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Destination Florence

JUBILEE/ ASSESSING JUBILEE 2025 AND
PILGRIMAGES IN THE CITY'S SURROUNDINGS

ANNIVERSARY/ GLOBAL TRAVEL LEADER TAUCK
CELEBRATES 100 YEARS IN FLORENCE

HERITAGE/ VASARI CORRIDOR AND ROYAL
APARTMENTS AT PALAZZO PITTI REOPEN

INTERVIEW/ CEO OF STARHOTELS, ELISABETTA
FABRI, DISCUSSES CURRENT STATE OF HOSPITALITY



**FLORENCE FACES
FUTURE**

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cover photo: Marco Badiani



The Watcher, Emanuele Giannelli.
Basilica of San Lorenzo



In a world tourism context in which Florence continues to be one of the most sought-after destinations, our role and task, as **Fondazione Destination Florence**, is to effectively contribute to an increasingly sustainable tourist growth, enhancing the territory in all its facets, and distributing tourist flows across time and space, so that the experience of those who visit our city is authentic and enriching with a quality daily life for those who live here.

This new issue of DF Magazine reflects this vision. We have dedicated the opening pages to the **Jubilee Year**, an event of global importance that will involve millions of pilgrims. The entire metropolitan area of Florence, with its religious and spiritual itineraries, has the opportunity to be a point of reference for this tourist sector, with a view to welcoming and discovering the historical and cultural roots of our territory.

Still on the subject of excellence, we tell the story of the **centenary celebrations of Tauck**, a leading company in the luxury travel sector that has chosen Florence as the stage to celebrate its history. A strong sign of our attractiveness and competence in the high-end tourism sector, this is further confirmed by the new hotel openings in the city and the contribution of **Elisabetta Fabri**, recently at the helm of the Italian Association of Confindustria Hotels. With her, we explore the **future of Florentine and national hospitality**.

We then dedicate our focus on a sector in which Florence and Tuscany have long been leaders, and which for us represents a quality sector and a driving force for the promotion of less traveled itineraries, thus expanding the offer and contributing to the delocalization of flows: **destination weddings**. The Tuscan data for 2024 confirms that our territory is increasingly coveted, and that this industry is constantly evolving. We present the important elements that have emerged thanks to our collaboration with the Tourist Studies Center, to better understand the dynamics and growth opportunities of the sector.

The Foundation, with its private partners that are leading components of the tourist economic scene, also has the key role of specialized consultant towards the governance of the city and the territory. Florence is preparing for the upcoming tourist season, with a continuous dialogue between tradition and future, and constant attention to respecting and protecting the city that we love and that, as a **World Heritage Site**, generously offers its history and authenticity to the world and to the people who choose to live and visit here.

With this magazine, we want to offer you our vision. Enjoy reading!

Laura Masi

President of Fondazione Destination Florence

As the official Destination Management Organization (DMO) of the City of Florence and the Metropolitan City, its Founding Members, Fondazione Destination Florence is dedicated to promoting sustainable tourism that respects the city's identity and makes it welcoming for both tourists and residents. With 30 years of experience, the Foundation serves as a key facilitator, connecting public institutions, private enterprises, universities, and cultural organizations to foster opportunities and address the evolving challenges of Florence's tourism sector.

The Foundation's unique public-private composition includes over 150 local businesses and tourism operators, enabling effective collaboration to achieve shared objectives. Through its specialized divisions, the Foundation attracts high-quality tourism by promoting international congresses, destination weddings, and sports events. Additionally, it manages the flow of individual visitors and temporary residents, such as international students and professionals.

Assessing Jubilee 2025 and pilgrimages around Florence



The sacred event commenced on Christmas Eve, December 24, 2025, when the **Holy Door** of St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican was opened, thus commencing the **Pilgrims of Hope Jubilee** that will be held until the Epiphany on January 6, 2026. Consisting of festivities, cultural experiences, and spiritual activities, the jubilee is expected to attract around 32 million pilgrims to Rome, with an undoubted crossover to Florence. The celebrations centre around the Vatican and the Eternal City, but museums, churches and religious routes outside the city prove popular for pilgrims also. Here, we take you through the attractions in Florence and beyond for visitors keen to explore the rich art and history in relation to the Catholic Church, all while **exploring Tuscany in a sustainable, respectful way.**



Montesenario - Ph.Vignaccia76

Florence and Fiesole

The Jubilee will be celebrated in the following churches in the **Dioceses of Florence and Fiesole**, where pilgrims will be able to receive the gift of indulgence: **Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore** (Florence), **Santissima Annunziata** (Florence), **Santa Verdiana** (Castelfiorentino), **Santa Maria** (Impruneta), **Santa Maria** (Montesenario), **Maria Santissima delle Grazie** (San Giovanni Valdarno), **Madonna delle Grazie al Sasso** (Santa Brigida), **Santa Maria Assunta in Cielo** (Vallombrosa), **San Niccolò** (Radda in Chianti) and **Santa Maria della Neve e San Domenico** (Pratovecchio).

The Jerusalem of San Vivaldo

The picturesque town of **Montaione** grants wide-ranging views over the **Valdelsa Empoiese** plain. Here, you'll find **The Holy Mount of San Vivaldo**, a sacred site that has become known as the Jerusalem of San Vivaldo given that it reproduces the sites of the Holy City on a smaller scale. The Franciscan complex was created in the woods where the blessed Vivaldo Stricchi lived his life as a hermit at the beginning of the 14th century. In 1320, a small church was erected at the site of an oak tree, inside of which the body of Vivaldo was found. It was later enlarged and passed to **Franciscan friars** in 1497 who built a monastery. The Holy Mount was built next to this between 1500 and 1515, designed by Father Tommaso from Florence. **Composed of 34 chapels, of which only 18 remain today**, you can admire spectacular groups of statues and reliefs in polychrome terracotta, depicting episodes from the life of Christ.



Pistoia: the Santiago of Italy

Since 1145, Pistoia has been a point of reference in the cult of **San Giacomo il Maggiore** due to the presence of the precious relic of the skull of the Saint, brought by Bishop Atto from Santiago de Compostela. On the occasion of the Jubilee Year, pilgrims will be keen to visit the relic in a reliquary made by Lorenzo Ghiberti in 1407 kept in the Cathedral of San Zeno, in the Chapel of the Judgement. In the same chapel, you can admire the Silver Altar, a masterpiece of goldsmithing. The **Cammino di San Jacopo** puts Pistoia at the heart of a system that connects Tuscan routes to international ones, such as the **Via Romea Strata** and the **Via Romea Germanica**. Pilgrims can admire the artistic, natural and religious treasures of Tuscany before continuing to the port of Livorno, embarking for Barcelona, and following the Catalan Cammino Jacopei to reach **Santiago de Compostela** in keeping with the centuries-old tradition.



