartphone and smartwatch devices, as well as being sustainable since it reduces the use of paper.

Tramlines + car parks

Florence's **municipal operational plan**, which has just been approved by the city council after a complicated four-year process, envisages future urban development.

The plan focuses on the **tram system**, confirming the new line 3 between piazza della Libertà and Bagno a Ripoli as well as the extension from piazza della Libertà to Campo di Marte and Rovezzano; line 4 connecting Stazione Leopolda, Le Piagge and Campi Bisenzio; and the extension of line 2 towards Sesto Fiorentino with a branch serving the university science park. Despite past discussions, running the

tram line near to the Duomo remains a possibility on paper, although via Cavour remains in the midst of works to redevelop the footpaths and plant citrus trees.

Another game changer is the possibility of creating a **car park under piazza di Costello** and a **multi-storey structure in Campo di Marte** for 2,500 cars, as well as the **parking lots serving the new tramways**, one near the Ponte all'Indiano junction for via Pistoiese (about 270 spaces) for line 4, the car park in viale Europe for line 3 and another that will be built in Rovezzano.



For further information, see www.at-bus.it/en/tiptap

Improved air quality + incentives for greener cars

The air quality in Florence improved in 2023 and now the city council is building on the progress by providing incentives worth **three million euro for residents to purchase greener cars**.

Until September 2024, individuals can apply for funding to purchase used or Euro 6 diesel cars, and contributions can be up to 3,500 euro for a petrol car or 5,000 for a new electric vehicle. The scheme is also open to **SMEs** with registered or operational headquarters in Florence or the neighboring municipalities of Bagno a Ripoli, Campi Bisenzio, Scandicci, Sesto Fiorentino, Calenzano, Lastra a Signa and Signa; self-employed workers with a VAT number residing in Florence or in the neighboring municipalities; and non-profit organizations headquartered in Florence or in the neighboring municipalities.

The new incentive expands upon previous city council schemes to support citizens and businesses in replacing polluting vehicles.

See ambiente.comune.fi.it for more information.



Countdown to the Tour de France

Destination Florence is working to support the **Comune di Firenze** in their preparations for this historic event and, in tandem, is **expanding their efforts in the field of sports tourism and infrastructure** in the city. With over 25 years of experience in the events field, Destination Florence is taking the opportunity to strengthen this activity by engaging more prominently in major sporting events, the Tour de France included. As one of the most watched sports events in the world, the Tour de France routinely attracts tens of millions of roadside spectators, and is broadcast to viewers in 190 countries. In June, all eyes will be on Florence for its opening.

President of Destination Florence, Jacopo Vicini, is attentive to the many benefits that the Tour de France will bring to Florence and to Tuscany this summer, and hopes the event will highlight the riches of the region. Speaking recently on Toscana TV, Vicini explained that “Cycling in particular allows you to promote the territory like no other sport, because you are not in an arena or a stadium, but, as we will see throughout the Tour de France, we will be able to promote our territory, not only Florence, but the whole metropolitan area, across the world... More so than economic and touristic value, there’s a cultural value. Cycling tells us a story that is wonderful to preserve and pass down to our children”. The additional encouragement for the use of bicycles also adds an **environmental benefit**.

The first stage of the plan to strengthen this type of tourism includes close collaboration with local public bodies and sports organizations. Vicini elaborates on Destination Florence’s growing role in this sphere: “One of the objectives in 2024 is to open a division dedicated exclusively to sporting events at Destination Florence. Our role as an institution is to promote Florentine tourism, working to increase the quality of tourism and to direct visitor flows,

On March 21, Florence commenced the **100-day countdown** to the **Grand Départ of the Tour de France**, which will transform the city on June 29. For the first time in its 121-year history, the world-famous cycling race will begin in Italy, and **Florence has been chosen as the prestigious cycling event’s first Italian point of departure**. Bathed in yellow, the symbolic colour of the Tour de France, Florence began its 100 days of celebrations, in eager anticipation of both the athletes and their leagues of excited fans.



largely working with congresses, but also weddings, in recent years, given that Florence has an ever-increasing appeal. Sporting events are certainly an aspect we can work on. The Tour de France is an unrepeatable occasion, but the **Firenze Marathon, EuroVolley, CT Tennis, and the Rugby Test Match** are all successful examples of sports tourism”.

