

THE PROVINCE OF FLORENCE

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The province of Florence covers a large and varied area. It includes the capital city and 43 other municipalities, which we have grouped together in homogeneous areas named the Florentine Area, Chianti, Empolese-Valdelsa, Mugello, Val di Sieve and Florentine Valdarno. The concise descriptions included below aim solely at stimulating people to explore these places, all of which deserve to be known and visited.

THE FLORENTINE AREA

Traditionally, the name Florentine Area is used to indicate the towns surrounding Florence. This area starts from the valley of Florence, then extends up the characteristic hills surrounding the capital, which contribute to the city's unique personality. Situated in an elevated position on a hill overlooking Florence, the Etruscan town of **Fiesole** is a treasure chest of art and archaeology, but also an absolutely enchanting place. The central square, Piazza Mino, in the past site of the forum, with the Cathedral of San Romolo, the monumental Seminary and the Palazzo Pretorio, is undoubtedly worth a visit. The steep walk up to the ancient acropolis will offer visitors a breathtaking view of Florence, and allow them to see the basilica of Sant' Alessandro and the church of San Francesco. Other interesting sights include the Archaeological Area, with the baths, the Roman Theatre and the imposing Etruscan walls, and several important museums and art collections, such as the Museo Bandini and the Fondazione Primo Conti.

Bagno a Ripoli is located on the left shore of the river Arno, to the south-east of Florence. Among the many places worthy of note, there are sacred buildings such as the Romanesque church of Santa Maria at Antella and the XIV-century oratory of Santa Caterina, spectacular villas such as Villa La Tana in Candeli, and examples of industrial archaeology, such as the medieval wool-mill of the Gualchiere at Remole.

The town of **Impruneta** grew up around the basilica-sanctuary of Santa Maria, a Romanesque building in origin, but modified repeatedly over the centuries. Not only does the church have numerous works of art, but the Museo del Tesoro della Basilica, right next to the church itself, is one of the first museums of sacred art established on the outskirts of Florence, and houses a priceless collection of sacred furniture and vestments, manuscripts and votive offerings. The area is famous for the production of hand-made terracotta.

Scandicci combines a modern town-centre and surroundings characterized by olive groves and vineyards, alternating with hilly woodland. Among its most remarkable historical and artistic sites, there are the Romanesque church of San Martino alla Palma, situated up high in a splendid position; the abbey of San Salvatore a Settimo, over one thousand years old; the Castle of Acciaiollo, an example of a fortified medieval residence; and Castel Pulci, a XVIII-century villa.

Like Signa, **Lastra a Signa** prospered thanks to its proximity to the river Arno, which in the past used to be navigable. The historic centre maintains interesting buildings such as the church of Santa Maria alla Lastra and the hospital of Sant'Antonio, possibly designed by Brunelleschi. In the vicinity there are the medieval church of San Martino a Gangalandi, with a small museum, the Museo Vicariale, annexed to it, and the splendid Villa di Bellosguardo (now also a museum), which once belonged to the tenor Enrico Caruso.

Signa unites a modern part, along the Arno, to an ancient town centre located on a hill. Together with several churches, among which the noteworthy XV-century church of San Giovanni Battista, one should visit the Museo della paglia e dell'intreccio "Domenico Michelacci", a museum dedicated to the craft of straw weaving, which for centuries was the main activity in the area. Along the Arno there is the ample river park of the Renai, that can be reached by bike from Florence thanks to a practical cycling lane. Even in **Campi Bisenzio** modernity lives side by side with ancient origins, traces of which are still present in the urban layout. Near the town there are the ponds of Focognano (a protected natural area of local interest and WWF Oasis), and a great example of contemporary architecture: the motorway church, designed by Giovanni Michelucci, and dedicated to San Giovanni Battista. The church of Sant'Andrea at San Donnino houses a Museum of Sacred Art which has in its collection a panel painted by the Master of Barberino.

Sesto Fiorentino was already inhabited at the time of the Etruscans, as is testified by two imposing "tholos" tombs which have been discovered nearby, called the "Mula" and the "Montagnola". Other interesting buildings are the Romanesque church of San Martino, in the town centre, and the church of Sant'Andrea a Cercina, on the hills going towards Monte Morello. There are also monumental aristocratic residences, such as the XVII-century Villa Guicciardini (once Corsi-Salviati), and Villa Solaria. The Richard Ginori Museum houses works of the old Ginori porcelain factory.

The visit to the Florentine Area finishes with **Calenzano**, founded at the time of the Romans to guard an important route. The historic centre spreads across the crest of two adjacent hills with the visit to the Castello, a picturesque fortified hamlet with



crenellated gates, which houses a museum of historical figurines, the Museo del Figurino Storico, and San Donato, with the church of the same name.