Via Francigena

Connecting **Canterbury and Rome**, pilgrims travel across the limestone traces through spectacular landscapes, taking in the historical and artistic beauties along the way. The 400-kilometre route is divided into 16 stages and has been undertaken by pilgrims, merchants and travellers for centuries, passing through forests, hills and medieval villages. It dates to 990, when Sigerico, the Archbishop of Canterbury, went to Rome to receive the pallium, the symbol of the pastoral mission, from the Pope. On the way back, he noted the stops of his journey in a travel diary, granting the possibility of reconstructing the route.



History of the Jubilee

Pope Boniface VIII called the first Jubilee in 1300, with the frequency of Holy Years having changed over time, varying from every 25 to 100 years, as well as the declaration of extraordinary jubilees. The last jubilee was celebrated in 2020, announced by Pope John Paul II. The Holy Year originally consisted of a pilgrimage to the **Roman Basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul**, with other symbols added later, such as the **Holy Door**. Those who participate in the Holy Year are granted a plenary indulgence. Information on Jubilee events can be found at www.giubileo2025.diocesifirenze.it

Global travel leader Tauck celebrates 100 years



Jennifer Tombaugh



February 3-6 saw festivities in Florence to mark the 100th anniversary of the renowned guided travel company, **Tauck**. More than 700 employees, family members, directors, board members and sponsoring partners gathered to attend meetings, daily sightseeing excursions, gala evening events and an array of volunteer activities, travelling from 32 countries and assembling in 13 hotels across the city. **Fondazione Destination Florence** collaborated with Tauck in bringing the event to Florence, assisting in the curation of spectacular celebrations to mark the occasion. The Foundation shares Tauck's vision for 'People, Places, and Planet', the motto that summarizes the commitment to inspire sustainable travel experiences, preserve cultural heritage and support local communities, a message that is in line with the Foundation's **Enjoy, Respect, Firenze** campaign, shared with all participants. **Tauck CEO Jennifer Tombaugh** explains more about Tauck's high-end travel operation.

Tauck is celebrating its 100th anniversary in Florence in 2025, an extraordinary milestone for a family-owned company spanning four generations. What was Arthur Tauck Sr's original vision when he founded the company in 1925, and how does that vision continue to inspire and shape Tauck today?

Arthur Tauck Sr. envisioned hosting a "congenial party" of culturally inquisitive travelers, and treating them to authentic, enriching and memorable experiences that would be difficult (if not impossible) to arrange independently. Arthur's vision also included impeccable service delivered by a knowledgeable, expert guide and the ease and convenience of paying a single price. Most

importantly, Arthur believed firmly in always doing the right thing for his guests, his suppliers and others. All of those elements can still be found in Tauck's product offerings today, and while those fundamentals have remained steadfast, our actual product portfolio would be unrecognizable to Arthur today. In fact, we offer more than 170 land journeys, river cruises, small ship ocean cruises, safaris and family travel adventures to 70+ countries and all seven continents. For all that has changed, however, we are still governed by a resolute commitment to "do the right thing."

Tauck has been recognized in Travel + Leisure magazine's "World's Best Awards" for 27 consecutive years. How has the com-

pany managed to maintain such a high standard of excellence and innovation in the competitive travel industry?

Underlying everything we do is a shared sense of purpose – to enhance our guests' lives by providing truly enriching, truly memorable travel experiences. We recognize that achieving that goal requires the combined efforts of what we call our "One Global Family," comprised of our incredible employees, our valued global network of supplier-partners, and our wonderful travel advisor partners. We are all committed to going the extra mile for the most important members of our "One Global Family" – our amazing guests who entrust us with their travel dreams.

Luxury travel is often defined by its exclusivity and attention to detail. What does luxury mean to Tauck today, and how do you balance tradition and innovation to create meaningful experiences for your guests?

Luxury can mean very different things to different people, and we actually avoid the term (in part because it can be synonymous with frivolous or overpriced). Rather than attaching the "luxury" label to our products, or engaging in what Arthur Tauck Sr. called "exorbitant advertising" or "high pressure schemes," we focus intently on creating the very best travel experiences possible. That means a year or more of research and development for each new itinerary—and at least two practice "dry run" training trips – before our first guests travel with us on a new land journey or cruise. Our strategy has always been to invest heavily in the quality of our products (rather than in their marketing), and to rely on strong word-of-mouth endorsements and the loyalty of returning guests who travel with us year after year. It's what Arthur Tauck called the "slower and



more substantial method of building a following.” And for the past 100 years, it’s an approach that has worked very well for us!

Florence holds a special place in Tauck’s history, having been featured on your itineraries since 1993. Why did you choose Florence to celebrate this landmark anniversary, and how does the city’s Renaissance legacy resonate with Tauck’s journey and values?

Our company operates in more than 70 countries worldwide and on all seven continents, and we could have hosted our 100th celebration anywhere – and in fact, we considered many of the world’s top destinations when we first began thinking about this milestone. However, it was Florence’s rich history that really resonated with the Tauck family and our executive team, and compelled us to host our celebration here. Florence, of course, is the birthplace of the Renaissance that lifted Europe out of the Dark Ages and the Black Death and into a new age of humanism and breakthroughs in art, architecture, science, literature and more. And thanks to the patronage of the Medici family, creativity and innovation flourished in the Renaissance. In a very similar way, our family-owned company has emerged from the challenge of a global pandemic and is ready for unprecedented success as we enter our second hundred years. The theme of our event, “Destined to Flourish,” perfectly captures the wonder of the Renaissance and our optimism and excitement as we enter our second hundred years.

How did the collaboration with Fondazione Destination Florence influence the choice of this destination and the success of your 100th-anniversary celebrations?

We’ve operated tours in Florence for decades, and we knew that by hosting our 100th celebration here, we’d benefit greatly from strong



local support. Fondazione Destination Florence was incredibly helpful in creating connections with many local partners, including associations for the volunteer projects our employees are working on during the event, and partners like Firenze Fiera and many others. And of course, our wonderful hotel partners, restaurants, attractions and more. We’ve worked closely with so many of them for years and they provided us with immeasurable help as well! To all, we say a truly heartfelt “Grazie mille!”