On June 29, **176 cyclists** will line up for their Grand Départ from Florence, but Destination Florence will be celebrating a Grand Départ of their own. The key event will symbolize the formation of this aspect of their endeavours to promote a more sustainable Florence and the city’s ever-increasing assets for both locals and visitors.



Urban outlook: Manifattura Tabacchi

Manifattura Tabacchi, **one of the main urban regeneration projects in Italy**, has brought new life to the former tobacco factory a short distance from the city centre. Out of use since 2001, the factory area has undergone extensive work in order to become an inclusive and sustainable neighbourhood, **with plans to further its complete regeneration by 2026**. Having been transformed into a **hub for contemporary culture, art and fashion**, the goal is to create a completely renovated area with streets, squares and parks that are accessible and open to all, while already making significant improvements such as the creation of **underground parking** with 800 spaces and a **new kindergarten**. **The Manifattura Tabacchi project consists in 16 buildings, with a total of 110,000 sqm** which will be transformed into a functional mix divided between lofts and residences, office spaces, stores, cafés, restaurants, accommodation for students and a hotel.

The works carried out honour the site's former function as a tobacco factory, with the **Caveau** exhibition space offering the opportunity to explore the history and heritage of Manifattura Tabacchi. Guided tours take you through the machinery, decorative items, fixtures and materials found, that have been carefully catalogued and displayed. A strong mission of **sustainability** is at the foundation of the projects, with works carried out in full compliance with ESG standards. The entire residential project obtained the highest standards of environmental sustainability, receiving the BREEAM Excellent certification. **Officina Botanica** is the green hub of the complex, located on the rooftop of the central building, **reaching over 560 m², with 96 trees and 1,300 shrubs and perennials**, it's a feat of the industrial architecture to feature such biodiverse greenery.

The first residential project was presented in September 2022, consisting of 45 units with a high level of design, in the context of two historic buildings, working to preserve the original architecture. It was developed across 25,000 m² by **Patricia Urquiola**, a leading figure in international architecture and design, and by the **q-bic studio**.

Cultural innovation is also at the heart of Manifattura Tabacchi with prestigious institutions such as **Polimoda Fashion School** opening their third headquarters in the iconic building with the clock, today attended by over 800 international students. Set to be added is the **European Heritage Research Infrastructure**, dedicated to the scientific conservation of cultural heritage, thanks to the purchase of a portion of the building by **Fondazione CR Firenze**, in agreement with the **National Research Council**.

The Factory opened in April 2023, a **cutting-edge creative hub and workplace** capable of attracting an international community of professionals who want to live and work in Florence. The lively community and eco-friendly spaces include areas dedicated to culture, fashion, art and design, becoming the heart of Manifattura Tabacchi with its many **eateries, stores, offices and varied events calendar**. Architects **Luca and Marco Baldini** of the Florentine q-bic studio, supported by landscape architect **Antonio Perazzi**, are behind the creation of the space.

Among the many food offerings on-site is the **Bulli&Balene** restaurant and American Bar, inspired by the Venetian bacari, with **Hiroko Bento e vini fatti a modo** made to order. **Cuchiss Lab** produces pastries such as brownies, cupcakes and muffins, and **Bottega Biologica** offers gastronomic delights procured from

small, local farms. **Shake Café** offers a carefully crafted seasonal menu based on local ingredients, with popular pizzeria **Berberè** a recent addition onsite, exclusively using sourdough and organic stone-ground flour with 24-hour leavening and seasonal toppings. **Po'Stò** presents both sweet and savoury breakfast options, with a rich lunch selection and a feel-good atmosphere at aperitivo hour, while **VIVIDO** is a space for gastronomic and musical entertainment, open until late with an ever-changing cocktail menu.

The **Toast Project Space**, founded in 2019 in the former porter's lodge, supports contemporary artistic research through the production of site-specific projects, while **Associazione Arte Continua** carries out free public art initiatives involving significant artists from the international art community.

The cultural calendar is ever-interesting: artist and experimental designer **Duccio Maria Gambi** welcomes a new space, and **Veda**, the contemporary art gallery directed by **Gianluca Gentili** curates a contemporary and experimental selection, with **Emily Jones' The Muddy Choir** currently on show. The gallery-showroom **ZOO_Hub** brings together and promotes research in design, while **Opera Prima** is an interior company that furnishes any type of environment.