FLORENTINE CHIANTI

The Florentine Chianti is made up of a hilly area between Florence and Siena and is renowned worldwide for its wine production and for the beauty of its landscape.

The area around **San Casciano in Val di Pesa** can boast numerous medieval churches, castles, such as those of Gabbiano and Bibbione, and manor houses, such as the Alberghaccio, where Niccolò Machiavelli lived in exile. In the town centre there is the Museum of San Casciano, divided into two sections, one dedicated to archaeology, the other to sacred art. Another art collection can be found inside the Church of Santa Maria del Prato.

Tavarnelle in Val di Pesa maintains its rich legacy of rural buildings, such as the medieval churches of Santa Lucia al Borghetto (in the gothic style), San Pietro in Bossolo and San Donato (in the Romanesque style). With its appearance of a fortified hamlet, the complex of the Badia a Passignano, founded in 1049 by the monks of the order of Vallombrosa, is particularly charming.

Barberino Val d'Elsa has a medieval past, as can be seen by the long stretches of wall, the town gates, the Palazzo Pretorio, and a refuge for pilgrims, the Spedale dei Pellegrini. In the surrounding countryside one can visit the remains of the Castle of Semifonte, where there is now the octagonal dome of San Michele Arcangelo, a reproduction in scale of Brunelleschi's one in Florence. At Sant'Appiano one can admire the ancient church of early Christian origins and the adjacent Antiquarium.

Greve in Chianti has a unique triangular square surrounded by porticoes, still used nowadays for events and fairs. The rooms of the old monastery of San Francesco now house a Museum of Sacred Art, with works from the XIII to the XIX centuries. In the vicinity, there are the delightful village of Montefioralle and the Romanesque church of San Leolino at Panzano, both really worth a visit.

EMPOLESE-VALDELSA

This area is characterized by two rivers: the Arno to the north, flowing eastwards in wide bends, and the Elsa, one of the Arno's main tributaries, to the south among gentle hills and a heart-melting landscape modeled by man.

Along the Arno: the area around Empoli
Montelupo Fiorentino has the Museo della Ceramica, an important ceramics museum documenting the town's long tradition in this art. In the medieval church of San Giovanni Evangelista there is a large XV-century painting, the "Madonna on the Throne with Baby Jesus and Four Saints", while in the church of San Lorenzo there are remarkable remains of XIII-century frescoes. The Medici villa of Ambrogiana was designed by Ammannati and Buontalenti.

On the right bank of the Arno there are **Capraia** and **Limite**. The former is situated in an elevated position over the Arno, while the latter, a river port, is on the riverbank. There is a noteworthy exhibition centre documenting the history of shipbuilding and rowing. Between Limite and Capraia there is the Park of Montereggi, a very interesting archaeological area, first Etruscan and later Roman.

At the foot of Montalbano, among olive groves and vineyards, there is the small town of **Vinci**, birthplace of the greatest genius of the Renaissance, Leonardo. At Anchiano, the house where he was born has a permanent didactic exhibition, while in the stronghold of the castle one can visit the Leonardo Museum, which explores his output as a scientist, a technologist and an engineer. The cellars house the multifaceted Museo Ideale Leonardo da Vinci.

Cerreto Guidi also stands on top of a hill, in a place strongly tied to the Medici Villa of the same name. Spectacular staircases, attributed to Buontalenti, lead to the Museo Storico della Caccia e del Territorio, a museum dedicated to hunting and local traditions. **Fucecchio** has interesting monuments such as the Castle, whose ancient towers are still standing. The Palazzo Corsini, in the historic centre, also houses the Museo Civico, a museum comprising three sections: one dedicated to archaeology, one to history and art, and one to nature, the latter focusing in particular on the fauna of the Padule di Fucecchio, a large marshy area of great value for its fauna and flora.

Empoli is the main city in the area, and has a nice historic centre. The Collegiata di Sant'Andrea, with a Romanesque façade in white and green marble, and its nearby museum, the Museo della Collegiata, with numerous paintings from the XIV to the XVI centuries, overlook the main square. Not far away, at Pontorme, there is the church of San Michele and the house of Pontorno, the great Mannerist painter. The Museo del Vetro, inaugurated in 2010, is a museum dedicated to glass in the fascinating Magazzino del Sale, the "Salt Warehouse".

To the south of Empoli, the Valdelsa opens out along the river Elsa.