Sustainability is increasingly important in the travel industry. How is Tauck integrating sustainable practices into its operations and itineraries, and how does this approach impact your 100th-anniversary celebrations in Florence?

Our commitment to supporting a thriving world is evident across the globe: on Europe’s rivers, where we’ve replaced single-use plastic water bottles with reusable insulated bottles; in Tanzania, where we’ve helped install 40 rainwater harvesting systems that provide safe, clean drinking water to more than 1,000 residents; and here in Florence, where our employees are donating more than 1,400

hours of volunteer work to local projects and organizations, and where we’ve also helped fund the restoration of the Madre Terra inlaid marble floor in the Baptistery of Florence. We’re entering our second century rededicated to having a positive impact—environmentally, socially and economically – on the people and places we visit, and in the places where we live and work.

What message would you like to send to your guests, partners, and employees as you reflect on this extraordinary milestone and prepare for the next chapter in Tauck’s journey?

Our message would be one of profound gratitude. For 100 years, we’ve delighted our guests with meaningful and memorable travel experiences, and we recognize that our success has been due to the combined efforts of many. It all comes back to our “One Global Family.” We’re grateful to our team of dedicated Tauck employees, our countless supplier-partners around the world, and our fantastic network of trusted travel advisors. And of course, we’re so incredibly grateful to our wonderful, loyal guests.

Fondazione Destination Florence thanks the partners who contributed synergistically to this memorable event for the sector: Firenze Fiera, where the main event took place, Il Mercato Centrale, prestigious hotels in the area, Exclusive Connection Tours, Affresco Events, Baspi Bus, Officina de’ Tornabuoni, and many others. Fondazione Destination Florence also assisted in curating volunteer experiences such as with Angeli del Bello Firenze, Made in Sipario, and Opera del Duomo that were carried out by Tauck participants and brought real value to the city.



Events in and around Florence

The brighter days see us out and about enjoying the city and surroundings as an ever-ample events calendar keeps us busy, with unmissable exhibitions and a wide array of cultural happenings.

EXHIBITIONS

Tracey Emin – Sex and Solitude

Palazzo Strozzi hosts a large-scale exhibition dedicated to British artist Tracey Emin, curated by Arturo Galansino. A selection of historical and recent works conveys the controversial and lacerating aesthetic of an artist who has most characterized the image of women and the relationship between body and existence in contemporary art over the last 30 years.

March 16-July 20 / www.palazzostrozzi.it

Caravaggio and the 20th century – Roberto Longhi, Anna Banti

Villa Bardini hosts an intriguing exhibition dedicated to the art historian and writer/translator and the circle of artists and intellectuals they brought together. 40-plus paintings, drawings, photographs and documents include masterpieces like Caravaggio's *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* and the *Apostles* by Jusepe de Ribera.

March 27-July 20 / www.villabardini.it

Thomas J Price

A large-scale figurative sculpture by the internationally renowned artist will be placed in piazza della Signoria, standing 3.6 metres tall in dialogue with the historical works. Simultaneously, Museo Novecento and Palazzo Vecchio dive deeper into his artistic career, with references to ancient, classical and neoclassical sculpture.

From March 14 / www.museonovecento.it

The Sky Above Florence

Giant sculptures by Emanuele Giannelli return to Florence following the success of *Mr. Arbitrium* in 2022. The dual-site exhibition consists of *The Watcher* beside the Basilica of San Lorenzo and two *Korf17* sculptures framing the entrance of Palazzo Strozzi Sacratì, the headquarters of the Tuscany regional government.

Until May 15 / www.regione.toscana.it



Boy Bitten by a Lizard, Caravaggio

FESTIVALS

Florence Korea Film Fest

Cinema La Compagnia hosts the 23rd edition of the popular festival that this year features an homage to director Na Hong-jin through masterclasses and screenings (also available online). Highlighting the best in Korea's cinema scene, guest of honour Hwang Jung-min forms part of the programme, receiving a dedicated retrospective.

March 20-29 / www.koreafilmfest.com

Florence Cocktail Week

Quality mixology takes centre stage for a week dedicated to the best of the city's bars. With a focus on trends like low and no alcohol drinks, it's a mainstay on the city's social scene.

April 7-13 / www.florencecocktailweek.it

CONCERTS

87th Festival del Maggio

Audiences at Teatro del Maggio are set to see spectacular performances as part of its long-running and highly anticipated cultural programming. From Strauss' *Salome* to Roberto Bolle in *Caravaggio*, esteemed performers come to the acclaimed stage.

April 13-July 1 / www.maggiofiorentino.com

SPORT

Half Marathon

The streets of Florence are filled with dedicated runners as the 41st edition of the 21-kilometre race through the Renaissance city takes enthusiasts through striking sites and picturesque spots as they undertake the impressive feat. A non-competitive 10.5km and a Charity Walk also take place for those keen to take part.

April 6 / www.halfmarathonfirenze.it



Tracey Emin



Florence Cocktail Week



TRADITIONS

Scoppio del Carro

The traditional “explosion of the cart” is a highly-anticipated historical Florentine event that sees the *Brindellone* cart escorted by costumed-paraders, musicians and flag-wavers to Piazza del Duomo. Pulled by two white oxen, it’s placed between the Baptistery and the Cathedral on Easter Sunday, where a fuse is lit sending a “dove” flying into the cathedral and back, where it ignites a firework display to the delight of all those assembled.



MIDA

MICE

MIDA

The latest Mostra Internazionale dell’Artigianato arts and crafts fair returns to the Fortezza da Basso, with the international handicraft exhibition showcasing Made in Italy heritage and identity worldwide, blending together a variety of artefacts, side events and live experiential workshops with more than 500 exhibitors and a strong international focus.

April 25-May 1 / www.mostrartigianato.it

Didacta Italia

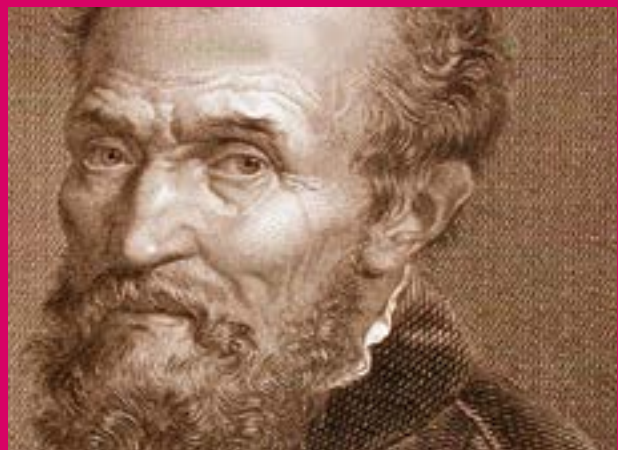
Fortezza da Basso hosts the fair dedicated to education and innovation in education systems, encouraging dialogue between decision-makers and the market. Along with training events for educators, the event features the latest news in the school sector.

