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Ponte Vecchio from the water: SUP adventure in Florence

Posted on August 6, 2020 by bestregardsfromfar

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Photographs: Marcella van Alphen

The morning sun bathes the city in a warm light as we walk towards the bank of the Arno River at the foot of Saint Michelangelo's Piazza in the city of Florence, Italy. We are meeting with Tommaso Pucci, the founder of Toscana SUP and organizer of Uffizi Sup Race and Florence Paddle Games. He knows the Arno River, and the Tuscan waters like no one else, and has a clear passion for his city, Florence, that he is about to have us discover from an unusual point of view...



Tommaso grabs an inflated Stand Up Paddle-board (SUP) under each arm and walks with us to the river with a large smile. A few minutes later, he is pedagogically showing us how to manoeuvre the board and use the paddle before we try ourselves on the warm waters of the Arno River. There is only little current, and we start paddling at a leisurely pace being towered by the Florentine architecture with the iconic Ponte Vecchio always in sight.



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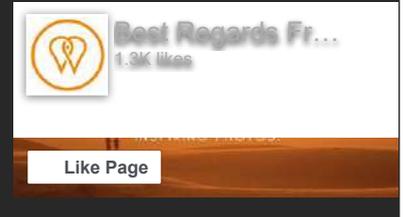
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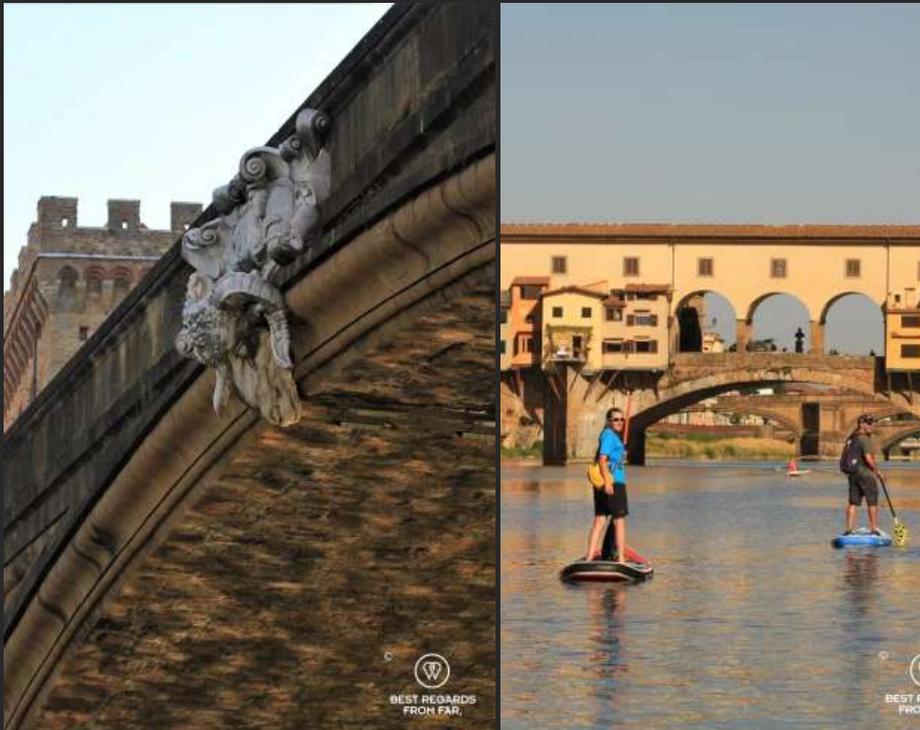
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While during the Middle Ages many bridges were flanked with shops, the Florentine "Old Bridge" is world's last remaining one lined with goldsmiths. Initially built of wood by the Romans to cross the river at its narrowest within the city, it was destroyed by the floods of the impetuous Arno. Its current version dates back to 1350. To finance the construction of the bridge, shops started to be rented on it, initially to the guild of the butchers. But when the Medici had the Vasari Corridor built over it to safely link the Pitti Palace to the Palazzo Vecchio without any risk of assassination, the stench was not compatible with their close-to-royal status. It is since then that the goldsmiths have set up shop there. Tourists are already gathering to take selfies from it while we enjoy the calm of the river. The bronze statue of Cellini, (the best goldsmith of the 16th century) looks at us paddling away.

Some rowers pass us during their morning routine, silently gliding on the river. The time when *barchetti* – the Florentine flat-bottomed gondolas – were browsing the waterway to inspect it for construction purposes or when *renaioli* were cruising on it to dig up sand is long gone.



