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## Florence: What to do with kids and teens

Posted by: Kate Appleton, Thursday, Oct 28, 2010, 2:04 PM



Kids take part in an arts workshop run by the Bottega dei Ragazzi in Piazza Santissima Annunziata (Courtesy Jorge Raedó/whatisattheblog.blogspot.com/queesarquitectura.org)

Earlier this fall, I traveled to Florence and looked into some reader questions. I already reported back with advice on eating and cooking classes and now I'll tackle family travel.

**Elizabeth Henry asked: "With all of the art museums, is there anything for a family with small children?"**

Yes! Florence's sheer number of quality museums threatens to overwhelm first-time visitors (after all, this is the city that inspired Stendhal syndrome). When you arrive, pick up the free pocket-size book "Passport for Families" at Palazzo Strozzi's reception desk. It provides quick descriptions of local museums, along with fun facts and questions intended to captivate kids' imaginations as they explore. The Horne Museum recreates a typical Renaissance family's home, so the booklet suggests asking: "What toys, games, and other objects related to childhood can you find?" The Stibbert Museum of European, Japanese, and Islamic armor should also appeal—and it's located in a park, where kids can take a welcome pause to let loose. The booklet includes recommendations for gardens, bookstores, and restaurants too.

Another natural choice is the Museo dei Ragazzi, a children's museum within the Palazzo Vecchio. Choose between two 90-minute tours—"The Medieval Palace Revealed" and "Life in the Medici Court"—each offered in a version for those ages 3+ and another for those ages 10+. The youngest visitors are led through the palace by Grandfather Godfrey, a guide in a mouse costume. The museum also runs activities and events in two small theaters, a multimedia room, and a painting studio.

I reached out to [Elisa Staderini, a Florentine mom who blogs at Fiorentiniscresce.it](#) (Italian only), and she recommended the kids' play area, Bottega dei Ragazzi, which has art workshops in English, Italian, or Spanish for those ages 3 to 11 (€10/\$13.80). The Bottega is fittingly located in Piazza Santissima Annunziata, site of a former children's orphanage and hospital dating back to 1419. Elisa also tipped me off to a bilingual class on drawing animals taught by a former Disney animator, Mike Wiesmeier, from 2 to 4:30 p.m. on the first Saturday of each month at zoology museum La Specola (€20/\$27.60, plus museum admission).

Then there are the affordable, tried-and-true kid pleasers like stopping for gelato or a spin on the antique carousel in Piazza della Repubblica or a souvenir from a toy store like La Tartaruga (Borgo degli Albizi 60r). You could even set out on a scavenger hunt of sorts through the historic center to see how many recurring symbols you can spot—for clans like the Medici (balls) and the Pazzi (dolphins) and for the city itself (fleur-de-lis).

Read on for suggestions on how to have fun with teenagers.

**Jeannie asked: "What to teenagers do in and around Florence? I will be taking my daughters there in June and want them to have fun memories!"**

Florentine teens do many of the same things as their American counterparts—hang out with friends, gossip, shop, text message—but also scoot around on *motorini* and (legally) drink. A good place to people-watch

is Piazza Santo Spirito, which is lined with bars and restaurants and draws a mostly hip, alternative crowd of teens and university students.

While you're in the Oltrarno neighborhood, you might swing by Libreria Café la Cité, a bookstore that doubles as a coffee and wine bar and hosts evening events like live jazz and readings (Borgo San Frediano, 20r). You'll also find teens hanging on the steps of Piazza Santa Croce and in the surrounding area's *aperitivo* bars and British-style pubs—popular with American exchange students.

For a glimpse into Italian university life, I suggest stopping for lunch at the Biblioteca delle Oblate, a library in what was once a convent. It's very central—on Via dell'Oriuolo, which branches off from the Piazza del Duomo—but easily overlooked and un-touristy. A cafeteria with panini for as little as €3/\$4 opened in May 2009 and offers fantastic views of the Duomo and terra-cotta roofs. There are computer stations, in case you want to check e-mail, along with newspapers, magazines, and, of course, books for perusing. The library stays open until midnight.

If your daughters are in to vintage clothes, take them hunting at shops like Pitti Vintage and Cerri Vintage. You can coordinate any purchases with affordable, statement jewelry made of crystals, pearls, or hand-cut Plexiglas at Falsi Gioielli; I included a pair of their earrings in this piece on what \$100 buys in Florence.

One of my favorite shopping strips is Via Gioberti in a well-to-do residential neighborhood that's about a 15-minute walk northeast of Santa Croce. Fuel up at Bar Serafini at the start of the street by Piazza Beccaria (Via Gioberti, 168r), and then browse among a mix of Italian name-brands like Intimissimi and Benetton as well as local boutiques—nine of which are clustered in an internal courtyard dubbed "le nove botteghe."

You could round out your visit by signing up for a cooking class, renting bicycles from a company like Florence by Bike or Alinari Rentals, and visiting whichever museums catch your daughters' attention. Don't leave without making the scenic bus ride up to Piazzale Michelangiolo for glorious panoramic views. Among other things, it's a classic teen make-out spot.

**If you've traveled to Italy with your family, share your tips below!**

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