Castelfiorentino stands at a crossroads on the Elsa. The old



town is dominated by the medieval church of Sant'Ippolito, while in the lower part of the town there is the large sanctuary of Santa Verdiana, next to which there is a museum of the same name. BE.GO., also located in the lower part of town, is a museum displaying frescoes by Benozzo Gozzoli dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

Montaione stands high on the plains of the Elsa and the Egola. In the historic centre there are the church of San Regolo and the Palazzo Pretorio, while in the charming countryside nearby there is the complex of the Gerusalemme di San Vivaldo, eighteen XVI-century chapels with the same number of groups of statues in polychrome terracotta, arranged according to the actual location of the holy tomb.

For centuries **Gambassi Terme** has been appreciated for its saline water. The tradition of glass manufacturing is now documented in a permanent exhibition. We recommend a visit to the imposing medieval church of Santa Maria a Chianni, a Romanesque jewel drawing inspiration from the styles typical of Lucca and Pisa.

Certaldo is an intact medieval town which can also be reached by cable-car. There are numerous ancient buildings and towers, the highest being the Palazzo Pretorio, whose red-brick façade is spotted with coats of arms. In the upper town centre there are also the house of Boccaccio, the famous writer, and the Museum of Sacred Art, in the church of Santi Jacopo e Filippo.

Montespertoli marks the division between the valleys of the rivers Elsa and Pesa, and overlooks the vineyards of Chianti. Here the tradition of wine plays a fundamental role, as is testified by the presence of a museum dedicated to the vine and wine, the Museo della Vite e del Vino. The interesting medieval church of San Piero in Mercato has a Museum of Sacred Art with a collection of pieces from the XIII to the XVI centuries, arranged according to the ancient ecclesiastical groups they come from.

MUGELLO

The Mugello district includes a wide valley to the north of Florence, enclosed to the north by the mountains of the Apennines, to the west by the mountains of the Calvana and to the south by the Monte Morello-Monte Giovi group.

In **Vaglia**, to the north of Florence, it is worth visiting the Convent of Montesenario, built during the XIII century, from where one can enjoy a splendid view of Mugello. The enchanting Demidoff Park, at Pratolino, has artificial grottos, statues and the majestic fountain "The Apennine Colossus", designed by Giambologna. In the centre of **San Piero a Sieve** stands the medieval church of San Pietro, dating back to the XI century, while narrow lanes lead to the Fortezza di San Martino, a fortress designed by Buontalenti for Cosimo I de' Medici. The Trebbio Castle, designed by Michelozzo for the Medicis, stands among century-old cypress trees (both buildings can be seen only from the outside). It is worth visiting the convent of Bosco ai Frati, which has works of sacred art including a splendid wooden crucifix attributed to Donatello.

Barberino di Mugello is a modern town with manufacturing and commercial activities, however it still has many monuments that keep the memory of its intense past alive: the Villa di Cafaggiolo, restored by Michelozzo for Cosimo I de' Medici in 1451 (visible only from the outside), but also the Palazzo Pretorio, the Medici Loggias, the Castello, transformed into a manor house, the abbey of Santa Maria a Vigesimo, the medieval church of San Michele a Montecuccoli, and the medieval church of San Giovanni in Petriolo.

For over five centuries **Scarperia** has been famous for the craft of forging sharp blades. The Museo dei Ferri Taglienti, inside the XIV-century Palazzo dei Vicari, is a museum which pays homage to the tradition of sharp metal instruments. On the opposite side of the square there is the church of Santi Jacopo e Filippo, with numerous works of art. Nearby, there is the late-Romanesque church of Sant'Agata, one of the most important sacred buildings in the Mugello. In the oratory of the Compagnia di San Jacopo there is a collection of sacred art, while old crafts and peasant traditions are brought back to life in the Sant'Agata Artigiana e Contadina at Leprino.

Borgo San Lorenzo, the main town of Mugello, grew up around the Romanesque church of San Lorenzo, one of the oldest in the district. Villa Pecori-Giraldi, which houses the Museo della Manifattura Chini dedicated to artistic ceramics, is particularly interesting. Nearby there are other very important sacred buildings: the beautiful medieval church of San Cresci in Valcava and, towards Ronta, the medieval church of San Giovanni Maggiore, with an octagonal bell-tower, and the Oratory of the Madonna dei Tre Fiumi. The Museo della Civiltà Contadina at Casa d'Erce is a museum dedicated to peasant society and has a collection of old objects from the share-farming tradition. Situated on a rise near the river Sieve, **Vicchio** is the birthplace of famous artists, such as Giotto (at Vespignano there is the house where he was born) and Beato Angelico, to whom the Museo di Arte Sacra e Religiosità Popolare is dedicated. This museum of sacred art and popular faith has a collection of objects from various sacred sites in the area. It is pleasant to go for a walk around the small lake of Montelleri, next to the town.