March 12-14 / www.fieradidacta.indire.it/en

Becycle

Following its debut coinciding with the Tour de France departure from Florence last year, the second edition of Becycle comes to Stazione Leopolda. Organized by Pitti Immagine, the event is dedicated to cycling and bike tourism, with three days of presentations by industry experts and champions.

March 15-17 / www.becycle.pittimmagine.com



Michelangelo 1475-2025

550 years have passed since the birth of the Renaissance sculptor, painter, architect and poet. The Accademia Gallery and other venues are set to host a series of initiatives and events to mark the occasion, starting from March 6 in honour of when the *maestro* was born in Caprese, Florence, in 1475.



Vasari Corridor reopens

Having been closed since 2016, the 750-metre-long overhead walkway was reopened to the public on December 21, 2024. Restored in its entirety, visitors can now wander the atmospheric corridor that weaves from the Uffizi and over the Ponte Vecchio before exiting next to the Buontalenti Grotto in the Boboli Gardens.

Returned to its original bareness, the Vasari Corridor is no longer lined with portraits, but can be experienced in line with its initial purpose: to provide undisturbed passage to Florence's ruling Medici family. The "new" Vasari Corridor now has improved accessibility, emergency exits, low-energy lighting and video surveillance.

Designed by **Giorgio Vasari** to allow the Grand Dukes to move safely from their private residence in Palazzo Pitti to the seat of government in Palazzo Vecchio, this overhead walkway remains unique and was built according to the wishes of **Duke Cosimo I de' Medici in 1565** on the occasion of his son Francesco's marriage to Joanna of Austria. Built in just five months, the corridor runs above the

city streets, along and over the Arno, enters buildings, goes around the Torre de' Mannelli and tops the Church of Santa Felicità, in a succession of unique panoramic views. Both the Uffizi and the Vasari Corridor were part of a wider project aimed at redeveloping the impoverished area between the Palazzo Vecchio and the Arno. It was inspired by the passageway between the Vatican and Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome, which saved the life of Pope Clement VII, born Giulio de' Medici, who managed to escape from the army of Charles V during the sack of Rome in 1527, as well as the Bramante passageway, built in 1505, to connect the Vatican Apostolic Palaces with the Casino del Belvedere of Innocent VIII.

The restoration plan was presented in February 2019 after 18 months of research. Costing in the region of 10 million euro, including a one-million-dollar donation made by U.S. entrepreneur **Skip Avansino** in 2023, the actual work began in 2022 and ended in recent weeks.

Ponte Vecchio to be restored



The first restoration of this type carried out on the bridge, extensive technical works are set to bring one of the most symbolic monuments of the city back to its former splendour. A bridge that has resisted floods, fires, and war, it will now receive a complex restoration to enhance its features. While it has no stability issues, it is suffering the usual phenomena related to the weather and river. Built in the early-mid 14th century and subject to various renovations and consolidations over the centuries, the works involve the restoration of the original materials and features present, such as the elevations, arches, abutments, wing walls, flooring and parapets, in order to guarantee their conservation over time.

Necessary works to improve the management of rainwater will also be carried out, while surfaces will be cleared of algae, moss, lichen and weeds. The pietra serena copings on the parapets will be restored, as will the stone flooring, and deteriorated, disintegrated or missing joints will be repaired.

Work on the flooring was carried out in October/November 2024, with the intervention relating to the piers and abutments of the bridge scheduled for summer 2025, and the elevations for summer 2026. The total cost is set to be 2 million euro, with support from the **Antinori family**.



1

1. King's studio
2. Red Hall
3. Green Hall
4. King's bedroom



2



3



4

The Royal Apartments reopen at Palazzo Pitti

On January 21, the Royal Apartments at Palazzo Pitti reopened following a five-year closure. The 14 palatial rooms on the first floor of the palace in the heart of the Oltrarno were home to the **Medici, Lorraine and Savoy** ruling families for three generations. One of the first residents of this wing was Grand Prince Ferdinando de' Medici, son of Grand Duke Cosimo III, in the second half of the 17th century, while the last resident, Vittorio Emanuele III of Savoy, left it to the State, along with the adjacent Boboli Gardens, in 1919.

Inaccessible since 2020 and after nine months of restoration, the Royal Apartments have undergone a complex conservation process by a multidisciplinary team of specialists. Meticulous attention

has been paid to every detail, from the ceilings to the floors, where carpets were removed to reveal a perfectly preserved parquet. In addition, the frescoes, stuccoes, carvings, silk wallpapers, draperies, paintings, furniture and ornaments were restored in depth. The decorative style of the apartments is "mixed", reflecting the tastes and periods of the personalities and dynasties that inhabited them over the centuries. The apartments are open to the public again every day, with guided tours every hour from 10am to 6pm.

Alessandra Griffo, curator of the Royal Apartments at Palazzo Pitti remarks: "Reopening the apartments allows us to recover the vision of Palazzo Pitti in its entirety, not as a collection of indepen-

dent museums but as a single palace. The work carried out respects the new layout in the 1990s, which used the 1911 inventory as a reference—the last to document the arrangement of these spaces, which were occasionally inhabited by the Savoy. Few changes have been made: some pieces have been rearranged and some paintings, otherwise kept in storage, have been introduced to better highlight the Medici era, when the apartment was inhabited by Grand Prince Ferdinando (1663-1713)."

Street Levels Gallery: contemporary urban art initiatives

The first contemporary urban art gallery in Florence, **Street Levels Gallery** (via Palazzuolo 74AR and via Melegnano 4R) and their wide-reaching projects have had a notable impact in redeveloping the area, improving its liveability and experience for both locals and visitors. Keen to know more about the gallery and the urban art movement, we spoke to the co-founder and director of Street Levels Gallery, **Sofia Bonacchi**, to find out more.



How and why did Street Levels Gallery come about?