Fashion comes in the form of the **SUPERDUPER** hat brand that combines the highest craftsmanship with contemporary research, and **LUNEDÌ** is an addition by Alessandra Lunedi, who creates upcycled tailored clothing that respects nature. **Fàbera** is a brand of ethical and sustainable jewellery and **Archivi Sartoriali** creates made-to-measure items, whereas **Captain Santors** reinterprets the work clothes of fishermen and sailors. **Cool Farm** is Mauna Kea's artisanal streetwear brand and renowned luxury fashion e-tailer.

Relaxation and regeneration come in the form of **Divine Estetica** beauty center;

LOSTUDIOESSE pilates and yoga and **Polverenera Parrucchieri**, the experts when it comes to hair. **Noa Ink** is noted for their tattoos and piercings, founded by international artist Noa Yanni, and you'll also find **Blues Barber**, inspired by the ancient Sicilian tradition and blues music. Fitness fanatics will be pleased to hear that **Trek Bikes** also has a dedicated space, among the world leaders in the design and production of bicycles and accessories.

The joint venture was established in 2016 by the Group's real estate company, **Cassa Depositi e Prestiti** with an ever-innovative outlook towards the future.



MANIFATTURA TABACCHI

in numbers

350 million euros total investment

16 existing buildings

4 newly built buildings

m² **110,000** total surface area

divided in:

m² **37,00** training, offices and co-working

m² **35,900** residences and services

m² **11,300** ateliers, workshops and concept stores

m² **26,300** hotel, student housing and brewery

m² **23,628** public areas



Alessandra Petrucci, Onofrio Pepe, Alessia Bettini

100 years of the University of Florence

It's an important year for the University of Florence. The academic tradition in the city goes farther back than can be accurately traced, but nonetheless, the **Università degli Studi di Firenze** has an anniversary of its official recognition to celebrate. In 2024, this anniversary reaches 100 years.

Some of Italy's finest minds and most famous names have graduated from or taught at the University of Florence, including **Giovanni Boccaccio**, author of *Decameron* and fashion designer **Donatella Versace**. Boccaccio did not attend quite the same university as its current cohort of **55 thousand students**, however. Founded in Medieval times, the **Studium Generale** of Florence was in place some 600 years before the university was officially recognized in its modern form. A further 100 years since this important milestone, the university observes the anniversary with a range of events throughout the year, and reflects on the continual modernization of its vision.

Looking forward, the university's hopes for the future center around **academic innovation** and its powerful **international presence**. Students come from all over Europe and the world to study in Florence, and benefit from some **500 international mobility partnerships**. In the midst of this, the University

continues to uphold its high academic standards, and combines the two efforts by offering **14 full degree courses in English**, and the opportunity for students to take a **joint degree** with other universities, bringing the most able and ambitious young people from around the world to Florence.

A crucial pillar in the city's cultural as well as academic landscape, the place of the university within the city is not confined to its lecture halls. Already this year, and to the great delight of tourists and locals alike, **La Specola** museum reopened in February, reintroducing some of Florence's most notable scientific and artistic treasures to its cultural hit-list. In fact, the reopening was an anniversary for the museum itself, **250 years on from its establishment as the first European Science Museum** whose doors were open to all. There was no better way to commemorate than to reopen its doors once more, following five years of restorative work.

The centenary celebrations also include **art installations** in university settings, and a dedicated sculptural exhibition by **Onofrio Pepe**. Titled *Rediscovered Myths*, it expounds upon the well-known renaissance academic tradition of the city, but explores the theme with a contemporary approach. Also along the artistic lines, **Leonardo da Vinci** is center stage of a collaborative initiative between the University of Florence and the **State University of Milan**, which is also celebrating its centenary.

100 years since the establishment of the modern university, **modernization** has remained the University of Florence's priority. The slogan of the festivities, '**A Century and Beyond**', emphasizes its respect for the legacy upon which the institution is built, and its commitment to pushing the city forward.

Fostering the future of Florence

Tour operator and travel agency ArtViva is a long-standing company in the city that is an innovative provider of themed experiences and tours. We speak to founder and director **Rose Mager**, who works with her husband **Pier Carlo Testa**, about their wide-ranging offering and her experience as a tour operator in the city.



Why did you choose to live in Florence, and what is your relationship with the city?

Choosing Florence as a place of residence was a decision deeply influenced by its unmatched cultural and historical significance. This city, renowned for its artistic and architectural masterpieces, offers an immersive journey through the Renaissance, making it an ideal setting for anyone with a profound appreciation for the arts and history. My initial interaction with Florence as an **international student** evolved into a profound connection, shaping my decision to not only make it my home but also the center of my professional endeavors.