In the centre of the town of **Dicomano** there are lovely XVII-century porticoes and the neoclassical oratory of Sant'Onofrio. The Archaeological Museum, located inside the town hall, has findings from prehistoric times through to the Renaissance. Nearby there are the Romanesque church of Santa Maria, the church and old convent of San Giovanni Battista a Sandetole, and the archaeological excavations of Frascole.

Well-known for its tradition of working "pietra serena", the local grey sandstone, **Firenzuola** still has the urban layout typical of the "new lands" of the Florentine Republic in the XIV century. The Rocca, a fortress housing a museum dedicated to sandstone, the Museo della Pietra Serena, is particularly interesting. In the beautiful surrounding countryside there is the abbey of San Pietro a Moscheta, with a museum dedicated to the historic landscape of the Apennines, the Museo del Paesaggio Storico dell'Appennino.

Palazuolo sul Senio is a peaceful, well-kept town with historic and artistic sites, such as the XIV-century Palazzo dei Capitani, which now houses a museum of mountain traditions, the Museo delle Genti di Montagna, and an archaeological museum, the Museo Archeologico Alto Mugello. The very ancient origins of the medieval church of San Giovanni Decollato a Misileo are testified by its crypt, dating back to Carolingian times. In the nearby hamlet of Quadalto there is the XV-century sanctuary of the Madonna della Neve.

The urban heart of **Marradi** is its beautiful square, Piazza Scallelle, where there are the Palazzo Comunale, the town hall, with a spacious loggia, and other historic buildings. The cultural vivacity of Marradi, which is the birthplace of the poet Dino Campana, is testified by its elegant late-XVIII-century theatre, the Teatro degli Animosi. Nearby there are the Badia del Borgo with the church of Santa Reparata in Salto, dating back to the XI century, and the hermitage of Gamogna, which can only be reached on foot.

VAL DI SIEVE AND THE FLORENTINE VALDARNO

The area of the Val di Sieve stretches along the valleys of the rivers Sieve and Comano, the second river being a tributary of the first, whereas the upper Valdarno starts in the plain of Arezzo, to the south, and ends at Pontassieve where the river Sieve merges with the Arno.

In **Pontassieve** one can still find traces of the typical Florentine "terra murata", a walled town. The bridge over the Sieve is called the Medici bridge, but its origins are even older. Numerous medieval and Renaissance sites can be found in the area, among which the Trebbio Castle, near Santa Brigida, and the ancient tower of Montebonello, it too medieval.

Rufina is renowned for its excellent wines, celebrated in a grapevine and wine museum, the Museo della Vite e del Vino, located in the cellars of the Villa di Poggio Reale. On the gentle hills there are interesting historic buildings, such as the Romanesque church of San Bartolomeo a Pomino and the XIII-century church of Santa Maria in Falgano.

Londa is enclosed by two small rivers and is characterized by a small artificial lake. Nearby there are the splendid Romanesque churches of San Leolino a Monti and Sant'Elena a Rincine. High up among chestnut woods, stands **San Godenzo** with its abbey. The entire area is of great environmental importance and the nearby town of Castagno d'Andrea is the gateway to a national park, the Parco Nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna. It also has a virtual museum dedicated to the town's most illustrious citizen, the painter Andrea del Castagno.

Pelago, instead, is situated on the mountainside of Pratomagno. In the medieval church of San Clemente, there is a small but remarkable collection of sacred art. Among the most important buildings in the area, there is the medieval church of Santa Margherita a Tosina, the Castle of Nipozzano and the tower of Ristonchi, one thousand years old.

Reggello can boast several places of incredible natural and artistic beauty, such as the forest and the abbey of Vallombrosa (whose tower houses a museum of sacred art), the medieval church of Pitiana, the church of San Donato in Fronzano, and the splendid medieval church of San Pietro in Cascia, with a museum of sacred art, the Museo Masaccio d'Arte Sacra, in the adjacent rooms.

