

DF

Destination Florence

N°08 SPRING 2023

CONFERENCES/ FLORENCE HOSTS HIGH-PROFILE
FEDERCONGRESSI CONVENTION **WEDDINGS/**
LEAN TOWARDS PISA AS A WEDDING DESTINATION
STUDENTS/ WHY THE SOCIAL HUB CEO CHARLIE
MACGREGOR PUTS PEOPLE FIRST

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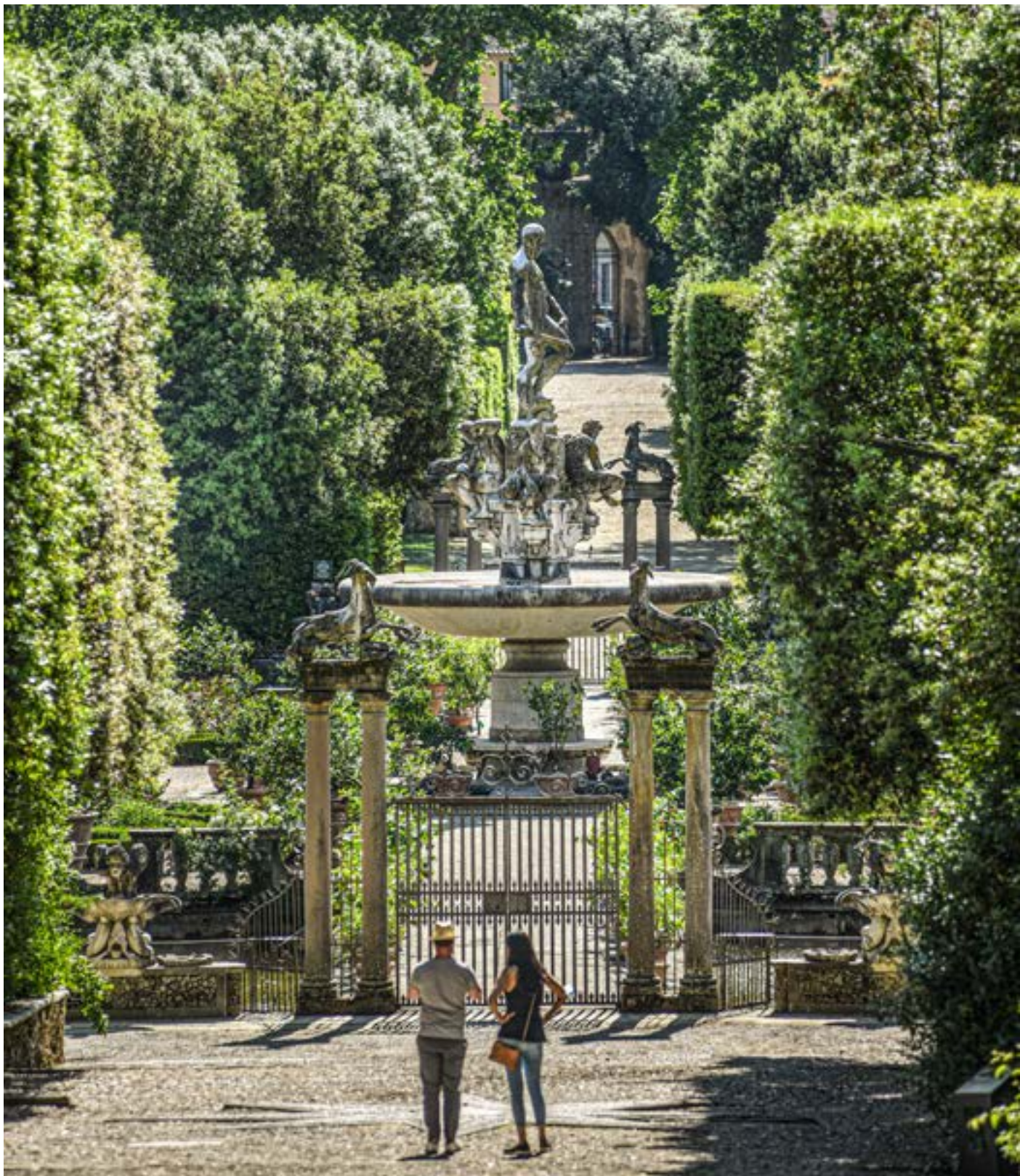
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DESTINATION
FLORENCE

MAGAZINE

DESTINATION FLORENCE CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU



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**DESTINATION FLORENCE
CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU**
Via del Tiratoio 1, 50124 Florence (Italy)

For 20+ years, Destination Florence Convention & Visitors Bureau has been the official association for promoting Florence as a destination. Our mission is to attract quality leisure tourism, MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, events) and destination weddings.

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cover photo: Marco Badiani



Raising the bar





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Let's begin, as always, with the numbers. During 2022, more than 100 national and international corporate events, congresses and conferences were held across Firenze Fiera Congress & Exhibition Center, with approximately 40,000 delegates arriving in the city, which resulted in an estimated 70 million euro in revenue for the destination. 2023 has started with another im-

portant recognition for the destination and the quality of Florence's conference sector with the annual Federcongressi convention, which for the second time has chosen the Tuscan capital to host its main event. It is clear that the strategy implemented by the city, based on cooperation between the public and private sectors to promote Florence as a city of culture and knowledge, is reaping rewards. Conference tourism is an increasingly key topic for the destination because, in addition to the evident economic and social impact on the local area, this type of tourism enables strategic planning years in advance and a more careful and widespread governance of flows compared to the dynamics with which we are now accustomed and which have re-emerged more clearly after the pandemic. This is the time to invest in the human capital of our academic and scientific community in order to increase the quality and quantity of the international events that choose Florence as their host city. For this reason, I am extremely proud to have been asked to chair Florence's recently formed Advisory Board. Due to the priceless work of the city's ambassadors (some of which are members of the board), we will strive to raise the quality of the conferences that we secure and leave behind a positive legacy at the end of each event. One such example is the thirteenth edition of The State of the Union (SOU), a high-level international conference that reflects on the European Union and acts as a bridge between the academic world and decision makers in Europe and around the world.