What role do you play in ArtViva?

As a director of ArtViva, my role extends beyond the operational oversight of a leading tour company. It encompasses a commitment to promoting **sustainable tourism**, a commitment that is critically important in a **UNESCO World Heritage** site like Florence. We are acutely aware of the challenges posed by overtourism and are dedicated to crafting experiences that encourage visitors to engage with the city in a manner that is both respectful and enriching. Our aim is to facilitate a deeper exploration of Florence, promoting

longer stays and more meaningful interactions with the city's soul. This approach is designed to safeguard both the tangible and intangible heritage of Florence, from its iconic landmarks to the local artisans who are the custodians of traditional crafts.

ArtViva's status as a licensed tour operator significantly bolsters our capacity to contribute positively to sustainable tourism efforts in Florence. This licensure is not merely a formality but signifies our dedication to maintaining high ethical and responsible tourism standards. Our commitment is reflected in the design of our tours, which are carefully curated to minimize environmental impact while maximizing cultural appreciation. By prioritizing authentic encounters and steering away from the well-trodden paths, we offer unique insights into Florence's lesser-known yet equally captivating aspects.

What is ArtViva's strength?

What distinguishes ArtViva from other operators is our **unwavering dedication to authenticity, quality, and personalized service**. Our experiences are crafted to go beyond mere sightseeing, aiming to connect our guests with the essence of Florence and Italy. Through exclusive access to local artisans, historians, and experts, we provide an inti-

mate and informed exploration of the city. This approach not only enhances the experience of our clients but also benefits the local community, **contributing to the economy in a manner that respects and preserves Florence's cultural landscape**.

Looking to the future, ArtViva is steadfast in its dedication to setting an example in the field of cultural tourism. We envision a Florence where sustainable tourism practices ensure the city's continued status as a beacon of art, culture, and history. By **fostering a deeper and more respectful engagement with the city**, we aim to protect its beauty and heritage for future generations.

My journey with Florence and ArtViva is an ongoing story of discovery, appreciation, and stewardship. It is an honor to share this experience with visitors from around the world, offering them a glimpse into the soul of Florence through responsible and enriching experiences. Our dedication to sustainable tourism and the unique value we provide through our tours reflect our deep commitment to ensuring that the rich tapestry of Florence's heritage continues to be celebrated and preserved.

Leaps and bounds towards leadership in experiential tourism



Towns of Italy Group announces the acquisition of the Sicilian tour operator, **Mediterranea Trekking – Medtrek srl**. The significant incoming, confirmed on December 20, consolidates the group's plans for growth in southern Italy, while simultaneously moving forward their aims to become a **leader in experiential tourism**, with 150 employees and one million experiences provided between 2006 and 2023.

Mediterranea Trekking is specialized in **outdoor and active experiences** in Sicily, founded in 2005 and based in Messina. A reference point for experi-

ential tourism in the region, it offers a wide range of services for high-quality outdoor activities, including trekking, cycling, visits to the Aeolian Islands, as well as personalized trips for groups and individuals.

Already a long-standing partner of the Towns of Italy Group, Medtrek shares their values in terms of creating **authentic and engaging experiences**, with **expert local guides** for small groups of visitors, favouring collaboration with **small structures and local suppliers** to guarantee full immersion in the traditions and culture of the places visited.

In February, the group subsequently announced the acquisition of the **Gruppi & F.I.T branch** (For Individual Travelers) by Torres Travel, an incoming tour operator based in Pompeii, furthering the group's growth in the South of Italy.

Towns of Italy Group is the first group dedicated to experiential tourism in Italy, made up of **Towns of Italy, Arno Travel, and ItalyXp**. The company is in second place in the **Stelle del Sud ranking** by Statista and **Il Sole 24 Ore**.

SYNLAB

HEALTH

from Florence!

Discover the services reserved for students of the Universities of Florence and those staying in the city's hotels.

SYNLAB is a partner of the Destination Florence Foundation, which promotes the city of Florence worldwide for a more sustainable and respectful tourism development and to make the city more welcoming for tourists and citizens alike.

As part of this partnership, SYNLAB has activated a healthcare service dedicated to students of the Universities of Florence and guests staying in Florence's hotels.