The name Street Levels intends the levels of interaction between art, public spaces and exhibition spaces. The idea came about when the artists of 74 Art Studio conducted a kind of experiment in 2017, creating half gallery and half art studio and calling it Street Levels Gallery. For the first two years, they had a lot of exhibitions and began the first murals. I then joined in 2018/19 and by 2020 there was a lot of hype around the gallery in Florence. After the pandemic, we decided to rebuild everything. We restructured the gallery and started again from zero. Now, it's been almost 5 years since we restarted with a new team, and we have many urban art projects not only in Florence but in all of Tuscany and also outside the region. More than 50 murals have been carried out over the years, with 25 exhibitions, not only in the gallery, but also in various museums such as Museo Novecento, and in Venice, Follonica and Grosseto.

Street Levels recently opened a second space on via Melegnano. What are the hopes for the new space, and does it differ from the gallery on via Palazzuolo?

They are very different spaces, but they are also closely linked. When we opened the first gallery, we were all emerging in the sector, and it reflected what we were doing at that time. Now, the space is restrictive, because it's low and narrow, so we needed a new exhibition space that better reflected the heights Street Levels has now reached. We didn't want to abandon underground art, however, and so we chose this second location close to the first in order to show our public the two sides of the coin: the underground scene and a more traditional gallery dedicated to upper bracket art in a venue that's suited to exhibitions and also private events, while via Palazzuolo is a showcase for emerging and experimental artists.



What was the impact of the Palazzuolo Strada Aperta project?

When we arrived in via Palazzuolo 8 years ago, we realized that it was a street with many problems. The opportunity came about to take on the Palazzuolo Strada Aperta project in 2023, and it was something that we had always wanted to do. We began by asking local artists to create artworks on 10 shutters on stores along the street. The idea was, and still is, to use the shutter as a canvas and transform the whole Palazzuolo area, creating a corner of the city dedicated to urban art. Our intention was that it would incentivize locals, residents and tourists to come to via Palazzuolo and create a new beginning for the area. The first project was a great success, and so we decided to make it an annual festival. This year, we will bring forward the date - usually it's September - starting in June. We'll transform more shutters than previous editions and also carry out the project over a longer timeframe, with new works continually added, so there's a reason to return.

What was the intention behind the Sauro Papini Primary School project in Galluzzo?

It's an example of a truly successful regeneration project. The Sauro Papini building dates to the 1970s, and it was full of grey, cement blocks and not suited for young people. When asked to take on the project, we thought of Nulo, a Uruguayan artist who works a lot with colour. She filled the entire façade with warm colours like purple, orange, red and fuchsia. For me, it was surprising to see the reactions of the students—their happiness and pride to say that this is their school. It showed me, as it always does with murals, how artwork can completely revolutionise a space.

Tell us about your upcoming projects.

Something we're very proud of is our upcoming project in Montespertoli, a village in the province of Florence that up until now has been well known for wine and olive oil but less visited from an artistic point of view. It's a village that has dedicated itself to becoming a centre for urban art in Tuscany and has entrusted the project to us. Just 20 minutes from Florence, you'll be able to visit a little village where over 20 murals will transform the main two streets over the course of a number of years, in addition to the reconstruction of a public space that will be used for exhibitions, workshops, live painting and everything to do with contemporary arts.

The CEO of Starhotels, Elisabetta Fabri, was recently nominated president of AICA (Associazione Italiana Confindustria Alberghi), the federation for the hotel industry.

We discuss her career in hospitality and the state of tourism in Florence, a city where the tourism sector generates an income of 5 billion euros, equal to 12% of the city's GDP, employing over 30 thousand people across related industries. Starhotels is a Promoter Member of Fondazione Destination Florence.



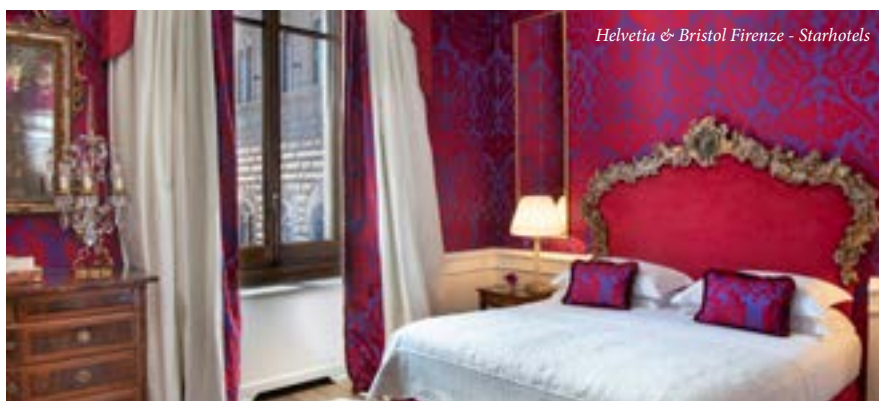
riches, inspired by the recognized values of Italianness: attention to beauty, attention to detail, friendliness and courtesy, as well as quality food and wine. It was during the first national lockdown that I decided to make "Made in Italy" no longer a choice but "the choice". Starhotels is committed to purchasing almost exclusively products manufactured in Italy, with preference for artisan companies. In 2023, we invested about 112 million a year in Made in Italy products and services for our hotels – about 90% of total spending.

In a sector traditionally dominated by men, how do you assess the evolution of the role of women in the hotel industry?

The environment in which I grew up has shaped my belief: a place where talent has always come first, without gender stereotypes, and where the female contribution to hospitality has been recognized as fundamental. I am very proud of the project we have created at Starhotels "A future as a STAR for female managers" launched in 2021, which has already brought several results in terms of female employment: in the two-year period 2022-2023, 30 promotions and hires were made on managerial roles. This has meant that today almost 60% of the management is made up of women.

You were recently appointed president of the Italian Association of Confindustria Alberghi: what are your main objectives, and what challenges await you in facing this role?

The presidency of Confindustria Alberghi represents an immense privilege and an extraordinary responsibility. One of my goals is to work in synergy with all the members of the association to face the challenges that await us, hoping for a political and economic context that is favourable to us. Tourism is the new manufacturing of Italy, it must be recognized and supported, starting from the development of human resources to attract young workers and give growth opportunities to those employed in hotels. In this ever-changing market, I feel that it is my task to focus on key issues such as the evolution of tourism profiles, promotion of the off-season, sustainable management of tourism flows and the adoption of ESG models. Added to this is the impact of new technologies, with particular attention to the growing role of artificial intelligence in redefining the dynamics and strategies of the sector.