Hospitality and innovation: these are the watchwords that distinguish our efforts. While the conference sector has raised the bar in recent years, our work is aimed at all tourism segments. In particular, I am delighted to welcome DUCO Travel Summit back to Florence, a key event in the leisure segment. For the third consecutive year, Florence will occupy the five-star hospitality limelight and we will be ready to welcome the world.

Dario Nardella

Mayor of Florence

+ President, Advisory Board

of the Florence Academic

Leadership Programme (FALP)





Federcongressi&eventi comes to Florence

The 14th edition of the Federcongressi&eventi Convention will take place at Florence's Palazzo degli Affari on March 3 and 4.

Established in 2004, the association represents the entire supply chain for Italy's event and congress sector. Members are from DMOs and convention bureaus, trade fair and congress venues, conference hotels and other spaces, as well as service and consultancy companies involved in events management.

Each year, like-minded industry players that are striving for professional growth find inspiration and business opportunities through discussion and networking under a single roof at this

prolific event. The convention is open to Federcongressi&eventi members and all players in the MICE sector. Last year's event, which was held in Treviso, attracted 250 delegates.

Florence, the chosen location for this year's event, is an excellent choice due to its strategic position in central Italy. The selection of locations for the entire programme of the 14th edition of the Federcongressi&eventi Convention displays the facilities currently available for conferences in the Renaissance city: the historic Fortezza da



Basso; the fully renovated Palazzo degli Affari; and the state-of-the-art Maggio Musicale opera house.

This year's programme will focus on **how innovation and cultural and social transformations are affecting the congress and events sector**. Indeed the guiding theme of the entire two days will be "Changing Transformations". Further-

more, delegates will define the concept of sustainability for their industry before putting forward models and specific approaches. One such example is "Food for Good", whereby food left over from catering events is donated to local charities and given to needy families and refugee centers.

Massimo Temporelli and Silvia Zanella will be the key-



note speakers at this year's convention. With more than 20 years of experience as a physicist on television, radio and in university lecture halls, Massimo Temporelli will talk about the relationship between humans and technology by telling five anecdotes about innovation and intuition. Journalist

Silvia Zanella, on the other hand, will concentrate on ways to attract new coworkers, establishing lasting professional relationships and the new skills required to accomplish this, such as emotional intelligence.

Another important part of Federcongressi&eventi is

the association's **mentoring project**, which provides university students with the opportunity to meet leading figures in Italy's meeting industry. Last year's edition involved 20 youngsters, whereas 40 mentees are learning from leading minds in 2023.

The event will take place over three days, starting on Thursday March 2, with pre-convention activities. Friday March 3 sees a full day of back-to-back sessions and the day will finish with an awards ceremony and dinner at the Fortezza da Basso. Saturday March 4 is a half day of sessions before a farewell lunch.

"We are delighted to hold our 14th Convention in Florence because of the city's beauty, unparalleled appeal as a destination and its positioning in the MICE sector. Furthermore, having an expert organization like Destination Florence CVB ensures professional support in organizing an event such as this. This year's convention takes place at an exciting time for the events and conference sector. Social, market and technological changes will be central topics at the convention. Over the two days, we will have an opportunity to understand how much these shifts are impacting our industry and we will discuss how these changes at work, which have been accelerated by the pandemic, necessitate a paradigm shift that focuses on acquiring new soft skills and human resource management, without overlooking the issue of sustainability."



Gabriella Gentile
President, Federcongressi&eventi

"Florence is again demonstrating its importance as a conference destination by prevailing over other leading candidate cities... We have every reason to believe that this year's convention will reach record levels of attendance. This opportunity will allow our colleagues to discuss the issues that affect the world of conferences and events today before coming up with innovative, competitive and



tangible proposals for the international congress scene."

Nicola Testai
Vice-President, Federcongressi&eventi
+ CEO, OIC Group

"On this special occasion, I have the honour of having two roles: as a representative of the Destination and Venues category on the Federcongressi&eventi management council and as Director of Destination Florence Convention & Visitors Bureau, which has promoted Florence as a location for international conferences for more than 20 years. Choosing the Tuscan capital for this top-level event was only right and proper, given the years of major investments made by the city in this sector, but securing the conference would not have been possible without the support of Firenze Fiera and the renovated Palazzo degli Affari. Our mission has always been to create synergies between the public and private sectors, coordinating a vast industry of leading professionals and a city administration that constantly supports our endeavours. This convention will be a unique opportunity not only to celebrate Florence's successes, but also the success of other destinations in Italy, which have made huge steps over the years, rising up the ICCA rankings among European destinations".

Carlotta Ferrari, Director, Destination Florence Convention & Visitors Bureau + Federcongressi&eventi board member



The State of the Union



The State of the Union (SOU) conference, now in its 13th edition, is a renowned annual summit for high-level reflection on the European Union.

The flagship event of the European University Institute will take place on May 4-6, unravelling into sessions where international leaders and experts will address the challenges and opportunities facing Europe in a rapidly changing environment. The 2023 edition will focus on the most pressing issues on the European agenda, including the war in Ukraine and its complex geopolitical, economic and legal ramifications, and its impact on the daily lives of citizens. Important EU goals, such as promoting sustainability and social inclusion, upholding the rule of law and digital transition, will also feature prominently in the programme.

The event will kick off on May 4 at the EUI premises and will continue on May 5 in Palazzo Vecchio. The programme will focus on **challenges to democracy, geopolitics and EU priorities, green transition and energy security, rethinking the global economic landscape, and digital and technological transition**, and more topics.