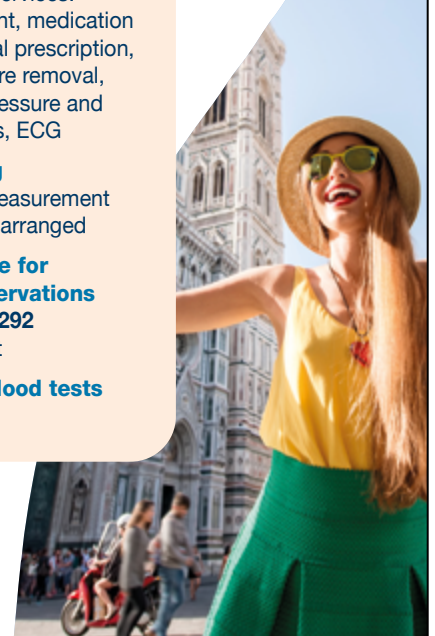
For more information, contact:
Email: info.toscana@synlab.it
Phone: **0554211617**
Medical Director: Prof. Vincenzo Cupelli

The service, available at SYNLAB Centers in Florence, includes:

- ✔ **Dedicated nursing clinic** at our SYNLAB Medical Center in Florence, Viale De Amicis 87, offering the following services: vital signs measurement, medication injection with a medical prescription, simple dressings, suture removal, installation of blood pressure and cardiac holter monitors, ECG
- ✔ **Home blood drawing** with blood pressure measurement on specific days to be arranged
- ✔ **Dedicated phone line for information and reservations** on mobile at **342 3301292** with a Health Assistant
- ✔ **Reduced rates for blood tests and specialist visits**



Find out more





OIC Group achieves sustainability success and wins Hero Award 2024

Founded in 1975 in Florence, the OIC Group are professional congress organizers in the field of healthcare and science, with further success recently coming in the form of obtaining the **ISO 20121 Certification**. As a carbon-neutral company, they approach the MICE market with an integrated vision of **environmental, social and economic sustainability**. The path towards receiving the certification was accompanied by radical business transformation, in which the OIC Group demonstrated unparalleled commitment towards the themes of **corporate social responsibility**, a philosophy that today permeates every aspect of the organization.

As part of their sustainable development, a decision was made to **change**

headquarters to via della Giovine Italia in Florence, with the clear objective of dramatically reducing waste and environmental impact. They also activated a partnership with **Up2You**, the Greentech B Corp that accompanies companies in personalized paths for calculating and reducing emissions.

The Q1 successes for OIC don't stop here. **Ginevra De Bellis**, **Head of the Department for International Relations and Management Nominations for the OIC Group**, was the winner announced at the IAPCO (International Association of Professional Congress Organizers) annual meeting held this March in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The award is one of the three exclusive prizes that are presented annually by IAPCO, recognizing those who embody excellence and dedication in the field of events organization and management.

Nicola Testai, **CEO of the OIC Group**, praised Ginevra for her positive influence within the company, saying, "Ginevra's ability to facilitate discussions about industry trends and problem-solving highlights her role as a facilitator, particularly in events where she represents OIC, making her a central figure in identifying changing trends in the meeting industry". The award includes a prestigious trophy and a scholarship that includes travel and accommodation to attend the 2025 IAPCO Annual Meeting.

and problem-solving highlights her role as a facilitator, particularly in events where she represents OIC, making her a central figure in identifying changing trends in the meeting industry". The award includes a prestigious trophy and a scholarship that includes travel and accommodation to attend the 2025 IAPCO Annual Meeting.

and problem-solving highlights her role as a facilitator, particularly in events where she represents OIC, making her a central figure in identifying changing trends in the meeting industry". The award includes a prestigious trophy and a scholarship that includes travel and accommodation to attend the 2025 IAPCO Annual Meeting.



FLORENCE EYE
RUOTA PANORAMICA FIRENZE
THE EXPERIENCE

Florence from another point of view

www.florenceeye.com

f i d



Piazzale Vittorio Veneto
Parco delle Cascine, Florence

Until 10 June 2024

Every day, from
10am to midnight

Event organized by

With

Media partner











The social vocation of the Spazio Reale Convention Centre

Spazio Reale is not simply a venue; it's a sustainability centred, multi-functional space that gives back to the community through inclusivity-focused projects and various social endeavours, making it an invaluable resource as well as a remarkable venue.