Starhotels was founded in Florence, the only Italian hotel company with an international presence. What were the advantages and challenges in founding a chain of this level in the Tuscan capital?

The idea of creating Starhotels in Florence was thanks to the vision of my father, Ferruccio Fabri, who perceived the potential of the hotel sector in a city that's so rich in history and art. The enhancement of beauty, which is part of Italian culture, and even more so in the case of Florence, characterizes Starhotels: the group has grown thanks to important investments in renovations and strategic acquisitions that have enriched it in terms of quality and variety, reaching a portfolio of 30 hotels and luxury residences in the most beautiful destinations in Italy, Europe and the United States.

Florence, your hometown, has played a key role in your professional career. How has the Florentine culture, history and environment influenced your approach to hospitality?

I started my journey when I was only 17 years old, right here, in Florence, where I grew up breathing the beauty and culture that characterizes our city. As a Florentine, I appreciate things done in a workmanlike manner, a principle that I always follow even in hotels, with the attention of a Renaissance artisan workshop that has profoundly influenced one of my dearest initiatives: La Grande Bellezza - The Dream Factory. This contemporary patronage project,

promoted and conceived by Starhotels with the support of two important institutions in the protection of Italian craftsmanship of excellence, the OMA Association (Observatory of the Métiers d'Art) of Florence and the Cologni Foundation of the Métiers d'Art, as well as Gruppo Editoriale, aims to support the sector by employing artisans in the renovations of our hotels. For example, for the renovation of the recently reopened Hotel d'Inghilterra, we involved renowned artisan brands such as Dedar, Rubelli and Il Bronzetto, a prestigious workshop in the Florentine Oltrarno, and have also organized immersive experiences in the artisan workshops of various Italian cities.

Made in Italy is a brand recognized worldwide for its excellence and Starhotels contributes to strengthening and promoting this value in the hotel sector in New York, Paris, London. What are the strategies that the group intends to adapt to future trends and global challenges, while always maintaining the link with Italian hospitality and style?

Our identity is one hundred percent Italian, and our payoff "L'Italia nel cuore" (Italy in the heart) is the great responsibility that shapes our corporate identity and guides our work: the promise to be ambassadors of Made in Italy and to represent Italy in the best possible way, especially in our foreign structures. We want our hotels to reflect the love for our country and its



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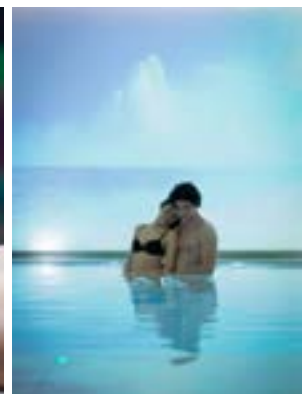
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Collegio Alla Querce, Auberge Resorts Collection opens in Florence



Auberge Resorts Collection, the award-winning portfolio of one-of-a-kind luxury hotels, resorts and residences, recently opened reservations for its new Florence hotel, **Collegio alla Querce**.

Named for the historic oaks that shade the original gardens, this 16th-century property rests on a hillside above Florence. Collegio alla Querce was a **center of learning** for more than 100 years. From 1868 onwards, Europe's brightest scholars flowed through the marble-lined hallways on their way to the library, theatre and chapel. Realizing the vision of Analjit Singh, owner and founder of Leeu Collection, the property's transformation into a contemporary 83-room hotel while preserving the original character was overseen by Esteva i Esteva, a Spanish father-son architectural firm. Local Florentine interior designers, ArchFlorence, brought the hotel's rooms, suites and public spaces to life, four dining venues including the extraordinary Bar Bertelli in the former principal's office, and a serene Auberge Spa, Aelia.

"We are delighted to expand our brand presence in Europe with the debut of Collegio alla Querce, our first property in Italy," said **Christian Clerc**, President and CEO, Auberge Resorts Collection, and who forms part of the Board of Directors of Fondazione Destination Florence. "Florence is one of Europe's most historic and treasured cities, and Collegio alla Querce, with its rich history and character, is the perfect addition to our one-of-a-kind portfolio. Collegio alla Querce has long been a Florence icon and an integral part of the fabric of this globally beloved city. We look forward to welcoming the local community and guests to this extraordinary property, where they can experience the best of Tuscan culture, gastronomy, and Auberge's singular hospitality."

Expansive lawns cascade through historic terraced gardens, all restored to their full glory by landscape designer Franchesca Watson. Heading indoors, the harmonious symmetry of the gardens is framed by soaring windows and reflected in the design of the 66 Guest and Estate Rooms, 16 Suites and the showstopping 2,300-square-foot Quercia Suite.



Destination restaurant **La Gamella** presents seasonal Italian classics for breakfast, lunch and dinner. **The Chef's Table** is a convivial space to graze, engage with the chefs' artistry and learn through cooking masterclasses. The atrium-inspired **Conservatorio** offers all-day dining, transitioning from morning coffee and cafe-style lunches to an intimate evening space. Designed for all-day alfresco lingering, poolside restaurant and bar **Café Focolare** serves Florence's famed panini beneath a vine-covered trellis. The nightly star of the show is **Bar Bertelli**, once the headmaster's office and now serving hand-rolled Italian cigars, cocktails and bar bites inspired by the distant lands explored in the school's old history texts. A haven for rejuvenation, **Aelia** is the hotel's Auberge Spa, which honours the vineyards, olive groves and abundance of fragrant herbs that thrive in Tuscany.

Unique venues offer elegant spaces for every occasion indoors and out, whether a lavish wedding celebration on **Terrazza dell'Arco**, the outdoor event lawn, or an intimate gathering in the 14-seat **Refettorio Private Dining Room** to mark a personal milestone. Celebrate beneath the soaring ceilings of **La Cappella**, the restored chapel, or dine and dance the night away in **Il Teatro**,



the original theatre with its opulent stage and wraparound balcony. In the gardens, elaborate grazing tables impress for social events, while a barista ensures the perfect Italian coffee at meetings in **Sala Noce** and **Sala Alloro**. The **Conservatorio's** adjacent library rooms host an art salon series and are also ideal for semi-private gatherings.

Lorenzo Maraviglia will lead the hotel as General Manager, bringing more than 20 years of experience on the international hospitality scene with the Four Seasons, Armani and Ritz Carlton. **Nicola Zamperetti** will helm the hotel's food and beverage offering as executive chef after holding the same position at W Rome and boasting Michelin-star experience in some of the most renowned restaurants in Europe.