Among the over 80 prestigious speakers, the event will see the participation of

- Sergio Mattarella, President of the Republic, Italy
- Dubravka Šuica, Vice-President for Democracy and Democracy, European Commission

- Anabel González, Deputy Director-General, World Trade Organization
- Tobias Billström, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sweden
- Frank Elderson, Member of the Executive Board, European Central Bank
- Sylvie Goulard, Member of the French Diplomatic Service
- Paolo Gentiloni, European Commissioner for Economy
- Antonio Tajani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Italy

SOU4YOU

In the afternoon of May 5, the European University Institute is offering **SOU4YOU**, a dynamic talk show: *The State of the Union for Young European Citizens*, in the Salone dei Cinquecento of Palazzo Vecchio, in continuity with the Festival d'Europa. The event, which is coordinated in collaboration with local institutions, aims to **stimulate an interactive dialogue on the present and future of young people and Europe**, advocating the need to invest in the education of new generations and thus make them protagonists in the construction of a modern, innovative, competent and sustainable Europe. As happened for

the 2021 edition in Fiesole, #SOU4YOU aims to bring young people to the stage in a dialogue with practitioners in the field of education, training, work and youth policies, together with personalities able to understand and disseminate their ideas.

As indicated by President Von der Leyen, if 2022 was the year dedicated to new generations, 2023 will be the year of European competencies. The European institutions are therefore committed to identifying and stimulating the growth of said skills, also through supporting young people in their training and professional development. **SOU4YOU** aims to address these issues by involving the young protagonists of our society, asking how public and private institutions can support young people and provide them with the right tools.

Open Day

At the conclusion of the event, on May 6, **the event will open the doors and gardens of Villa Salviati**, a centuries-old palace that is home to EUI's departments of History and Law, the Academy of European Law, and the Historical Archives of the European Union. The final day is intended to be a day of free gatherings and leisure, within the spaces of the Institute and thus in a stimulating and lush environment from a natural point of view, enjoying refreshments offered by local producers in front of an evocative view from above beautiful Florence. Works and art projections by students of the Florence Academy of Fine Arts will accompany the day. Participants will



also have the opportunity to take guided tours of the Historical Archives of the European Union (HAEU) repositories and the villa, gardens and grotto of Villa Salviati conducted by the “Apprentice Tour Guides” of the Italian Environmental Fund (FAI - Florence delegation) and HAEU archivists. In the evening, music, drinks and refreshments will entertain visitors.

The Open Day, in partnership with FAI, is open to the public. Visitors will be able to tour the beautiful grounds and buildings of the historic villa and visit the state-of-the-art vaults where Europe’s memory is preserved. Information on event registration will be announced in April on the SOU website.



Participation is by invitation and on a first-come, first-served basis. To find out more, contact SOU Secretariat at sou@eui.eu. The entire event will be streamed on the EUI website: www.stateoftheunion.eu. For live updates, follow the event’s Twitter account @EUISoU, which will share continuous updates on the program, content and speakers before the event, and live coverage during the three days. The hashtag to follow is **#SOU2023** for the main event, **#SOU4YOU** for the afternoon event on the 5th, and **#SOUOPENDAY** for the day on the 6th.

Mario Panico Sales and Revenue Manager, Hotel&Resort Le Axidie Napoli

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www.travelappeal.com

 **TRAVEL APPEAL**

Events in and around Florence

Florence never fails to host fascinating and innovative events. This spring sees new exhibitions, plenty of festivals and days to celebrate the city's artisanal excellence.

MICE

Federcongressi&eventi annual convention

Florence's Palazzo degli Affari welcomes the national convention of Italy's meeting industry, Federcongressi&eventi, on March 3 and 4. Now in its 14th edition, the event is open to all MICE professionals and will cover matters such as how innovation and sociocultural transformation is changing the events industry. www.federcongressi.it

EDUCATION

Didacta Italia

Fortezza da Basso is the location for the learning-focused fair from March 8 to 10. The event, now in its sixth edition, looks to the future of schooling, with international educators coming together to turn the city into a European capital for innovative education. Separated into exhibition and activity areas, seminars range from technology to the humanities, open to all in the sector. www.fieradidacta.indire.it

CONTEMPORARY

Reaching for the Stars: From Maurizio Cattelan to Lynette Yiadom-Boakye

From March 4 to June 18, Palazzo Strozzi reopens its doors for the exhibition *Reaching for the Stars. From Maurizio Cattelan to Lynette Yiadom-Boakye*, which showcases major works by international contemporary artists such as Maurizio Cattelan, Damien Hirst, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye and Rudolf Stingel to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Turin-based Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Collection, one of the most prestigious collections of contemporary art in Italy. www.palazzostrozzi.org



Duco Italy 2022

MODERN

La ricerca dell'assoluto/L'origine du monde

Palazzo Vecchio

From March 2, a double exhibition presents the art of Swiss sculptor Alberto Giacometti and Argentine-Italian painter Lucio Fontana. These works will create an important dialogue between two international powerhouses of 20th-century art in the stunning Sala delle Udienze and Sala dei Gigli at the Palazzo Vecchio, while the Museo Novecento will host a continuation of Lucio Fontana's works through September 13. www.museonovecento.it

TRAVEL

DUCO Travel Summit

From March 27 to 31, the high-end tourism event returns for its annual invitation-only occasion for English-speaking travel advisors and outstanding hoteliers and suppliers from all over Italy. Promoting Italian hospitality to the world's most important buyers, attendees explore every facet of the destination of Italy, with a vast programme for professionals offering a full immersion into Italian travel. Several spots in the city host events, including Palazzo Portinari Salviati, Mercato Centrale, Four Seasons Florence, The St. Regis & The Westin Excelsior Florence, Palazzo Pucci and The Mall Firenze.

www.ducotravelsummit.com



Lucio Fontana



Maggio Musicale Fiorentino



Scoppio del Carro



Eleonora di Toledo

OPERA

Opera at Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino

Enjoy a night at the Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino this winter/spring: Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* from March 12 to 26 and *Carmen* from March 28 to April 16. www.maggiofiorentino.com

CINEMA

Florence Korea Film Festival

For over 20 years, the Florence Korea Film Festival has been a main draw for Asian cinema enthusiasts, welcoming Academy Award and Golden Lion winners as well as introducing first-time directors, some of whom have gone on to become international superstars. This year's showcase will take place from March 30 to April 7 and includes events, animations, master classes, independent movies, K-documentaries and shorts. www.koreafilmfest.com

FOLKLORE

Scoppio del Carro

The uniquely Florentine *Scoppio del Carro* (Explosion of the Cart) spectacle in front of the Duomo is the traditional celebration to mark Easter Sunday. Loaded with fireworks, the dove-shaped rocket symbolizing the Holy Spirit flies out of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore to ignite the cart, known as the *Brindellone*.