In 2015, restoration began on the space, with the emergence of a clear commitment to social causes. **Elisabetta Carullo, General Manager of the Spazio Reale Group and CEO of Spazio Reale Eventi srl**, elaborates, "Choosing to organize an event in our spaces also means supporting social and inclusivity projects for the most disadvantaged sectors of the population. In addition to the commercial soul of a large conference centre, Spazio Reale also has a strong social mission; in fact, it was created to deal with the needs of the territory". Most recently, projects have included the hosting of 60 people fleeing from war-torn Ukraine (March 2022) and aid due to the floods in November 2023, with over 100 people offered hospitality for 15 days, and over 500 volunteers making the space their operational and logistical base. Spaces were freely given to the Onesight Luxottica Foundation for the Days of Sight in March this year, during which approximately 340 free eye exams were given to those in difficulty.

Sustainability is another core mission of Spazio Reale, who are soon to become part of **Federcongressi's FOOD FOR GOOD** project to reduce food waste during large events as much as possible. During the last event held onsite, surplus food was sent to the **Caritas** charity in Florence. It is also a **fully accessible structure** for those with mobility difficulties, having received the D-4001 certification, with active projects for young people with disabilities. A training agency in the company offers courses recognized by the **Regione Toscana** (the Tuscan Regional Council), managing the quality certifications achieved by the Spazio Reale Group. The group is currently completing the process for certification on **gender equality** in the workplace, as

Some of the Spazio Reale stats

- 25,000** m² in total
- 2,300** total people
- 1,000** seats in the main hall
- 4,000** m² sports centre
- 32** rooms for overnight stays
- 200** parking spaces
- 24** h reception



well as pursuing the SA 8000 social certification.

High-level catering is available in the many spaces available, with the **Acero Rosso Restaurant** serving typical Tuscan cuisine in a refined and contemporary setting. 32 large rooms offer the possibility of overnight stays, four of which are equipped for those with mobility difficulties. The multifunctional spaces present various possibilities for corporate **team building**, from leather workshops to culinary activities, with **the sports centre reaching over 4,000 m²**, with spaces for rhythmic gymnastics, karate, basketball, football, volleyball and padel, and even a fitness centre. Spazio Reale also manages **Palazzo Pucci**, a historic location that is ideal for events and receptions, mere metres from the Duomo. The Apollo Hall can accommodate up to 180 people, and the Paris Hall has 90 seats, with four other finely frescoed connecting rooms available.

Find out more about the venue at
www.spazioreale.it and www.spaziorealeventi.it
 And learn about their training agency at
www.spaziorealeformazione.it



Florence won 15 congresses in 2023, with an estimated economic impact of over 30 million euros

Almost **18,000 participants are expected** to attend the high number of conferences won by the MICE division of **Destination Florence** in 2023, the result of applications developed in collaboration with **Firenze Fiera**. The high-profile international events are planned for 2024-2028, and include the prestigious **International Pathogenic Neisseria Conference** at Palazzo dei Congressi from March 31-April 4, 2025, bringing top experts in research on infectious diseases. Almost 500 participants are expected, for an impact on the territory of almost one million euros, thanks also to the commitment of **Rino Rappuoli**, Scientific Director of Siena's Biotechnology Foundation, **Mariagrazia Pizza**, Professor of Microbiology at the Imperial College of London, and **Chiara Azzari**, Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Florence, who worked to promote the city as a venue to host the event.

It is no coincidence that **Rappuoli, Azzari and Pizza were awarded the Florence Ambassador Award by the Municipality of Florence**, a recognition given every year to personalities from the academic and scientific world who contribute to bringing Florence to the world and the world to Florence. They received the recognition for having brought IUMS 2024 to Florence (with Azzari having been awarded for another congress won previously), the Congress of the International Union of Microbiological Societies, of which Professor Rappuoli is the current president-elect. **President of Destination Florence, Jacopo Vicini**, underlined the significance: "The victory of this candidacy, the thirteenth in a single year, is not only a great source of pride for us professionals, but above all, it is further confirmation that enhancing and investing in the precious human capital of our academic-scientific com-

munity is fundamental. The candidacy was promoted by three Ambassadors whom we had the pleasure of rewarding in the 2022 and 2023 editions of the Florence Ambassador Award for the awarding of two other conferences. This is an excellent example of how both their and our daily work brings lasting benefits that are tangible and significant for the whole city, even after years".

According to a **Gaining Edge** report for 2022, **Florence is the first Italian city to leverage its intellectual capital index**, a testament to the work carried out by Destination Florence with the scientific-academic community to bring conferences to Florence. **According to the GEAR data from March 2023, Florence has its local intellectual leaders in the governing bodies of 60 international associations**, which is key to engaging high-profile meetings.