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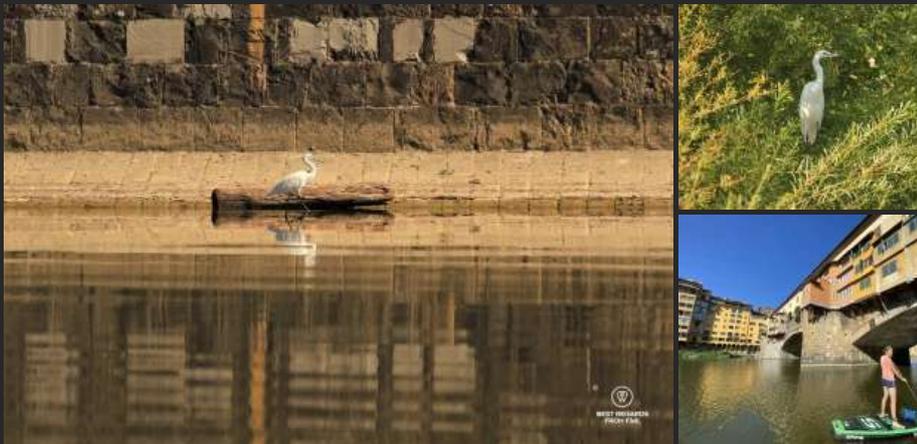
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As we turn around to go back upstream to our starting point, we notice a scary goat looking at us from both sides of the Ponte Santa Trinita. The head facing west towards Ponte alla Carraia defends Florence from invasions, while the one facing towards Ponte Vecchio guards the city from the devastating floods. The Renaissance Bridge partially realized by Michelangelo between 1567 and 1571 was completely rebuilt, though. Just like every other bridge of the city, it was blown up by the Nazis in 1944 to slow down the progression of the Allies. Only Ponte Vecchio was spared: instead of being destroyed only the houses at its extremities were, and their rubbles piled up as a barricade. Many think the bridge was spared because Hitler liked it: when he visited Florence in 1939, Mussolini had three large windows pierced into the Vasari Corridor in the middle of the bridge especially for the Führer to enjoy the view. Others talk about a hunchback who used to hang around the bridge and who would have disconnected some wires.. In any case, Ponte Vecchio remains and has become one of world's most emblematic bridges.



The Arno River is the artery of Florence. It is thanks to it that trade could boom in the city and that the leather tradition could develop putting Florence on the forefront of crafts. There is no better way to get to appreciate Florence than by gliding on its waters, without the crowds!



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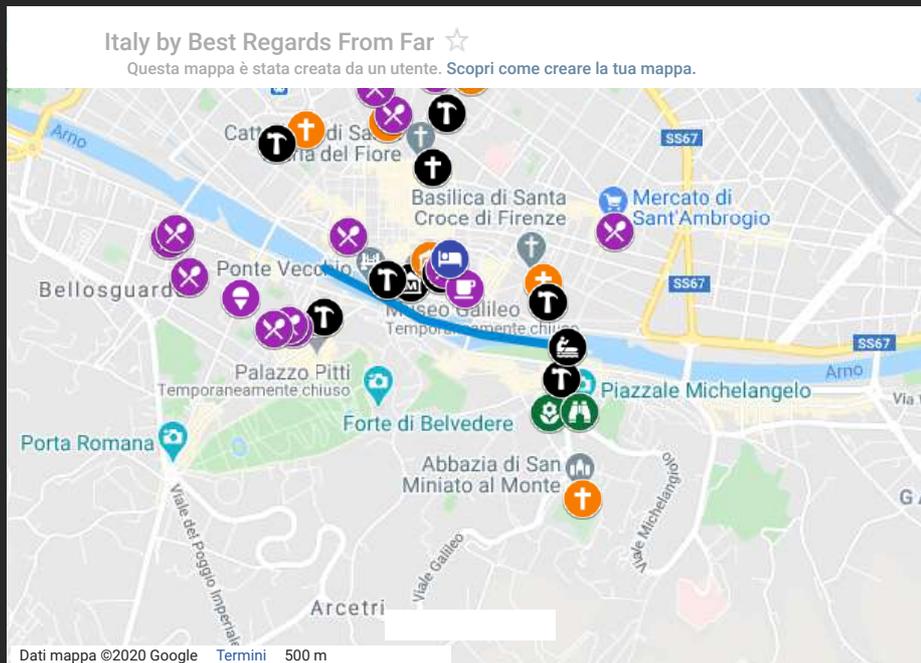
Travel tips:

- To experience this adventure, reach out to [Toscana SUP](#).
- To enjoy Florence in style, stay at the [Hotel Bernini Palace](#) in a 15th century palace full of history and luxury in the heart of the city!



Bedroom of the Hotel Bernini Palace, Florence, Italy

- Check out this interactive map for the specific details to help you plan your trip and more articles and photos (zoom out) about the area! Here is a [short tutorial](#) to download it.



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