

# Michelangelo's city truly a cultural capital

Story and photos:  
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**FLORENCE, Italy** — The small boy chases pigeons across the Piazza del Duomo. Tourists sit on the steps of the great cathedral facing the square while lovers embrace against the great bronze door on the baptistry. Four pigeons steal corn from the vendor's box placed in the plaza between the church and the baptistry.

The work of great artists is all around us, and we will savor it as the day warms, but the lifebeat of this plaza is people and pigeons, people and pigeons.

THE CITY HAS been here since 100 years before Christ, and the

Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore was built in the 13th century, but some things cross the boundaries of time and space. People and pigeons are two of them.

Travelers who rush in and out of this experience in the cathedral square will certainly miss it. They may see the great bell tower and Michelangelo's Pieta but they will miss everything else. To enjoy this great city, you must sit for a while on the cathedral steps and let the pigeons do the flying.

Florence, or Firenze as the Italians call it, straddles the Arno, a middle-sized river that empties into the sea near Pisa. As you approach Firenze by train, cream stucco buildings with red tile roofs crowd the landscape all the way into the tracked wilderness of the main railroad station.

There is a 20th century pandemonium on the streets as the morning crowds rush towards lunch. Cars and motorcycles race between crowds jamming the sidewalks near small beautiful shops, and outdoor cafes where Florentines linger over their morning coffee.

As you approach the Piazza del Duomo, you see a corner of Giotto's bell tower first as it rises in a square white shape above the city buildings. Soon a slice of the Duomo, literally the dome, fills the end of the street, growing larger as it fills the whole world of your vision with its splendor.

Camera bugs press back against doorways, trying to get far enough away to capture it all: the carved front of the church, the huge dome behind, the high tower beside and the octagonal shape of the baptistry, which faces the cathedral door across the plaza.

People squat on the cathedral steps, crowd the great bronze baptistry doors and the horse-carriages, and delight themselves anew every day with the pigeons. The pigeon man, bored over his box of corn amid a sea of birds, pours corn into a woman's hand and raises it high. The pigeons flutter around her while her husband takes a picture.

IN THE GREAT, cool stillness of the cathedral, a service goes on between the arched pillars and crowds gather around the Pieta, an incomplete marble carving that Michelangelo intended for his own tomb.

Against the wall, video screens tell the story of the cathedral in four languages. Here you can plan your tour through the splendors of these buildings: a climb up the high dome so that you can overlook the city; another climb up Giotto's bell

tower, a visit into as many nooks and crannies as you can see in one visit.

Here you will see the works of great artists who had until now only been names to you: Donatello, Brunelleschi, Botticelli. Florence is the very heartbeat of great European art.

Pigeon lovers enjoy the art, as the artists themselves probably did, among the bustle of the city itself. Have cannellini or crepes with a little white Chianti in a restaurant near the square. Note the plaque, shoulder high, where the disastrous floods of 1966 rose above the priceless artifacts.

When you have chased the pigeons, and ridden around town in a carriage, walk three blocks up the Via Ricassio to the Galleria dell'Accademia where Michelangelo's statue of David is waiting to take your breath away.

There are many concrete reproductions of the David around the city, but nothing prepares you for the first sight of the real thing as it becomes visible down a long gallery of unfinished work by the old master.

Warning! Check the opening and closing times carefully and go at least one hour before the Academy closes. They stop selling tickets an hour before closing time, leaving many frustrated tourists fuming angrily at the door.

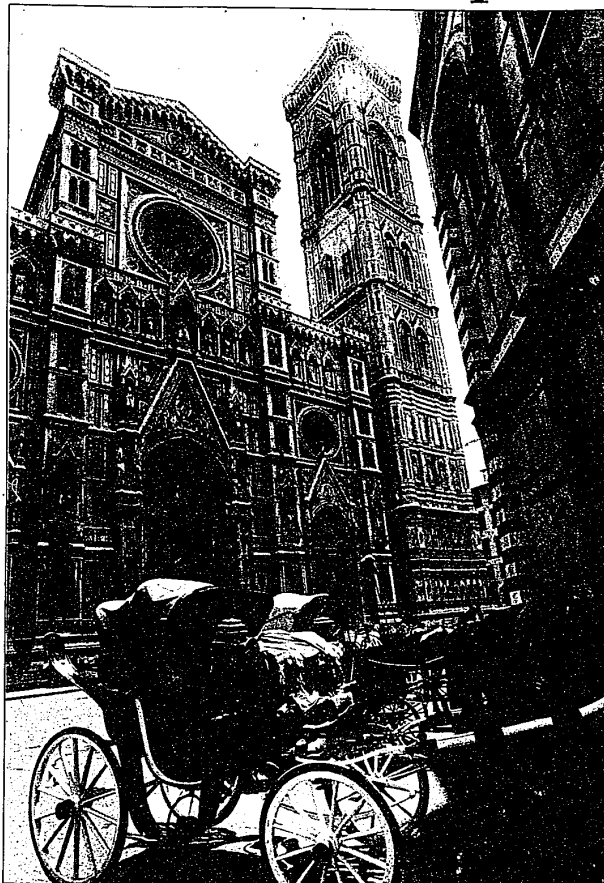
A few blocks on the other side of the Duomo is another pigeoned people place, the Piazza della Signoria. This is the site of the Palazzo Vecchio and the Uffizi gallery, a great sunlit open place surrounded by sidewalk cafes.

A couple of blocks away is the city market and the marvelous bronze boar with its nose rubbed shiny gold by passing children.

