

3 THE ROMAN CASTRUM – 1,3 Km

Starting from the Ponte Vecchio garage, cross the bridge of the same name and continue straight on [via Por Santa Maria](#), street that takes its name from the ancient southern gate of the city. Despite the Nazi mines from WWII, some of the medieval tower houses can still be seen. In a few minutes you reach the Mercato Nuovo, better known as [straw market or Porcellino](#), name that derives from the bronze fountain of a wild boar made by [Pietro Tacca](#) in the 1600s, but a copy of a Roman original in marble preserved in the [Uffizi gallery](#). Tradition has it that by touching the pig's nose and throwing a coin into the fountain, one can return to Florence.

Going around the market you enter [via Porta Rossa](#) and after a few minutes on the left stands the [palazzo Davanzati](#). The building dates back to the mid-14th century and originally belonged to the Davizzi family, then passed on to the Davanzati family and fell into a state of abandonment in the mid-19th century when, thanks to the intuition of a Florentine antique dealer, [Elia Volpi](#), became a museum and showroom, welcoming customers from all over the world. Since 1910 the building has been transformed into the Museum of the [Casa Antica](#). Its structure marks the transition from the medieval tower house to the Renaissance palace, with the loggia on the ground floor used as an office and shop, while the upper floors were inhabited by the family.

Taking the street in front of the building and then turning right you reach [piazza della Repubblica](#), originally the center of the Roman Castrum and seat of the forum. With the unification of Italy and with the passage from Florence of the country's capital, it was unfortunately decided to "renovate" the historic center, creating the square and the buildings that surround it. At the center of the square is the column that marks the center of Roman Florence. Turning to the left (to go back to the [Arno](#)), however, you meet of the buildings that have not been affected by the nineteenth-century transformations: the [arte della lana](#), built at the beginning of the fourteenth century and home to one of the most powerful corporations in the city, and the [Orsanmichele church](#) behind it. The origins of the church date back to the Lombards, then to the 8th century, who erected an oratory dedicated to San Michele (San Michele in orto). The oratory was destroyed in 1239 and around 1290 [Arnolfo di Cambio](#) he built the grain market (this explains the upper floors of the building). The building also became a place of worship, thanks to an image of the Virgin considered miraculous, an image that burned in a fire, which led to the transformation of the building into a church (the new granary was built behind the public building). Marble tabernacles were inserted along the entire external perimeter of the church and within them each Art was called to have its own patron saint executed: the minor arts in marble, the [major arts](#). Today's statues are copies and to see the originals you need to visit the upper floors on Mondays. The works constitute an example of statuary art from the end of the fourteenth century to the end of the sixteenth century. The most important Renaissance artists worked there: [Donatello](#), [Brunelleschi](#), [Ghiberti](#), [Giambologna](#) and [Verrocchio](#), only to name a few. Very close to [Orsanmichele](#) there is also the so-called [House of Dante](#). In this medieval corner of the city, the [Alighieri](#) was born in 1265. The house purchased by the municipality was opened as a museum in 1965.