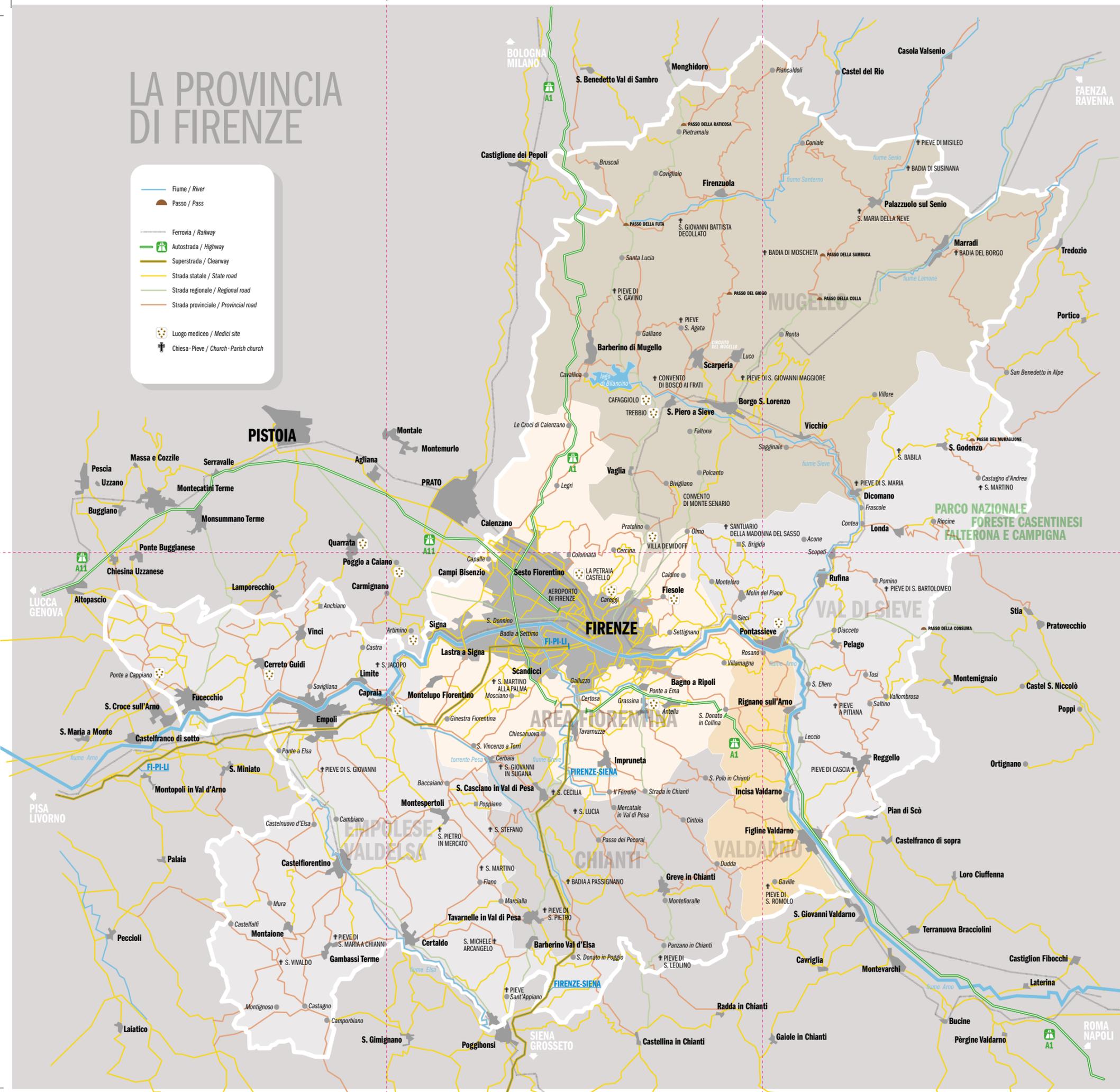
Figline Valdarno is the first municipality of the upper Florentine Valdarno. The church of Santa Maria has paintings by the so-called Master of Figline and in an adjacent building there is a collection of sacred art. The medieval church of San Romolo a Gaville, just outside town, has several rooms dedicated to a museum of peasant traditions, the Museo della Civiltà Contadina. Even **Incisa in Val d'Arno** has a museum of sacred art in the XIV-century Oratorio del Crocifisso. The church of Sant' Alessandro has part of a polyptych by Andrea del Giusto (XV century).

Rignano sull'Arno closes the upper Florentine Valdarno with a landscape embellished by villas and historic farmhouses, such as the Villa di Torre a Cona, with an Italian garden, the Castle of Volognato and the ruins of the Castle of Castellonchio. There is the interesting Romanesque church of San Leolino, comprising three naves ending in apses.



LA PROVINCIA DI FIRENZE

- Fiume / River
- Passo / Pass
- Ferrovia / Railway
- Autostrada / Highway
- Superstrada / Clearway
- Strada statale / State road
- Strada regionale / Regional road
- Strada provinciale / Provincial road
- Luogo medico / Medici site
- Chiesa - Pieve / Church - Parish church



Map and places of interest in the province of Florence

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