

Monday the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2009



Tuscany's flag



Florence's coat of arms

Next stop was Florence.

Florence (Latin Florentia) is a city in the province of the same name, and the city is the regional capital of Tuscany in the northern Italy. The name comes from Latin: Florentia, which means the flowering. From 1865 to 1870 the city was also capital of the Kingdom of Italy. Florence lies by the river Arno on a plain below the Apennine mountains, and has a population of about 400,000 people, including a suburban population of a little over 200,000 people.

The city was founded as a military bastion in the Roman Empire around the year 100 AD. During the crusades of the Middle Ages, Florence developed as a center of trading, and it became soon known for its wool spinning mills, leather tanneries, goldsmiths and well-developed finance institutions.

Florence was in the Middle Ages a center of European trade and finance, and the city is often regarded as being the birthplace of the Italian Renaissance. The city was for a long time ruled by the Medici family. Florence is also known for great art and architecture. The city is also called the Athens of the Middle Ages.



The river Arno flows through Florence. Like many other rivers in the Mediterranean area, the flow varies from a heavily roaring, brimming flood of melting water in the spring to a quiet rippling brook at the bottom of the river bed in the autumn. This has often led to floodings and landslides. In 1966 a flooding of Arno resulted in that a lot of people perished and the inundation damaged numerous masterpieces of art and rare books in Florence. New erected dams higher up have made it possible to even the flow, such that the Florentines can live more safely with their river.



Here we have arrived in Florence and are sitting at a café on Piazza Santa Maria Novella



This church, Santa Maria Novella, lies in one end of the Piazza.



The baptistry, Battistero di San Giovanni, and Florentin Giotto's clock tower (85m high) stand in front of the cathedral.



This is the front of the cathedral, which is named Santa Maria del Fiore



A wall and the cupola (91m high), which was finished in 1463. The cathedral is Europe's fourth biggest church. It is even today the highest building in Florence.



This is the cupola seen from the other side. The dome was at that time the biggest that was made without scaffolding.



Here we are in Spedale degli Innocenti, which was opened in 1444 as the first orphanage in Europe.



In the evening we had dinner at the same place as we had eaten lunch. Live music.

**Tuesday the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2009**



Palazzo Vecchio (Italian for old palace) is the city hall in Florence.

This massive fort is among the most impressive city halls in Tuscany.

It lies on Piazza della Signoria, which is one of the most important public squares in Italy.

The palace hold today a museum where there are, among others, works of Agnolo Bronzino, Michelangelo Buonarroti og Giorgio Vasari.

In front of the entrance is a copy of Michelangelo's David as a replacement of the original, which once was there, but now is in a museum.



There were a lot of people on the square outside



Some of the statues outside Palazzo Vecchio

This is Basilica di Santa Croce di Firenze, The Basilica of the Holy Cross, which is the main church of the Fransiscans in Florence.

Santa Croce means holy cross, and the church is the largest Fransiscan church in Florence, which also was the city where the Fransicans first was established. According to the legend it was Frans of Assisi himself who founded the church. At those times there were roumors that there were miracles going on in the church.



Here we arrive at the river Arno, which flows through Florence.



Here we are arriving at the bridge Ponte Vecchio (Italian for old bridge), which is a known bridge from the Middle Ages.

Ponte Vecchio is known for its shops (mostly goldsmiths) that go alongside the whole bridge. Ponte Vecchio is also the oldest arch bridge in Europe. The bridge is believed to have been built first in the Roman Ages, and from the start made of wood. After having been destroyed by the flooding in 1333, it was build again in 1345 and this time in stone. It is believed that Taddeo Gaddi has designed the bridge, which consists of three arches, the middle arch has a span of 30 meters, the two arches on both sides have a span of 27 meters. The height of the arches lies between 3,5 and 4,4 meters.

The bridge has in all its existence been a place for shops and merchants (according to legend it was in the start because of tax exemption), who display their goods on tables after having got permission from Bargello (a kind of lord mayor, a magistrate and a police chief).



Here we are right beside the bridge



View from the bridge upstream



A view downstream



Shops on the bridge



More shops



Here we have crossed the bridge and arrived at Piazza de' Pitti. The building is a part of Palazzo Pitti.

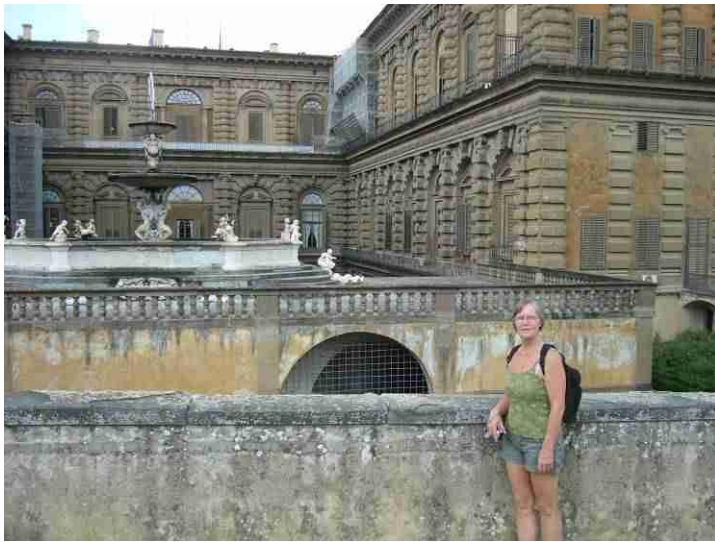
Palazzo Pitti was built for the banker Lucas Pitti. The enormous size of the building, which was commenced in 1457, was due to Pitti's desire to exceed the Medici family through this demonstration of wealth and power. Ironically, the Medici family bought the palace when the heirs of Pitti were ruined by the building costs.



There is an enormous park inside the property. To get there we had to go through a metal detector like those on the airports.



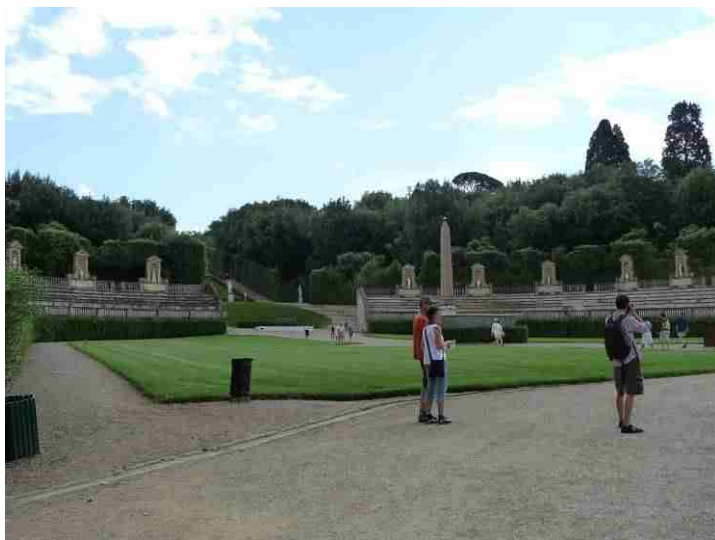
Here Kjell is on his way through the building



Here we have arrived at the backside of the buildings



Now we are higher up and get a good view over the city



The first part of the park is well trimmed



Here we are even further up and look back down



Still further up there were a pond with a fountain in the middle



Here are ducks that we feed with bread crumbs

Below follows a series of pictures from the park







