

The delights of Miracles Square, Pisa



Pisa is not the most attractive city in Italy by any means – it was damaged badly in WWII - and the reconstructed buildings are for the most part architecturally uninspiring. Also, it can be desperately crowded with tourists during the hot summer months. That said, no one should miss any opportunity to visit the Piazza dei Miracoli (Miracles Square) which contains the famous leaning tower together with a grand baptistery, duomo and monumental churchyard. Strangely, the Piazza is now on the Northern periphery of the city, though at one time it was near the centre.

Pisa lies at the confluence of the rivers Arno and Serchio. The former flows from the East, passing through Florence along the way, whilst the Serchio comes in from the North via Lucca, which is 18 miles away. It is a communications hub with its airport, autostrada and nearby Marina di Pisa shipping port (10km to the West).

Sights

The leaning tower (actually the bell tower for the adjacent cathedral) is startling, and walking to the top is quite an experience. Entrance is controlled by a sophisticated ticketing system – one can book online 16 to 45 days in advance at <http://boxoffice.opapisa.it/Torre/primo.jsp> or one can take a chance on the day. If you do the latter, it is vital you arrive early (ie before 10am) to avoid disappointment – even then you will be in for a substantial wait before your entrance time comes around. Either way, the experience is not cheap as a ticket costs 17 euros (internet booking) or 15 euros (booking in person on the day) and the guided tour takes a mere 30mins. At the booking office one can also obtain a ticket for the Duomo (cathedral) – a reasonably priced 2 euro – though we would recommend a “2 Monumenti” ticket which for 6 euros allows entry to the cathedral, baptistery, monumental churchyard, Museo dell’Opera (containing various religious works of art), and the Museo delle Sinopie (containing preparatory sketches of frescoes prepared by the Masters).

The Baptistery (Battistero di San Giovanni) was begun in 1153 and finally completed in the 1363. It is the largest in Italy and contains important furnishings, including a fine font and Pisano pulpit. Construction began in the Romanesque style under Diotisalvi. Nicola. Giovanni Pisano gave the upper part a Gothic transformation between 1277 and 1297, and Cellino di Nese added the Gothic dome in the 1300s.



The Camposanto Monumentale (monumental churchyard) was for centuries a graveyard for noble and eminent citizens. Begun by Giovanni di Simone in 1278, it was completed in 1464 and badly damaged by American bombs in 1944.



Pisa Cathedral (Duomo di Pisa) was begun in 1093 and is a masterpiece of Romanesque architecture. Despite its proximity to the eye-catching leaning tower, the Duomo still dominates the Piazza dei Miracoli.

The first stone of the Cathedral was laid in 1093, initiating what would become the distinctive Pisan Romanesque style. The main architect was Buschetto, who is buried in the last blind arch on the left side of the facade. The facade itself was built by Buschetto's successor, Rainaldo. A disastrous fire in 1595 destroyed most of the cathedral's medieval art, but some of the best Renaissance artists were hired for the redecoration work.

Transport

Driving to Pisa takes about 70mins (65 miles/7.70 euro toll each way). From the Pisa Nord exit on the A12 take the highway Statale Aurelia to Pisa. At the junction for Parco di S. Rossore, turn left into Viale delle Cascine. Drive along Contessa Matilde to Largo Cocco Griffi to reach your destination. Tourist parking is on Via Pietrasantina, five minutes' walk from Miracle Square.

An alternative to driving is to travel by train from Aulla Lunigiana station where there is extensive (free) car parking. The destination station to ask for is Pisa San Rossore (not Pisa Centrale, though you can get the train to Centrale and then change for Rossore) which is but a few minutes' walk from Miracles Square. The cost of the direct trains (10.21 & 10.39am) is 7.10 euro each way and the journey takes 70-90mins. You can also catch the 8.09am train to La Spezia and change trains – you will then arrive in Pisa at the earlier time of 10.20am (the fare is 7.70 euro each way). Return trains leave Pisa San Rossore at 6.15, 6.59, 7.15 and 8.15pm and take an hour to get back to Aulla Lunigiana. You can obtain tickets in advance at Trenitalia's (English) web site:

<http://www.trenitalia.com/cms/v/index.jsp?vgnextoid=ad1ce14114bc9110VgnVCM10000080a3e90aRCRD>

Be warned that at Aulla Lunigiana ticket issue can be slow since there is but one automatic ticket machine and one ticketing clerk (who is very helpful, but doesn't speak English).

The way you ask for tickets is as follows:

“Due biglietti a Pisa San Rossore andata e ritorno, per favore.”
 (“Coincidenza a La Spezia”)

“Two return tickets to Pisa, please.” (Changing at La Spezia”)

The ticket clerk might ask you if you want first class or second class (“prima classe o seconda classe”) but probably won't – he'll assume you want second class.



Tickets are valid for two months but you must remember to validate your ticket using the machine located on the platform before boarding the train! Once date stamped, a ticket is valid for 6hrs.



The image shows a Trenitalia train ticket with several red arrows pointing to specific fields and labels. The ticket is for a single adult (N. 1 ADULTI) on a double-decker train. The route is from Lucca to Aulla Lunigiana via Bagni di Lucca. The ticket is valid from 16/07/11 to 15/09/11. The price is EUR 6.40. The ticket is for a second-class (Classe 2) train. The ticket is for a double-decker train (VIA B. LUCCA*). The ticket is for a double-decker train (VIA B. LUCCA*). The ticket is for a double-decker train (VIA B. LUCCA*).

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VIA B. LUCCA*				← Route: in this case via Bagni di Lucca	
KM 92		← Distance		Price	
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