Alessandro Penko and Riccardo Penko
Ph. Edoardo Argento



Paolo Penko's craftsmanship enamours Hollywood

Over 530 pieces were created by the Florentine goldsmiths for the Oscar-nominated film **Conclave**, directed by Edward Berger, from rings and cufflinks to pins, chains and crosses. A long-standing collaborator of **Fondazione Destination Florence** (Bottega Orafa Paolo Penko are behind the pins given at the Florence Ambassador Award) the film has received 8 Oscar-nominations and 12 for the Baftas, including Best Costume Design, catapulting Florentine artisanal excellence to an international stage. Set in the Sistine Chapel, the film imagines the dramatic election of a new pope, with a cast almost entirely of cardinals to kit out in ecclesiastical garb, starring Ralph Fiennes, Stanley Tucci, John Lithgow, Isabella Rossellini and Sergio Castellitto.

Working closely with the costume designer **Lisy Christl**, the pieces seamlessly integrated with the costumes, adding depth to the characters and enriching the atmosphere of the film. The opportunity came about when the Florentine costume supervisor, **Ilaria Marmugi**, put the Penko workshop in touch with Christl, who commissioned pieces for the protagonists. So pleased with the results, the commission was expanded to cover the whole cast.

The workshop, founded by Paolo Penko and carried on by his wife Beatrice and sons Alessandro and Riccardo, represents one of the highest expressions of Florentine goldsmith art. **Riccardo Penko** shares more about the high-speed process to get the pieces prepared for filming: "My father is co-founder of the School of Sacred Art in Florence so we had access to theological expertise, but the greatest challenge was finding new forms, as we were reflecting a contemporary period and so needed to portray current events. It took two and a half months to carry out the work, which we conducted over the Christmas period, so it was very busy but very beautiful. It was a

great honour to work on such a high-level production. It was important for us to communicate the work that we do to create our jewels, and so each actor was provided with a slip of paper describing the piece. At our workshop, we create handmade objects that tell a story, which is why we worked on the back and front of each piece even though it wasn't going to be seen by those watching the film. The cardinals in the film came from all over the world so we had to tell the stories of their geographical origin, their history, and also their approach, meaning each piece is completely unique".

The entirely handcrafted jewellery was created using traditional techniques including lost wax casting, fretwork, engraving and penkato, adding to the quality and authenticity of the pieces and speaking to the passion of the artisans, with the pieces currently on display in the window of the workshop, with hopes for an exhibition in the future.



An event was held at the historic Palazzo Coppini on February 17, the headquarters of Fondazione Romualdo Del Bianco - Life Beyond Tourism, presenting the extraordinary works created for the film and underlining the key role of Italian craftsmanship in the international film scene. The event also served to celebrate Penko's nomination for the 12th edition of the Italian Excellence Award, reaffirming Florence as a point of reference for craftsmanship. Following the Florentine event, the Bottega Orafa Penko will be present at the 20th edition of Los Angeles, Italia - Promoting The Best of Italy 2025.



NUMBER OF EVENTS IN TUSCANY

Over **3,380** events related to the wedding world were celebrated, generating **570,000** tourist presences.

FOREIGN COUPLES AND GUESTS

Over **2,700** weddings of foreign couples were celebrated, generating **158,000** arrivals and **465,000** overnight stays.

ORIGIN OF THE SPOUSES

Over **60%** of the couples come from the United States (**37.3%**) and the United Kingdom (**24.1%**), with an increase in requests from Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands.

LOCATION TRENDS

The most popular locations were villas (**24%**), villages (**15.7%**) and historic residences (**13.1%**), with an increase in interest in unconventional places such as vineyards, archaeological sites and beaches.

AVERAGE BUDGET

The average expenditure per event was **68,600** euros, with a predominance of intimate weddings and an increase in the use of Wedding Planners (**52.8%**).

OUTLOOK 2025

Bookings already acquired indicate a growth of **+4.9%** of events, with an increase in demand for intimate weddings, green weddings, wedding weeks and immersive celebrations.



Tuscany reigns supreme in the wedding sector

The recently presented data on weddings in Tuscany and Italy indicates a positive year for the sector, with 2024 reporting a total **increase of 11% turnover in the Destination Wedding sector in Tuscany** (based on foreign couples and Italian nonresidents in the region), reaching 215.2 million euros, 187.3 million of which was from foreign couples alone. The research conducted by the **Centro Studi Turistici of Florence** commissioned by **Fondazione Destination Florence** reveals that Tuscany continues to attract couples from all over the world, eager to celebrate their special day in the stunning territory, **with further growth expected in 2025.**

The lifestyle and slow tourism of Tuscany proves once again to attract destination weddings, with the tourism sector working in a conscious way to curate an organized and quality offering for those seeking venues outside congested centres and instead choosing locations like vineyards, forests and archaeological sites. The data on wedding planners is particularly significant, as it can be read as an increasingly

mature market, where events are well organized and promotion is widespread, thanks also to **Tuscany for Weddings**, the division of Fondazione Destination Florence dedicated to the promotion of Florence and Tuscany on the international wedding market, whose excellent valorization of the entire chain of operators has fed into these positive figures.





Weddings in Italy

The data presented by **Convention Bureau Italia** reveals that events in the sector have grown by 11.4%, generating almost 1 billion euros. Over 15,000 weddings were celebrated across the peninsula, with couples coming mainly from the USA, Japan and the United Arab Emirates. One-of-a-kind weddings with a **Made In Italy** focus and emphasis on local products were repeatedly requested. Wedding planners are increasingly sought-after, rising from 44.2% to 46.3%. Weddings in central Italy accounted for 31.3% of weddings, with 29.3% in southern regions and the islands. In third place was the north-west area with 22.9%, followed by the north-east at 16.5%. Summer remains the favourite period, peaking between May, June and July, while the October-November period saw an increase of 22.4%.



Art of Winter

A recently launched project pertains to the promotion of weddings and related events in the winter period, given the seasonality of the wedding sector. Utilizing knowledge of the market and having heeded the statements of those in the **Fondazione Destination Florence** network, a series of locations and operators for the construction and promotion of an ad hoc offering for winter being coordinated to offset seasonality. The initiative acts out the foundation's mission, to create a sustainable, planned, and organized management of flows while promoting a model that enhances the entire territory and relocates the offering outside crowded areas.