Tuscany awarded "region of the future"

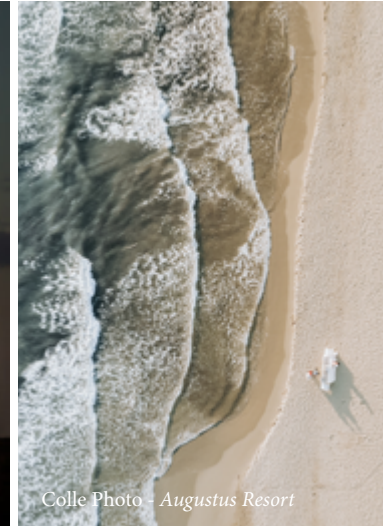
Tuscany was awarded "**region of the future**," with a **fourth-place rating in the prestigious fDi Intelligence ranking** dedicated to medium-sized European regions capable of attracting foreign capital, held in Cannes on March 14.

141 European regions (divided into large, medium and small categories) were evaluated in terms of economic potential, friendliness in business, connectivity, human capital and lifestyle, and cost-effectiveness. Receiving the award was **Invest in Tuscany**, together with the institutional representation of **Regione Toscana** (the Tuscan Regional Council).

As evidence to the ever-moving forward collaborations between the various regional and local bodies, **Destination Florence** collaborated as Host Destination Partner for the Aftercare Forum event, the second edition of which takes place from May 29-30, in collaboration with **Invest in Tuscany**, following the first edition in Paris. The event brings together Aftercare experts, policymakers, practitioners and senior executives to strengthen post-investment support around the world, with several of Destination Florence's members involved in the proceedings: **Lungarno Collection** with **Hotel Gallery** and **Continental** for the speakers' stay, **Palazzo Capponi** as the sole venue for the two-day event, a technoconference with **AV services**, and a light lunch at the **Picteau Bistrot** restaurant. Prior to the event, Foody Farm hosts an aperitivo and dinner on May 28, with dinner on May 29 at **Cibreo, Hotel Helvetia & Bristol**. An experience will be held for participants on May 30, with tourist tours of the city involving **AGT tour guides** and a mixology experience at Cibreo.



D2 Photography - Vitaleta



Colle Photo - Augustus Resort

Tuscany comes out on top in 2023's wedding industry boom, with even greater growth predicted for 2024



Gianni Aiazzi
San Galgano



D2 Photographer - Chianti

During 2023, more international couples than ever before chose Tuscany as the location for the happiest days of their lives. Among the many romantic options boasted by the region are the historic villas and castles, with their stunning backdrops making Tuscany a dream location for couples from all over the world. The number of couples from abroad **getting married in Italy has increased by 22% in just one year**, and Tuscany hosts more international weddings than any other region across the country, with an **increase of 12.5% in 2023** alone.

Villas, historic residences and agritourism destinations are the most popular venues for the wedding of international couples, who come **predominantly from the USA and the UK**. Tuscany's wealth of choice in these types of settings is part of the reason for this increase.

With their **historic value**, reputation for luxury, and lush surroundings of the rolling Tuscan hills, it is easy to see why these venues are growing in popularity, helped of course by the global fame of **Tuscan cuisine** and the finest selection of **local wines**.

All of these factors attract more than just the newlyweds, however. The guests of international couples are also contributing to the value of the destination wedding sector. **In 2023, more than 496,000 tourists came to Tuscany** in connection with a wedding, and each spent an **average of 3.2 nights** in the region, seeking experiences from city breaks to spa retreats, and making the nuptials of a loved one in Tuscany a significant pull towards everything else the region has to offer. The winding lanes through the countryside and the enchanting towns dotted along them are an irresistible at-



D2 Photography - Certaldo Alto



D2 Photography - Firenze

traction for those who join the happy couples in their pursuit of Tuscany's innate charm.

As is appreciated by many of these couples, a wedding is the time to spare no expense. This mantra is followed by those seeking the most refined ceremonies and receptions, **spending an average of 65,000 euro**, which is an **increase of 15.3% on 2022 figures, and 6,000 euro higher than the national average**. As such, the value of the destination wedding sector across the country has **rocketed to 803 million euros, a growth of over 200 million euros from the previous year**. Even more impressively, this growth has occurred in spite of rising inflation, which records show has not affected the patterns of international couples, and in Tuscany specifically, **overall turnover is up by 29.5%**. In fact, experts **predict further growth**

of 9.1% for 2024. Almost a third of the budget is spent on food and beverages, and with local, seasonal produce and an expert selection of courses, the menus speak for themselves.

