

WHERE TO GET THE BEST *APERITIVO* IN FLORENCE



While there are some world famous Italian exports that travel well—think pasta, pizza, Pavarotti—there are others that really, inexplicably, don't. The *aperitivo* slots into this second category, not because mulling over a bitter drink and some *hors d'oeuvres* from around 7pm – 9pm in the company of close friends isn't globally appealing, but perhaps because doing so only really works in benign Mediterranean climates. We certainly don't have anything like it in the UK. Still, considering that I'm writing this back home in the middle of August, and it's 13 degrees and pouring rain, that shouldn't come as much of a surprise.





Crostini Aperitivo



People Relaxing In a Cafe In Florence

The origins of the *aperitivo* are rather obscure, though the practice of drinking something bitter and alcoholic specifically to whet the appetite seems to have originated in Turin at the end of the 18th century. The man credited with inventing the *aperitivo* was Antonio Benedetto Carpano—creator of the first Vermouth in 1786—who marketed his concoction of fortified white wines, herbs and spices precisely for this purpose. But it was in nearby Milan, during the 1920s, where the bitter drink and snack combination we're familiar with today really took off. And to this day the great northern city is still hands-down the best place to go in the world for an authentic, quality *aperitivo*.

Less obscure are the 's etymological origins. The word comes from the Latin verb *aperire*, which means “to open”. From this it diffused across the various romance languages giving the French their *aperitif* and the Spanish... well, their tapas. The idea that drinking something boozy while eating small amounts of food opens up our appetites for more might be counterintuitive. But knowing how much the Italians love their food we should probably trust them on this one. And when it comes to the *aperitivo* proper, less really can be more. After all, why waste valuable stomach space on small snacks when the true Italian meal consists of a *primo piatto* (first plate) *secondo piatto* (mains) *contorni* (sides) and *dolci* (dessert).

in recent years the *aperitivo* has morphed more into a meal in and of itself. This has deeply upset purists who preach moderation when it comes to the aperitivo. Overindulgence is sacrilege, so they say, and as a rule of thumb one plate of food equates to one drink: if you want to eat more, buy more. They'll tell you that if you stray from these unspoken rules, you'll be breaking custom, and on the receiving end of dirty looks from waiting staff and locals alike. This, I can tell you, is absolute rubbish.

Across Italy you'll find a growing number of places offering *apericena* (a mix between aperitivo and dinner). And these places aren't just frequented by foreigners who are visiting Rome but failing to do what the Romans do, so to speak. While I can't speak for Milan's *aperitivo* culture, I've gone out with Italian friends for *aperitivo* in Florence many times, and they almost never stick to these supposed rules. Instead they embrace an altogether different Italian approach to food: *chi mangia bene, vive bene*—who eats well, lives well.

What should you order to drink?

Essentially anything you fancy, whether it be alcolici (alcoholic) drinks—cold beer, red or white wine, a spritz or a cocktail—or analcolici, soft drinks. As with Italian cuisine, there are regional preferences, and if you want to try something truly Florentine, you should go for Negroni. Invented here in 1919 by the eponymous Florentine count Camillo Negroni, it's made by mixing a third gin, a third Campari and a third sweet red vermouth, topped off with a slice of orange. The most traditional drink, however, is a spritz of some kind, generally Campari or Aperol.

The orange coloured Aperol Spritz is the least bitter of the two: made with prosecco, a splash of bitters and Aperol. But for an aperitivo it's definitely my favourite. Plus it's quite fun seeing what various places decorate it with as a finishing touch. I've had things ranging from the traditional orange wheels to olives, blueberries and even a cocktail stick with nothing on it (amusing as this was, it did nothing for the flavour). So where should you go to try out the Italian aperitivo on your visit to Florence? Here at [Roman Candle Tours](#), we've prepared a short list of some of the best the city has to offer.

Quelo (Borgo Santa Croce 15r)

I live directly above Quelo, and for that reason alone I should probably dissuade people from going there because almost everybody hangs around outside, and in the tall, narrow streets of Florence, noise really carries. But I won't because it's just so good. In business since 2012, during the day Quelo is frequented by hipster students and lost looking tourists, drawn in by its quirky menu and unpretentious authenticity. Get there early and you can enjoy probably the best cappuccino in Florence, washed down with one of their many delicious homemade cakes. For lunch they serve up a modest but no less mouthwatering range of sandwiches and soups.

From 7pm onwards they put on their *aperitivo* buffet, which has to count among one of Florence's freshest and most vegetarian/vegan friendly. As well as the usual bowls of pasta, they also make delicious chickpea, broccoli, white bean and lentil salads as well as homemade red pepper, pesto and truffle sauces. There's no need to book either as they always have far more tables inside than customers (seriously, for a hole-in-the-wall bar, it's like a Narnian wardrobe in how it seems to stretch on forever).



At night—every night, in fact, apart from Sunday when it closes—Quelo is hopping with Florentines of all ages. They congregate there from around 8pm onwards, both to mix with friends and to mix Quelo's selection of incredibly reasonable (and, for that matter, incredibly strong) cocktails for just €5 each. If you fancy joining, you can't go wrong either with one of their more traditional cocktails or some of their more wacky inventions: especially the vodka laced fresh fruit and vegetable juice Ultimate Mix.