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Firenze Fiera in numbers

3 locations

Fortezza da Basso,
Palazzo dei Congressi,
Palazzo degli Affari

100,000 m² total

300,000 visitors per year

21 million euro
generated in **2023**

Firenze Fiera's third sustainability report highlights the best practices in terms of environmental and social sustainability undertaken by the congress and exhibition centre located in the heart of Florence.

Lorenzo Becattini, president of Firenze Fiera, confirms the acceleration of trade fair and conference activities, with the first half of 2024 seeing Firenze Fiera perform as one of the leading players in the major events' industry. "Thanks to acquiring the **ISO 20121 certification** (Sustainable Management System for events) in December 2023, the company is among the first Italian exhibition districts to boast this important recognition of 'good management' of events, also involving customers in responsibly managing the social, economic and environmental impacts generated by their events."

Initiatives include #WeRecycle, a **waste management programme** with **74% separate waste collection**, evidence of Firenze Fiera's sustainable approach in the provision of its services, placing waste prevention at the centre of its strategies to reduce environmental impact. In keeping with this commitment, the **Food for Good** project sees the **donation of excess food**, collaborating with **Banco Alimentare** and **Equoevento** to recover excess food and donate it to those in need. The project has been recognized as a best practice in the EU for its effectiveness in combatting food losses and waste, recovering and allocating more than 13,000 portions of



food in 2023. **Renewable energy** is used to power the facilities, in collaboration with Enel. Renovations are also carried out with **eco-sustainable** practices, such as that at **Palazzo degli Affari**, where **46% of energy is produced from renewable sources**.

In terms of mobility, concrete solutions are offered to reduce the use of private vehicles and related emissions, with **convenient pedestrian accessibility** to the trade fair and congress centre allowing guests to reach events through public transport (easily accessible by tram), bicycles (taking advantage of rentals or bike sharing services) and walking, enjoying the city along the way. Firenze Fiera aims to make its spaces completely **accessible**, with dedicated entrances and parking, as well as tactile signage and optimized ramps. In addition, a **digital accessibility project** eliminates barriers on the web portal with tactile mapping in the main buildings.

Since March 2017, Firenze Fiera has been certified **ISO 45001** (Health and Safety Management at Work) and since January 2019 it has added the **ISO 14001 certification** (Environmental Management System) which works towards fulfilling environmental policies and respecting pollution limits as well as dedication towards constantly improving performance.

The events organized generate an **economic impact of approximately 21 million euro**, an increase of 49% compared to 2022, with over **330,000 visitors per year** and a significant **increase in hotel bookings**. Firenze Fiera is committed to becoming a **model of excellence in the sustainable management of trade fair events**, placing the concept of **shared value** at the center of its activities. This strategic approach aims not only to generate economic benefits for the organization, but also to create positive impacts for the entire Florentine community and the environment. Through collaborations with **local authorities, social initiatives and inclusion projects**, the company contributes to the social and cultural well-being of the city, strengthening the bond between the trade fair world and the local socioeconomic fabric.

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The Social Hub opens second site in Florence

The leading hybrid hospitality group inaugurated its second facility in Florence, in the **San Jacopino** area, on February 1, 2025. **The Social Hub Florence Belfiore** is the result of an urban regeneration project that required a total investment of 150 million euros. This new opening becomes the 19th property opened in Europe, making Italy the group's second most important market. The Social Hub Corporation has an existing structure in **viale Spartaco Lavagnini**, established in 2018. Having taken over five years to complete, Florence's second hub stands on the former site of the Fiat offices, the abandonment of which had left behind a lake in the middle of the city, creating a challenging process to reclaim the land.

Designed by the **Natalini Architetti Studio**, the space extends over 85,000 square metres, with 550 rooms and one of the largest coworking spaces in Tuscany at 3,300 square metres, accommodating over 500 people. Providing opportunities for **travellers, entrepreneurs, students, digital nomads as well locals**, the space is equipped with a 24-hour gym, a rooftop pool and bar, restaurant, hotel, parking lot, garden and city archives. It also vaunts a number

of spaces suited to **events**, with plans to organize over 600 yearly events focused on culture and entertainment. Other spaces have been specifically created with **fairs and conferences** in mind, capable of hosting groups of up to 300 people.

The first floor is dedicated to shops, bars, restaurants and common areas, all decorated in a bright modern style with lots of green flourishes, while the 7,000 square meter rooftop with

its panoramic view of the city is decorated by botanist **Antonio Perazzi** with 60 different species of vegetation, creating a hanging garden. A monumental staircase, featuring an arch with the words "Come as you are," takes visitors straight to the roof from the outside of the building.

Located a short distance from **Santa Maria Novella train station**, the new hotel rises over nine floors, four of which



TSH in numbers

- 85,000** m² total
- 3,300** m² co-working
- 7,000** m² roof garden
- 500** parking spaces
- 300** people for events
- 550** rooms
- Nine** floors



are underground, and it's also conveniently located near the **future Firenze Belfiore high-speed rail station**, scheduled for 2028. The Belfiore Hub will be the first in which a **monthly subscription** will be tested, meaning anyone will be able to access the services, spaces, events and training opportunities offered by the hub for 99 euro per month

The Social Hub was declared **B Corp certified** in 2024, evidence of their mission to create a better society. With the 'B' standing for 'Benefit for All', the certification granted by B Lab requires high standards of social and environmental performance. The status was attained following a year-long assessment, the result of which

was the awarding of the prestigious certification on the first attempt, illustrating the success of the **hybrid hospitality model that focuses on social impact and sustainability**.

As part of its commitment to the two issues, the **Better Society Academy project** was established, a programme dedicated to providing free training for those who want to play a leading role in social change. By 2030, the group has **committed to achieving significant environmental goals**: reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 78%, producing 50% of energy on site, obtaining BREEAM (In-Use) certification for all properties, and diverting 100% of residual waste from landfills or incineration.

Boom in university registrations in Florence

The **University of Florence** reaches a historic milestone. For the 2024-2025 academic year, enrollments recorded the best figures in the last 20 years, confirming the desirability of the Renaissance city for both young Italians and students from all over the world. With an **increase of over 11,000 new university students, of which 3% are foreign students**, the city is enriched with new ideas, cultures and perspectives. In keeping with the increased demand, a new cohabitation project promoted by the **Municipality of Florence** and **Fondazione Destination Florence**, titled **Generazione Casa**, matches residents with students, enabling them to access accommodation at regulated pricing.



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