EUROPE

The State of the Union

The 13th edition of The State of the Union conference will take place at the Palazzo Vecchio from May 4 to 6. Unrivaled in the quality and breadth of its sessions, the annual summit gathers leading scientific thinkers, academics, policy makers and journalists from various disciplines for reflection on key policy areas, including challenges to democracy; geopolitics and EU priorities; green transition and energy security; rethinking the global economic scenario; and the digital and tech transition. www.stateoftheunion.eui.eu

HANDICRAFT

Florence International Crafts Fair

Florence International Crafts Fair, known as MIDA, welcomes artisans to the Fortezza da Basso from April 25 to May 1, presenting the variety and quality of craftsmanship. MIDA displays the diversity of crafts, which evolves through traditional practices and high technology. www.mostrartigianato.it

ART

Eleonora di Toledo and the Invention of the Medici Court

Organized by the Uffizi Galleries and curated by Bruce Edelman, professor of art history at New York University Florence, the largest exhibition ever dedicated to the grand dame of the 16th century can be seen through May 14 in the halls of the Treasury of the Grand Dukes on the ground floor of the Pitti Palace. Expect 100-plus works, with major international loans, paintings, drawings, tapestries, costumes, jewels and gems that reflect the life, personality and cultural impact of Eleonora di Toledo. www.uffizi.it



Award-winning culture

Arturo Galansino, Director General of the **Palazzo Strozzi Foundation**, provides insight into his strategy at the helm of Florence's dynamic cultural center of international importance.

What does it mean for Palazzo Strozzi to have won the Apollo Awards for Best Exhibition of the Year 2022 for Donatello, the Renaissance exhibition, especially in light of your cultural strategy and after also winning the same prize in 2014 for Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino?

Receiving this recognition fills me with pleasure, also considering that the exhibition was nominated alongside projects at the MoMA in New York, the National Gallery in London and the Paris Museum of Modern Art. The award is confirmation of the quality of our efforts, which produce exhibitions that are capable of putting Florence at the forefront of the international cultural scene. The success of this major show is the result of Francesco Caglioti's unparalleled curatorship, the core collaboration with the Bargello Museums and the generous support of some of the most important museums in the world, which enabled us to create a truly unique exhibition.

Do you notice a difference in visitors when you stage contemporary art exhibitions compared with shows that focus on more historical artists and movements?

Our exhibitions are aimed at everyone through different means of engagement, while always focusing on key values of inclusivity and accessibility. The **340,000-plus visitors** in the last 12

months bear witness to this. The dialogue between ancient and the contemporary now runs through the veins of Palazzo Strozzi. It's what has resulted in a major involvement of visitors aged under 30, while also retaining the attention of adults as we continue to seek new engagement strategies. For instance, in 2022 we simultaneously hosted the Donatello exhibition and the *Let's Get Digital* project that focused on crypto art. This blend was a winning one, which was confirmed by the incredible public appreciation and participation.

What can you tell us about the forthcoming *Reaching from the Stars* exhibition? What's the main message?

The exhibition proposes a selection of works from some of the most important contemporary artists, such as Maurizio Cattelan, Sarah Lucas, Damien Hirst, Cindy Sherman, William Kentridge and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, as we celebrate here in Florence 30 years of the Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Collection, one of the most prestigious contemporary Italian art collections. The project aims to explore the main artistic research conducted in recent decades, as well as creating a platform of contents and reflections on the world today. Through the perspective of over 50 artists from all over the globe, the exhibition is an opportunity to reflect on the present and future of art, giving back the variety, evolution

and relationship with contemporary society in an open way.

Given the repeated successes of Palazzo Strozzi, in what way can the decisions made by museums have an impact on a city's tourism strategies?

Quality, innovation and accessibility: these are the three words that represent our core values, which are fundamental as inspiring principles in striving to make a cultural institution relevant and truly contemporary. Palazzo Strozzi's experience focuses on this direction. In particular, in a place of major cultural value like Florence, what matters is a cultural offering of an international caliber that is capable of making our city alive and attractive for quality tourism. That means that people not only come to Tuscany, but that these people return time and time again in pursuit of excellence, authenticity and creativity.

Palazzo Strozzi facts and figures

Established in 2006

50+ exhibitions

3 million visitors

www.palazzostrozzi.org

Founder and Director of Exclusive Connection Tours, **Lucia Montuschi**, talks about the ways in which museums can influence a city's tourism numbers.

Museums in Florence focus on the city's Renaissance past and the contemporary art scene. What are the differences and similarities in sharing this culture to the public?

Florence is a fascinating city that entralls you at first glance, but it is only by returning several times that one can say that they have been there and that they truly know the place in depth. It is a bustling city and the Florentines populate it with a lively temperament; it is people-oriented and in sync with the times. The museum offering is rich: you can range between municipal and state museums by selecting various chronological and thematic itineraries. Some of the museums are very famous and attract the majority of visitors; others are less known and visited by a selected few. In any case, visitors are heterogeneous, of all ages and coming from different backgrounds. Art is an expression of its time and, when scenarios change, its language changes accordingly. The public is a cross-section of society, always curious to listen to our rich history and to well-told stories. Visitors arrive willing and ready to learn, and are thus transported through time and beauty, finding the answer they were looking for in Florence.