There are many things to do in Florence. Any guide book will tell you about the great churches, palaces and museums. If you like a touch of all that in a grand array of people experiences, walk through the sidewalk stalls from the Piazza della Signoria to the bank of the Arno and across the famous Ponte Vecchio, the bridge of jewelers.

A short taxi ride away, high up on a hill above the city, eat ice cream and watch the sun go down on the red, red roofs of Florence. The roof of the cathedral dominates it all, sitting there in sunset splendor with pigeons flying around its edges.

This high plaza is called the Piazza Michelangelo. It's full of yellow balloons, people and pigeons.



Santa Maria del Fiore, St. Mary of the Flowers, defies even the widest of photographers' lenses. When you've seen the Duomo's pink and green marble exterior and stunning mosaics, you've visited the third

largest cathedral in Europe. And if you've also seen the two largest, your trio consists of Peter (in Rome) Paul (London) and Mary (Florence).

## TRAVEL LOG of Iris Jones



### A crafty place indeed

The famous Ann Arbor Art Fair is over. So is the almost-as-famous medieval festival that followed it a week later. But Michigan still has dozens of art shows and festivals scheduled between now and Labor Day.

The fuel shortage is keeping travelers closer to home this year, so in-state festivals are a good way to spend a fuel-conscious summer weekend.

A booklet called "Michigan '79 Arts and Crafts Fairs and Festivals" is published every year by the Michigan Council for the Arts and can be obtained from their offices at 1200 Sixth Street in Detroit.

It's published early enough to satisfy crafts people who want to enter their creative work in these shows, and it covers enough ground to be useful to travelers right through the end of the year.

The Bay County Fair and Youth Exposition started today, in Bay City and will run through Aug. 11. Right on its heels is the Decatur Day and Ethnic Festival in downtown Decatur, Aug. 10 and 11.

The Holland Friends of Art and the Holland Recreation Department are sponsoring Art in the Park in Centennial Park, Holland, Aug. 11. Closer to home, the Keatington Art Festival will be held in Keatington Antique Village in Lake Orion Aug. 11 and 12.

If you are going into the Upper Peninsula, the Sault Area Arts Council will hold the Sault Summer Arts Festival in Sault Ste. Marie Aug. 14 and 15.

Some of the arts and craft displays are shown at county fairs such as the one held at Mt. Morris in Genesee County, Aug. 14-19. Others are as ethnic as the Danish Festival Arts and Crafts show on Main Street in Greenville Aug. 17-18.

Still others honor a single bit of Michigan produce like the Montrose Blueberry Festival Arts and Crafts Fair in the Village Park at Montrose Aug. 18 and 19. You may not know that Michigan is known nationwide for its blueberries.

The Dowagiac Chamber of Commerce and the Dowagiac Artist Guild are the contacts for the Dowagiac Artist Guild Arts and Crafts Show in the city park in Dowagiac Aug. 18. The Kalamazoo Valley Art Association sponsors the Milham Park Art Show on the same date in Kalamazoo, with Aug. 25 listed as a rain date just in case.

The biggest fair of them all is just down the road from us Aug. 24 to Sept. 3 when the Michigan State Fair comes to town.

You'll find these arts and crafts shows going on all over the state through the fall. August candidates include the Arts Pete at Dodge Park in Lansing Aug. 25-26; Art at the Center in Fenton Community Center Sept. 1 and 2; the Algonac Art Fair in the city park on the river in Algonac, Sept. 1 and 2; and Big Rapids Labor Day Arts Festival in Hemlock Park Sept. 3.

And the Lafayette Park Art Fair grandly takes over the shopping mall at the corner of Lafayette and Orleans in Detroit Sept. 8-9.

And that's just the arts and crafts fairs, not to mention the other kinds of festivals that can brighten up your life as you travel through Michigan this year.



Pigeons are a plentiful lot in this city on the Arno River, and this child energetically passes the time away chasing them in the Piazza del Duomo.

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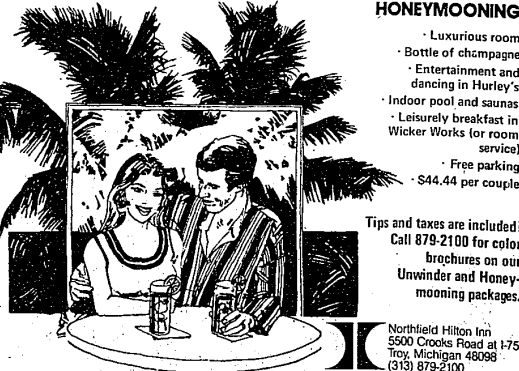
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### Hey diddle diddle, 3 days to fiddle

Sugarbush Campground will be the site for a Bluegrass Festival Aug. 10-12.

Events will include a band contest starting at 8 p.m. Friday, with a \$200 cash prize to the winner, open workshops on Saturday for budding bluegrass musicians with instruments, and a gospel concert to start off Sunday.

Bands playing on Saturday and Sunday include Don Reno and the Tennessee Cut-Ups, Frank Neely, the Stone Mountain Boys, the Sunnysiders, Big John and the B.J.s, Home Grown Grass, and the Cronley Family.

At the campgrounds, there is plenty of camping space, free parking, some electrical hookups, concessions, and space for tents.

Admission price for all three days is \$12 at the gate. For individual days, the prices are Friday \$4, Saturday \$6 and Sunday \$5. Children younger than 12 will be admitted free.

For information, call 817-439-9525, 313-282-7814 or 565-9215. From Detroit, follow I-94 west to U.S. 12 west, to South Sand Lake Road, which is two miles west of Jonesville. Sugar Bush Park is 5 1/2 miles west of U.S. 12.