

EASTER IN FLORENCE

International News

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“Buena Pasqua” says the restaurateur warmly. It’s Easter Saturday in Pisa, and the streets are deserted. Rather unobservantly, we couldn’t understand why the whole city seemed to have deserted; leaving us wandering the streets wondering what apocalypse we had survived. Easter in Italy is a big deal.

As the spiritual home of Catholicism, it is perhaps the country that solemnises this celebration above all others. On the Friday, in Florence, most of shops were closed, but the streets were still thrumming with tourists and Florentines who were off work. Most were heading to or from some kind of ceremony, and the air echoed with peals of bells from every basilica, church and, loudest and most resonantly of all, from The Duomo.

In the evening, fish supplies must dwindle seriously, as every restaurant, café and hotel is serving fish in memory of Jesus, along with some seriously sweet appetisers and copious amounts of the local Chianti. Up on the terraces of the old Etruscan town of Fiesole, a short prayer is being observed before dinner, and the sun is slowly setting over Florence, making the sky flush red, and the pale roofs below glow with the last dying rays. Everything is still, save for the cicadas in the grass, and the wind in the birch trees. It feels like Tuscany is holding its breath.

Then we are eating, and the world bursts back in to life – the amazing Italian staccato mingles with the clatter of crockery and the tinkle of glasses. It’s a perfect evening, where everyone – religious or not – has the excuse of a feast. On the Saturday, life is much the same as usual, though there are less shops open than usual.

It’s a weekend of gatherings – friends, families and communities sit outside in piazzas, sharing more food, drink and news. It seems that everyone is a tourist in Florence today – the city treated with the novelty and reverence that it deserves. In the evening, a stew followed by passing round a great wheel of Gorgonzola dolce and grappa.

On the Sunday, before we leave from Pisa airport, we stop off in the city for lunch – discovering completely deserted streets. We hear some hubbub coming from behind a door, managing to have found seemingly the only open restaurant in Pisa. Turns out it’s not really open – only serving the proprietor’s family – but we could join them for some Easter lunch. We hurry back to the airport a little tipsy, hop on the plane, and before we know it, we’re back in London, reeling.

Planning a trip to Florence is incredibly easy – there are a dozen budget airlines flying to Pisa every day; [travel insurance](#) is a cinch with AATravel; and hotels, youth hostels and even villas are in plentiful supply there, from cheap to extortionate