Time and beauty



What are the main features that determine the quality of a museum experience?

A museum visit is an extraordinary opportunity for discovery and enrichment in the setting and space of its own story. It is an encounter with the artists, their creativity, beliefs and time, and an incredible way to exchange information for the formulation of new thoughts and comparisons. Content quality in its presentation and communication is essential for the enjoyment of visitors, as it is the welcome they receive, starting with logistics: the cloakroom, bathrooms, seating opportunities and itineraries carefully studied to facilitate accessibility, taking into account any possible challenges. When a visit is not guided by specialized personnel, the experience should be helped by a modern set-up with clear signage. Introductory panels when entering the rooms are very important and non-specialist

plaques should communicate the history and the value of a work of art, situating it in its correct time frame. Entrance flows should always be managed by a set time booking system and with a graph suggesting quieter visiting hours in order to ensure a pleasant and stress-free experience. The success of each single visit is the best publicity a museum can get. Not to mention the educational offering that encourages the growth and development of attentive and responsible new generations.

How do museums influence tourism flows?

Museums have an immense impact on tourist flows. Their popularity, alongside the masterpieces they house, tends to increase demand, which is often greater than the supply itself. Many works of art are true icons and the echo of their beauty resonates over time. Visitors choose to come to a city to be able to see these artworks, thus increasing cultured tourism,

which is not necessarily richer in economic terms, but is nevertheless richer in terms of quality, upping education and awareness. Lesser known museums offer amazing opportunities to deflect major tourism flows if they succeed in improving their assets. These numbers would definitely grow if they started to share, communicate and publicize their wonderful contents by selecting younger and more immediate forms of communication and by telling their stories on social media. Furthermore, exhibitions, if captivating and well organized, can bring exciting results in terms of visitor numbers. Their challenge is to engage citizens and visitors as well as tour operators who, if involved and trained through the sharing of catalog texts and preparatory meetings, can have a real impact in tourism flows.

FROM THE PAST TO THE FUTURE



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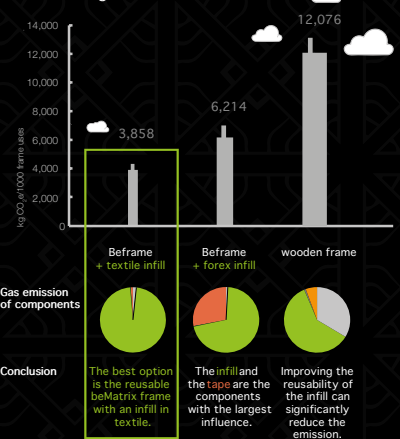
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Virtuoso takes Tuscany

Virtuoso (virtuoso.com) is a unique, top-end global network of agencies that focuses on luxury and experiential travel. Via the services of the very best available companies across a variety of sectors such as hotels, tour operators, cruise lines and others, plus the more intimate and tailored skills of personal connections and local knowledge, Virtuoso creates bespoke trips for clients according to specific requirements, where additional privileges may include exclusive experiences, VIP perks, and even rare access options. The combination of top-range service providers and dedicated travel advisors is specifically aimed at providing one-in-lifetime experiences. Now there are three top-class new entries to the Virtuoso family in Tuscany: **Toscana Resort Castelfalfi** (near Montaione, east of Certaldo), **Helvetia & Bristol Firenze - Starhotels Collezione** (central Florence) and **Dimora Ghirlandaio** (south-east of Florence, near Tavarnuzze).

For **Toscana Resort Castelfalfi** (www.castelfalfi.com), the repositioning led by Indonesian owner Sri Prakash Lohia at the luxury end of the market is providing opportunities not only for the guests of the small hamlet, but also for other international travelers in the area, with services such as the Kids' Club and Adventure Park. The entire experience is enriched by

signature suites, the complete renovation of the spa facilities and a new restaurant. The active agricultural estate remain the beating heart of this extensive property, and there are a multitude of activities associated with food and wine in which guests can partake, including wine and olive oil tastings, but also discovering beer, grappa, balsamic dressings and digestive liqueurs produced on the estate. The sheer range of options makes Castelfalfi a highly attractive venue for Virtuoso clients.

General Manager of **Helvetia & Bristol Firenze - Starhotels Collezione** (www.collezione.starhotels.com), Federico Versari, sees the transition into the Virtuoso environment as an important step forward. With a focus on Italian hospitality, personalized services, guest well-being and new experiences, Versari is excited about the new prospects that being part of the Virtuoso network brings to his team and their guests. The Helvetia & Bristol brings important well-being values to the Virtuoso offering as one of a small number of locations in central Florence able to offer all the luxury amenities of a top-of-the-range city hotel, but also a high-end spa. The Helvetia & Bristol is definitely an interesting new addition for the Virtuoso family.

Dimora Ghirlandaio (www.dimoraghirlandaio.it) offers



Dimora Ghirlandaio



Helvetia & Bristol Firenze - Starhotels Collezione



Toscana Resort Castelfalfi

the very best of two separate worlds, being immersed in the renowned Chianti countryside but also a very short distance from the city centre. Choices include a stunning underground spa facility, a customizable restaurant experience in the hands of qualified chefs using ingredients produced on the estate, the possibility of a hot air-balloon trip, cooking lessons, bike tours and river trips. Should e-car charging facilities, a helipad, floral services or pool swim with

a view be required, then Dimora Ghirlandaio is at the ready. This is the perfect new luxury partner for all those joining the Virtuoso experience.

The expanding Virtuoso family carefully selects partners for their ability to offer outstanding products and services, but also their ability to go the extra mile, above and beyond expectations. These three Tuscan partners certainly hit the mark.

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Domus Comeliana



Triangolo Verde di Peccioli

Head to the hills of Pisa for the pinnacle in destination weddings.

