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Sleeping in the cradle of the Kingdom of Italy [Bernini Palace]

Posted on September 28, 2020 by bestregardsfromfar

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Photographs: Claire Lessiau & Marcella van Alphen

In the heart of Florence, a stone's throw away from the Palazzo Vecchio and the Uffizi Museum, the 15th century palace that now houses the Hotel Bernini Palace has a long history of luxury and hospitality. More than staying in a 5-star hotel, staying at the Bernini is sleeping in the cradle of the kingdom of Italy and stepping into history...



Hotel palace since 1640!

Just outside of the Roman walls and medieval circle and close to the markets and the Arno River, the Hotel Bernini Palace used to be the meeting point for traders from all over the world. First owned by the prominent della Pera family, ancestors of the Peruzzi, and powerful financiers of Europe, it was converted into a hotel in the 1640's. In the 17th century, the then known as The Shield of France was the first hotel of the city with running water while horses of guests were attended to on the ground floor. Today, the horses are long gone, and the ground floor showcases beautiful historical arches and is decorated with elegance. Smiling female heads coiffed with hats ornate the large lobby area as a wink to a 1900 hat exhibition that was hosted between these walls. They look at guests checking in at the front desk or others enjoying a Negroni at the stylish bar in the city where this cocktail – a mix of vermouth, Campari and gin – was invented by the Florentine Count Negroni.



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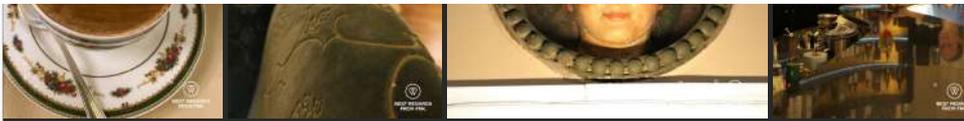


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Get Da Vinci's point of view: his first crack at anatomy

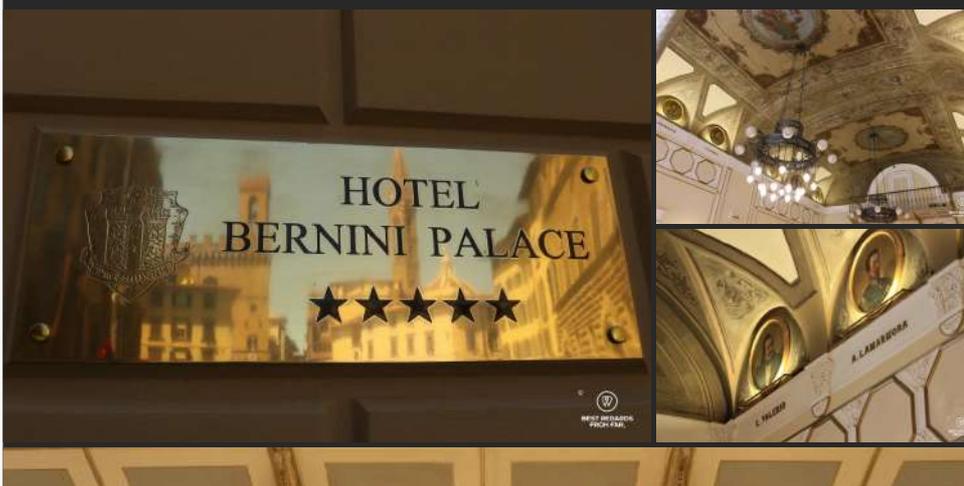
The tastefully decorated bedrooms offer a fantastic view on Florence. From our window on the fifth floor, the ones of today's Bargello Museum are just across the Piazza San Firenze. I am looking at the Gondi Palace, just a few meters away from me. Before it was built, the young Da Vinci stayed in a house at that very same street corner during his time in Florence where the 20-year old studied art with his master **Verrocchio**. Back then, Leonardo Da Vinci had the same vantage point on the Bargello Palace. Today's museum of Renaissance sculptures used to be a prison. Dead bodies of convicts were often hung from its windows to discourage criminals. This peeked the genius' interest in anatomy. The curious Da Vinci asked for some of these bodies to be brought to him to study them. His first known drawings of human anatomy will be completed years later in Milan, but it is in Florence that it all started.



Witness the political intrigues that led to the Unification of Italy

November 18, 1864: the capital of Italy is transferred from Turin to Florence. This will last for only six years, but will transform the city radically. Its population almost doubled, a ton of money was poured in, high-ranked politicians from all over the country moved in with their families propelling Florence on the international stage. The face of the city changed with crumbled down antique districts making room for Paris-inspired modern market halls and avenues lined with fashion stores and high-end boutiques.

Looking up at the ceiling, the faces of these politicians who shaped the Italian Unification are looking at me enjoying my cappuccino and decadent breakfast in the Hotel Bernini Palace. They used to stay here themselves, or at least run from the close-by Palazzo Vecchio where the House of Parliament was located to have their meals in this majestic hall, known as the Buvette of Parliament. Some senators who used to meet in the theatre of Palazzo Pitti just across the Arno River also joined these informal negotiations at the heart of the Italian political intrigue that gave birth to the kingdom of Italy. Today, the beautiful frescoed ceiling pays tribute to them at the very spot where they used to meet: Garibaldi, Nero Corsini, the last minister of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, the Piedmontese Cavour...



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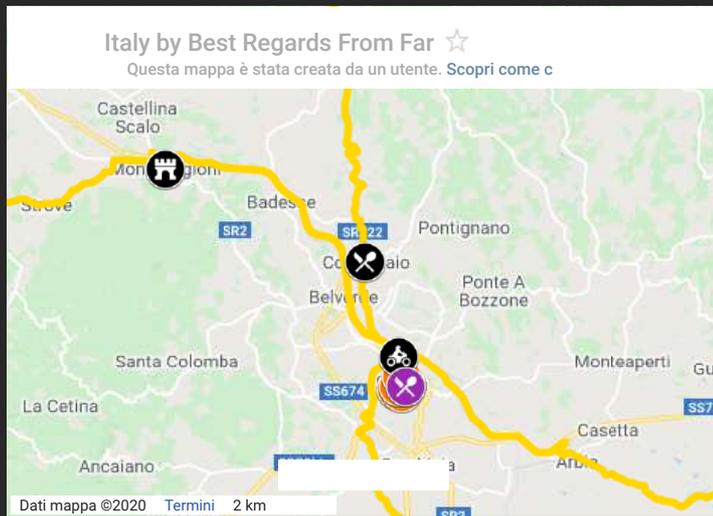
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Travel tips:

- To stay at the Bernini, refer to [their website](#).
- Please note that two concierges of the prestigious French organization Les clefs d'or are always available at the Hotel Bernini Palace. In a very touristy city where everything tends to be booked up, this does make a difference!
- 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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3 thoughts on "Sleeping in the cradle of the Kingdom of Italy [Bernini Palace]"



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I can only imagine the sight of criminals hanging in doorways and by windows, but if it's inspirational, I guess some good came of it. But, oh, how awful! Thanks for lovely photos, interesting details, and history lesson from one of my favorite cities in the world: Florence!

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