Kitsch (Viale Antonio Gramsci 1/5r) and Kitsch Devx (Via San Gallo 22r)

When it comes to value and variety, **Kitsch** is the undisputed champion of Florence's *aperitivo* bars. More than just aperitivo it offers the full-scale *apericena* which consists of—just to name a few things—seemingly unlimited slices of pizza, bowls of fresh pasta, cold meats, paté, polenta, crusty bread, salads and fresh vegetables, all drizzled in extra virgin olive oil. Stick around long enough and they'll even wheel out some form of dessert. Oh, and Tuesday is fish day which sees enough fresh salmon, clam spaghetti and fish salad laid out to comfortably feed the five thousand.



There are in fact two Kitsches: The first, simply known as **Kitsch**, was the flagship bar, and is situated on the eastern extremities of the city center, just off Piazza Beccaria. Because it's on the peripheries, it's much more popular with locals than it is with tourists, who tend to make the pilgrimage instead to Kitsch Devx, located on Via San Gallo, a 10-minute walk north from the Duomo and the Church of San Lorenzo.

Kitsch Devx is always pretty busy, and it can be nigh on impossible to get a table outside on Friday or Saturday evenings, especially during the summer months, so booking ahead is advisable. You can do this easily by calling them on (+39) 0552343890. Whichever of the two bars you go to, the first drink and access to the buffet costs €10, after which every other cocktail costs €5. Their drinks are skillfully made too—especially their Pimm's, which has to be the best I've tried outside the UK.



Volume (Piazza Santo Spirito 5r)

With its idiosyncratic décor, its obscure wooden sculptures and its mismatched studio machinery, **Volume** still carries the feel of the artisan workshop from which it was recently converted. This bustling bar is right at the heart of Santo Spirito's vibrant, alternative bar scene and is always full of Florentines chatting away on one of its mismatched leather chairs or sofas, sitting at the bar while nibbling their way through the crisps and crusty, olive oil soaked bread that's aid out, or gathered around the dozen or so tables outside on the piazza.

Soon after ordering your drink someone will bring you your own *aperitivo* selection tray, consisting of crisps, bread, olives, dipping slices of carrots and celery and a selection of dips. It's not enough for a meal, but it will set you up nicely for one of the many other culinary treats this neighborhood has to offer (the food is always especially good at **Osteria Santo Spirito** across the square).

Volume's volume gets notably turned up later in the evening, both inside and out. Come on a Thursday and you're likely to catch some live jazz music while outside, on any night of the week, you'll be treated (or subjected) to one of the many impromptu acoustic acts that form on the piazza. I say many because, in terms of nightlife, Piazza Santa Croce is without doubt the busiest square in Florence—the trendiest hub of the city's young and beautiful, bustling all year round from around 8 until very, very late.



MAD Souls & Spirits (Borgo San Frediano 36r)

Something of a cult following has sprung up around this San Frediano bar since it opened in October last year. And for good reason, owing to its self-proclaimed off-the-wall alchemic inventions. If you come here looking for a glass of local wine or beer, prepare to be disappointed. MAD Souls & Spirits is all about the cocktails; in fact there something of a celebrity buzz around the three owners and bartenders—Julian Biondi, Neri Fantechi and Lorenzo Forzoni—who've managed to create an utterly unique bar that combines the feel of an ultra-modern cocktail bar with the bar of a five-star hotel.

It needs to be stressed that the emphasis here isn't on food. Their selection of crisps or taralli is almost as Spartan as the bar's bottle green and brick red industrial interior. But this shouldn't put you off because their drinks are unrivalled. And that's not all: given the exceptional quality the drink prices are also remarkably reasonable—something not lost on the crowds of young Florentines, exchange students and lucky passers-by who keep the MAD men in business.

You can of course come to MAD and order something sane, like an Aperol Spritz. But while you're here, why not carpe diem and try one of the weird and wacky inventions chalked up on their "Daily Madness" board. That is if cocktails made from carrot jam, egg whites and bourbon sound up your street.



Oibò (Borgo de' Greci 1)

Situated right on the corner of Piazza Santa Croce, Oibò has been one of the cornerstones of Florence's aperitivo scene since it first opened in 2008. The popular lounge bar tends to attract a younger crowd made up of Florentine locals and predominantly American students, many of whom live in the neighborhood. People tend to lounge around both inside and out all through the day, but it's at night that Oibò really gets going.

Their aperitivo runs from 7pm until 10pm and costs €10 with each following cocktail costing \$8. And believe me when I say that their cocktails are so good that it's not worth stopping at one. When it comes to the food, Oibò doesn't have the widest range. But what they do they do well. I really rate their coccoli (deep fried balls of bread dough eaten with stracchino soft cheese and prosciutto crudo) as well as their BBQ chicken—not especially Italian, I know, but at least it's not McDonald's.

I would suggest making a reservation, especially if you're thinking of going at the weekend or during the summer month from around May to September. You can do this by calling them on (+39) 0552638611.





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