Leaning towards Pisa and the surrounding area as a wedding destination region? High-calibre hospitality options, suppliers and experience makers make it a superb choice. We took some journalists on a press tour organized by Tuscany for Weddings on behalf of Toscana Promozione Turistica.

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An amazing event location situated right in the heart of the old town of Pisa, literally in the shadow of the famous Leaning Tower. **Domus Comeliana** (www.domuscomeliana.com) is highly flexible, including halls, terraces and gardens that communicate the historical value of such a location, whilst modern facilities like a catering kitchen, air con, audio visual equipment, fully controllable lighting and a fibre-optic internet connection provide everything required for a seamless wedding experience. Tall garden walls, lush flora, superior interior finishes, bronze and marble statues, and water features make this a one-of-a-kind wedding venue.

A five-star spa within a spectacular historical building, **Bagni di Pisa Palace & Thermal Spa** (www.bagnidipisa.com) was once the preferred thermal baths of the Grand Duke of Tuscany and was visited by timeless celebrities, such as Mary Shelley and Lord Byron. Full hotel facilities, including bar and restaurant services, are available alongside unique thermal spa amenities. A variety of both internal rooms and outdoor spaces for small and large events alike ensure an entirely unique wedding experience. **Borgo di Colleoli** (www.borgocolleoli.com) is a very different wedding venue made up of a main building and a number of nearby structures, including what was once

the granary, a workshop and other farm outbuildings (now converted to top grade apartments), all located in the midst of olive groves and atop lava rock formations typical

of the area, known as tuff. Terraces and pools overlooking breathtaking views complete the picture of the perfect wedding destination.

Just 30 minutes by car from Pisa, **San Miniato** (www.discoversanminiato.it) is famous for its landscape, history, cuisine and truffles, and is also perfectly located for easy access to Pisa, Lucca, Pistoia, Florence and Siena. The medieval town lies in the heart of the Valdarno valley and on the renowned pilgrimage road, Via Francigena. The town hall boasts a stunning location for a civil ceremony in the highly decorated and sumptuous Sala delle Sette Virtù. Based just outside the town of San Miniato, **Truffle in Tuscany** (www.truffleintuscany.com) offers opportunities to walk through the woodland, while having contact with experts not only of the human kind, but also the canine kind, as you learn about eco-sustainable farming methods and find some of those highly prized white truffles. Local tour guide **Sara Morini** provides in-depth tours of the San Miniato area, adding knowledge and flair to our visit.



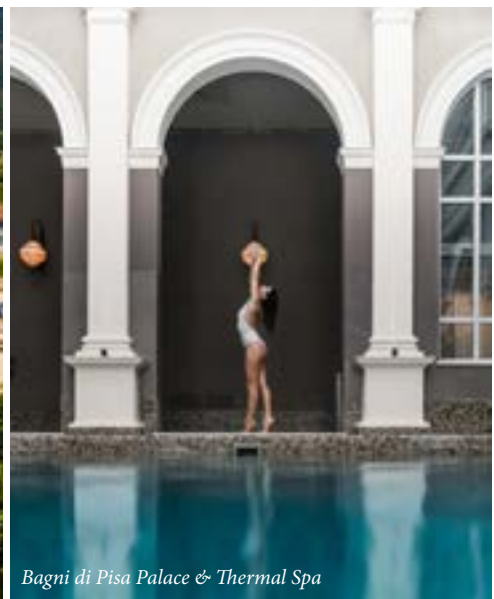
Borgo Colleoli



Le Palaie



Villa Scorzi



Bagni di Pisa Palace & Thermal Spa

Local tour operator **Arianna & Friends** (www.ariannandfriends.com) guides wedding guests through just about every local culinary experience imaginable in the hills near Pisa and Volterra: not only cooking classes with a variety of focal ingredients, but also the opportunity for wine tasting, food and wine tours, personalised chef services, and much more besides. The food experiences are matched with a range of venues, complimentary services, and the sheer delight of spending quality time together.

With a focus on the green economy, **Belvedere Spa** (belvedere.peccioli.net) is an innovative concept, where

a landfill site becomes the backdrop for art, landscapes, cultural activities and learning centres. Within what is called the “Green Triangle”, couples can tie the knot in a civil ceremony within an unconventional context. Works by renowned artists such as David Tremlett bring together the apparently separate worlds of natural beauty and human refuse in a positive experience. This is an adventure that will not be forgotten in a hurry. The nearby old hilltop town of **Peccioli** (www.comune.peccioli.pi.it), with its narrow winding streets, bell towers, hill views of olive groves and vineyards, both directly contrasts with and complements the modern art installations

that are displayed across the urban centre. Alicja Kwade and Patrick Tuttofuoco are the artists behind the vibrant permanent artistic works, whilst the decorated house fronts bear the signature of David Tremlett. Don't miss Palazzo Senza Tempo with contemporary viewpoint affording vast vistas.

Le Palaie (www.lepalaie.it) is an extensive wine estate and it is exactly the sounds, sights and indeed smells of such a splendid location that make it such a one-of-a-kind wedding venue. The cavernous wine cellar, the terrace perched on the hillside, not forgetting the large pool, are all areas that are available to guests. Naturally there is also

a range of accommodation, which ensures an equal balance of privacy and togetherness for the wedding party.

Lying between the Pisan hills and the Tyrrhenian Sea, layers of history are incorporated within the buildings and lands of **Villa Scorzi** (www.villascorzi.com), with its gardens, grotto and fully renovated outbuildings. The ambience is a mix of colours, perfumes, locations, views - all of which are centred on the land and its produce. Licensed to conduct marriage civil ceremonies, ample sleeping facilities and indoor and outdoor large-scale event options make Villa Scorzi an ideal venue for weddings.