The number of international couples that choose Tuscany for their wedding destinations continues to outnumber the number of couples from other regions in Italy, showing that Tuscany's appeal is expanding geographically, and is attracting people from farther and wider. Connected to this is the **growing role of the wedding planner**, as **48% of couples from abroad employ an expert** in the field to help construct their perfect day. Their knowledge of the surroundings and local traditions makes them a valuable resource, and promotes the importance of the wedding industry for the wider economy, as an increasing proportion of couples seek their help in obtaining the best in the business. This figure, again, is higher in Tuscany than the national average, making Tuscany a hotspot for the industry.

The facts and figures barely do justice to the beauty of a wedding in Tuscany, but accurately demonstrate the full extent of the **ever-growing popularity of the region**. The picturesque countryside, speckled with quaint, intimate venues, join the region's reputation for fine food and hospitality to make Tuscany an obvious choice for any couple who hopes to live happily ever after.

"The data on weddings in our region is a testament to the quality of the work carried out in recent years", explains Jacopo Vicini, president of Destination Florence. "Even in 2015, we were the first Convention Bureau to create a division dedicated to the wedding sector, to promote Tuscany's offerings in Italy and abroad in an organic, coherent and structured way, and the constant increase in figures demonstrates our foresight and the rewards of our efforts".

The remarkable results are the conclusion of the three-year tender in which Tuscany for Weddings promoted the region as a destination on behalf of Toscana Promozione Turistica. The success of the collaboration has led to an extension to the conference sector as well as weddings.



The future looks Bright

From April 19-21, three days of cultural events at **Stazione Leopolda** and **The Social Hub Florence Lavagnini** combine digital art, lighting design and electronic music, with the seventh edition of the **Bright Festival** featuring a wide range of educational activities, exhibitions and performances in an innovative and future-inspired format.



national studios, with 21 experiences and installations and 10 leading companies in the sector. Highlights include the **Night Show**, an unmissable chance to see the best in digital arts, lighting design and electronic music, with **Bright Pro** providing a unique opportunity to expand your knowledge and establish valuable contacts.

The festival, organized by Teresa Balestrieri, Claudio Cacioli, Virginia Poggio, Gian Paolo Dei and Luciano D'Agostini, partners with the Municipality of Florence, Epson, Ic Video Pro, Panasonic, K-Array, The Social Hub, Maxon, Touch Designer, Wacom, Silent System, IED Roma, Istituto Marangoni, MIAT and Modartech.

Digital creativity is at the centre of the forward-thinking fest, with many international institutions, universities, companies, artists and creative studios coming together in the creation of the format that was launched in Florence in 2019, and subsequently exported all over the world, thanks also to the collaboration with the **Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperazione Internazionale Italiano**. Six official editions have been held since its launch, two of which were in Florence, and four in Germany, with numerous events in cities such as Madrid, Buenos Aires, Edinburgh, Athens, Brussels and more, reaching **20,000 spectators and more than 100 international digital artists and creative studios** in total.

The third Florentine edition takes place in two striking locations: the former railway station, Stazione Leopolda, and the innovative hotel and co-working brand, The Social Hub. The packed programme includes over **40 hours of meetings and training sessions**, with students, professionals and enthusiasts in the digital creative sector engaging the opportunity to meet the artists and book 20-minute one-to-one sessions. Stazione Leopolda will host exciting **digital and interactive installations, with immersive art, audiovisual performances, and sound and light projects** by some of the best international minds (entrance 16 euro). The events and performances extend to 20 hours, involving 32 digital designers and inter-

Many events are free entry upon reservation, with the full programme viewable at www.brightfestival.com

Read what's happening in Florence for the tourism industry.



See our site to
flick through our
previous issues.

www.destinationflorencecvb.com



DESTINATION FUTURE

Destination Florence celebrates its new start as a Foundation with a dedicated DF magazine to mark the occasion.

Moving towards the future with reinforced goals and energy for our objectives, this special issue explores the past, present and future of **Destination Florence**, with words from its former and current presidents in addition to the usual features of **Destination Florence** magazine.

With over 25 years of experience in cultivating quality tourism in Florence across the spheres of congress, destination weddings and leisure tourism, **Destination Florence** is now bringing its know-how and experience as a forward-thinking foundation.