Castel Monastero wins the Amour Forum “Most Romantic Resort” Award 2022



An 11th-century village in the Tuscan countryside, just 23 kilometres from Siena, has been awarded the “Most Romantic Resort in Europe” Award 2022 by Amour Forum, “The Home of Romance Travel” via its “Love Travel Awards” programme. That medieval village is **Castel Monastero** (www.castelmonastero.com), with 74 bedrooms/suites and the separate Villa Lavanda.

Amour Forum aims to give the global romance travel community a dedicated space, in which it can bring together the very best in service providers for that specific community. In seeking that perfect combination of ambience, facilities and service, Amour Forum found it all at Castel Monastero.

With its variety of sleeping options, courtyards, gardens, two restaurant options (Con-

trada and La Cantina), sports activities, in-room catering, pool, tennis courts and many other facilities and services, in addition to its stunning location, Castel Monastero certainly has the romance factor. Over and above being the perfect getaway for special times, Castel Monastero is also a fabulous wedding and events venue, with all the services necessary for the perfectly romantic event of a lifetime.

Over 1,000 square metres of dedicated spa space is undoubtedly one of the romantic highlights of this venue, with sensorial showers, a high-density salt bath, saunas, Jacuzzi and Kneipp therapy all on site.

The Amour Love Travel Awards represent a badge of honour for both the people and the places that ignite and reinvent romance travel. Votes are received by the travel community, for both planners and properties, which challenge traditional outlooks and exceed clients’ expectations in ways that truly matter. Castel Monastero has done just that, in more ways than one, and built a creatively romantic environment that is highly appreciated.

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Il nuovo salotto di Firenze.

One of the most stunning buildings in the city, **Palazzo Portinari Salviati**, houses **Chic Nonna Firenze** with its four distinct settings: **Salotto Portinari Bistrot**, a large and comfortable area offering cuisine inspired by Tuscan and Italian tradition, **Eye Cocktail Bar**, **Sala Beatrice** and the Michelin starred restaurant **Chic Nonna di Vito Mollica**.

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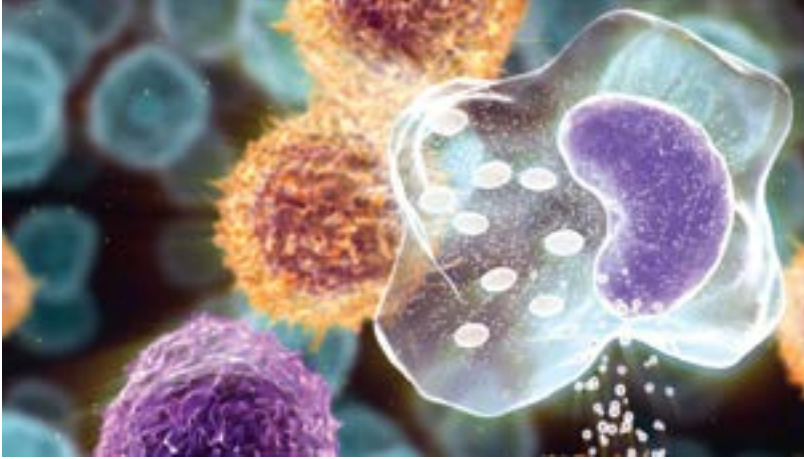
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Florence is back on track with a rapidly resurging congressional and events industry.

A city for conferences

MAGAZINE

DESTINATION FLORENCE CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

Post-Covid congressional tourism has taken a definite turn for the better. In 2022, the sector was back up to an estimated value of over 70 million euro, and 2023 is shaping up to become an exciting year for Florence as a city for conferences.

Last year, 100 congresses, conventions and national and international events were held in the Tuscan capital at Firenze Fiera, Palazzo dei Congressi, Palazzo degli Affari and the Fortezza da Basso. **40,000 delegates** arrived at Firenze Fiera, bringing an increase in **revenue of 59%** compared to 2021 for Firenze Fiera, with a significant knock-on effect for economic, social and cultural factors.

Working as a team, Firenze Convention Bureau, Firenze Fiera and Kenes Group focused on winning the **Annual Congress of the International Union of Microbiological Societies (IUMS 2024)**, a five-

day event uniting 500 microbiologists. **Professors Rino Rappuoli**, the president of IUMS, and **Mariagrazia Pizza** played a key role in securing this high-level medical meeting. Both were recognized for their efforts at the latest Florence Ambassador Award ceremony.

In March 2024, 4,000 delegates from around the world will come to Florence to take part in the 17th edition of the **International Conference on Advanced Technologies & Treatments for Diabetes (ATTD 2024)**. This is another appointment that was put in place by the Firenze Convention Bureau, Firenze Fiera and Kenes Group.

In 2025, the **European Society for Blood and Marrow Transplantation (EBMT 2025)** will return to Florence for the second time. The medical and scientific congress is expect to bring 6,500 delegates to

the city. Vital to gaining this commitment was the collaboration between Firenze Convention Bureau and Firenze Fiera, with the additional assistance of Dr. **Riccardo Saccardi**, director of the Marrow Transplant Centre associated with Cell Therapy and Transfusion Medicine at Florence's Careggi University Hospital, a Florence Ambassador Award winner and member of the Advisory Board of the Florence Academic Leadership Programme. In 2025, there will also be the **15th Conference of the International Society for**

the Low Vision Research and Rehabilitation (ISLRR 2025), with 1,000 delegates. This bid was assured by the collaborative skills of Firenze Convention Bureau, Firenze Fiera and the OIC Group. Efforts on many different levels and by multiple players are shaping Florence and the surrounding territory as a destination venue for academic and medical/scientific congresses and conventions, further establishing the city's reputation as a capable and welcoming host city.

Conferences at Firenze Fiera in 2022

100 congresses, conventions + national and international events

40,000 delegates

70 million euro (est.) in revenue for the destination



Dario Nardella

Alessandra Petrucci

A strategy to attract conferences

An **Advisory Board of the Florence Academic Leadership Programme (FALP)** has been established. Chaired by Florence's mayor, Dario Nardella, the goal is to up the quality of congresses that choose Florence as their event venue. The list of conferences booked to be held in the Tuscan capital over the next few years is impressive and provides a superb foundation for the board's future efforts.

Investment in human capital with the scientific and academic communities marks the way forward in attracting international events that choose Florence as a venue for their events. Mayor Nardella notes that success in attracting large-scale events to Florence results in a boost to the economy, which permits strategic scheduling on a long-term basis. Via the vital work of the

city ambassadors, some of whom make up the Advisory Board, energies can be grouped together to further **elevate the caliber of congresses, conventions and events that the city aims to attract**, which ultimately is to the advantage of all involved. The city's administration has a central role to play in this endeavour.

"The research and education system is crucial in determining

the future prospects of our city," explains the President of the University of Florence, **Alessandra Petrucci**. "Reinforcing research and creating professionalism as a driving force contributes towards making Florence a preferred destination for conference tourism."

The creation of an advisory board is another step in ensuring Florence's role as a major player on the international circuit of con-

gressional venues, which then provides positive ramifications for the city as a whole. A synergic relationship between the city council and the University of Florence is a vitally important strategic step forward in fortifying the city's attractiveness as a top venue.

Nicola Testai, CEO of OIC Group, was appointed as a new member of the IAPCO Council on February 9, following the IAPCO General Assembly (International Association of Professional Congress Organisers), which recently took place in Jerusalem.



IAPCO unites professional congress, conference and events organizers across the world, ensuring that rigorous standards are upheld by its members via continued training and development, quality monitoring and reviews through the IAPCO Quality Committee.

Nicola Testai is currently the only Italian member of the IAPCO council, which highlights Italy's opportunity to demonstrate the professionalism and competence

of its conference organizers. "It's very important that Italy has regained a position at the highest levels of professional congress organizers internationally," comments Testai.

"I am honoured to be part of this important international association and I shall try to contribute in the best possible way to continue IAPCO's objectives, along with the other council members of the team," remarks Nicola Testai. "It's fundamental that we continue to

reunite and to prove once again the resilience of the events industry, regardless of the unstable economic period that we've been experiencing for a while across the world."

With an entrepreneurial background, Testai has been at the head of OIC Group for 10 years.

OIC Group is one of the first PCOs in Italy, whose core business is event and conference organization and management.

With an active role in the world of international associations, Nicola is also Vice-President and PCO representative for Federcongressi&eventi, the top-level national association that represents public and private companies, which carry out activities connected to congresses, conferences and seminars and events.

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Community first

CEO and Founder of **The Social Hub**, **Charlie MacGregor** speaks about his ethos to put people at the center of his successful hospitality brand.

How did the idea for The Social Hub come about?

It came about through student housing, which I used to build in the UK. I moved to the Netherlands and saw a massive demand for it there: European student housing was non-existent at the time. I also realized that the industry didn't treat students very well. The reputation of students, especially for our generation, was along the lines of *they're just going to destroy the place*. Today's students are not like that: their workload is huge and yet they perceive themselves as the lucky ones. **We wanted to create a space where people could meet together and share ideas.** We took our cue from Facebook, which came not from a university so much as from the dorms. We connected the professional local community with the student community, so the atmosphere is much more like real life.

Tell us about your decision to rebrand TSH from The Student Hotel to The Social Hub, whether this is a shift in ethos as well as identity, and what it actually entails for TSH's daily activities.

We have changed our name to The Social Hub to put social at the heart of everything we do. Now more than ever, there's a need for genuine connection and positive change. Together, we believe, we create a better society. The Social Hub sees our community through a new lens. Not only as students, travelers, digital nomads or entrepreneurs, but as one community with a shared mindset. The new brand identity has been created to amplify The Social Hub's hybrid hospitality offering, reflecting guests' needs for flexible spaces that allow people to **connect and find community**, whether they are getting to know a new city or building a business network.

One of The Social Hub's steps towards creating better societies is our events program, which aims to improve social connections and **features 200 events per month** across the portfolio, including learning experiences, awareness days, networking events, sports classes, as well as a wellbeing and mental health program and more.

In what ways can a market leader like TSH impact a city's tourism policies and effect change for the hospitality industry on a local level?

By redefining hospitality with a new hybrid model, as The Student Hotel, the spaces welcomed travellers, entrepreneurs and students all in the same place. By welcoming a diverse range of visitors who were in the city for learning, work, fun and exploring, the hubs act as a social connection point to the cities. As The Social Hub has matured, so has its mission to create more positive impact. For example, the company is now working with local municipalities on its **green energy transition**, piloting projects on retrofitting existing properties with energy saving solutions. As a market leader, we feel it's our role to be transparent about our sustainability and impact goals and achievements. This year, we will set our science-based targets and next month we will launch our impact report from the past 12 months. Like others, we know we have areas to work on, but we will share our journey on how to accelerate these and aim to net to zero by 2030.

In addition, local connectors in each hub work to create a publicly accessible events programme. For example, in Florence we hosted an art gallery exhibition about love and inclusivity by the well-known photographer Sara Lorusso, talks about Black History Month by Giorgia Insalata, and organized a vintage shopping market. Because of our unique offer and with the connectors really involved in finding and sharing hidden gems, we also attract tourists who are interested in discovering the "real" city and seeing something different. By offering a different creative events and suggestions programme, we attract curious and interesting visitors to our host cities.

We keep seeing changes at TSH Florence Belfiore as construction continues to speed up. How is the project proceeding and do you have an opening date yet?

The project is progressing well and our vision for this hub is now really taking shape. We are still around 18 months away – mid-summer 2024 is our aim. It will be our biggest asset in Italy so far and it's at a very exciting stage in the development. We are designing a rooftop park that's open to the public with a swimming pool, an outdoor event space, an urban garden, and we will be offering a lot of different sports facilities too. It's going to be a cool place to hang out for our students, guests and local community – with over 650m² of coworking for local entrepreneurs.



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