



Lots to love in Tuscany: bruschetta at La Chiara di Prumiano

## Tuscany's Treasures

### Uffizi Gallery FLORENCE

Home to the world's finest collection of Renaissance paintings, the Uffizi is probably the one sight you should see in Florence if you see no other. To avoid the long entrance lines year-round, reserve a pre-timed ticket in advance at [frenzemusei.it](http://frenzemusei.it).

### Il Campo SIENA

Intimate and manageable, this medieval walled city south of Florence is crammed with culture. Il Campo is the sloping, scallop-shaped square at its heart, where the annual Palio horse races take place. Branching from there, narrow cobblestoned lanes are lined with shops selling Florentine stationery, rainbow mounds of gelato, and other Tuscan goods.

### Campo dei Miracoli PISA

In Pisa's central piazza (square), the Leaning Tower survived World War II bombs

that ravaged the rest of this Tuscan city of science and learning (Galileo was born here). Visits to the Leaning Tower, which involve climbing 294 steps, must be reserved online 12-20 days in advance at [opapisa.it](http://opapisa.it).

### Wine Tasting CHIANTI

Many small wineries in the Chianti region between Florence and Siena offer short, informal tastings and tours. Find a winery with a sign saying Vendita Diretta ("direct sales") or Degustazioni ("tastings").

*Adapted from the National Geographic Traveler guidebook Florence & Tuscany.*

### Visit Tuscany with Nat Geo

The 10-day itinerary for National Geographic Expeditions' "Inside Italy" trip includes visits to the Tuscan cities of Pisa, Lucca, and Florence. For details go to [natgeoexpeditions.com](http://natgeoexpeditions.com).

day, as we reluctantly pack up our room, Jackie declares, "You are both very generous people."

**T**here is one last thing I need to do to round out my soul-searching week: find Venus. Florence is the birthplace of the Renaissance, the cultural shift that introduced diplomacy to politics, observation to science, and perspective to art. Perspective is exactly what I've come to seek.

One of the oldest museums in the world, the Uffizi displays works by Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Caravaggio. But I go straight to Botticelli's "Birth of Venus."

Reaching this moment has taken me five years, 4,366 miles, four airplanes, and the synchronization of a yoga retreat. I sit on a bench directly in front of the enormous painting, and my field of vision is filled with... buttocks. Tourist buttocks of all shapes and sizes.

I catch glimpses of the seafaring, voluptuous goddess with alabaster skin and Rapunzel hair. Art critics have deemed Venus's elongated proportions "anatomically improbable" and her pose "impossible," as she would certainly tip over her shell and face-plant into the sea. It's also true that her dark outline and lack of shadows renders her flat, like a sticker you can peel. Everything in the painting is moving, fluttering. Yet Venus herself looks as calm as the clamshell she rode in on.

Note to self: *Be calm.*

Next, I notice her gaze. She is looking toward us, but her eyes indicate that her thoughts are far, far away.

*Go inward, I think.*

How to decipher her expression? A slight smile plays upon her lips, but her eyes look wistful. Is she happy? Sad? Homesick? Tender is the best I can surmise.

*Be tender.*

Shocking display of white skin, belly gently rounded.

*Be authentic, vulnerable, and brave.*

Eventually I rise to leave. No dramatic "aha" moment, but one can't argue with the subtle wisdom. I make my way through the throngs for a close-up good-bye. As soon as I draw near the canvas, my head fills with one word. It's as if the volume of my female intuition is turned to its highest setting. "Love!"

I want to smack the painting. Venus drags me all the way to Florence to tell me the secret to life is love? Doesn't everyone know that? Can she be a bit more specific? No. Venus sticks to her monosyllabic script. "Love, love, love, love, love."

As I leave the Uffizi, it hits me. Venus didn't let me down at all. She simply finished my soul's incomplete question: Can you receive...love?

MELINA BELLOWS (@melinabellows) is National Geographic Partners' Editorial Director for Kids and Family. Contributing photographer CATHERINE KARNOW (@catherinekarnow) leads photo workshops in Italy.

Better Living on a Scale From...

RELAX TO RAVE!

# BLISS INDEX

BY JENNIFER BARGER  
ILLUSTRATION BY  
JAMES TAYLOR



# 11

Experiences that Provide a Mental and Physical Reboot





These boots were made for walking Australia.

Surf's up in Indonesia!

DJ got us fallin' in love with early mornings.

# 9

## HEAVENLY HIKE

VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

The 64-mile Great Ocean Walk meanders through deserted beaches and the Otways rain forests, before ending in view of the offshore limestone stacks known as the Twelve Apostles. Hikers might spot kangaroos, wallabies, or whales. Do the whole trail in about a week (there are campsites along the way), or just portions via a guided trip. [visitgreatoceanroad.org.au/greatoceanwalk](http://visitgreatoceanroad.org.au/greatoceanwalk)

# 10

## Waves of Wellness

SUMBA ISLAND, INDONESIA

Surfers travel the world in search of those adrenaline-inducing perfect waves. At Sumba Island's Nihiwatu resort, fronting the Indian Ocean, "there's a juxtaposition of trade winds, swell direction, and distance from storms," says part-time surfing instructor Terry Simms. "It creates some of the smoothest and most undisturbed swells in the world." Experienced boarders tackle Occy's Left, a barreling, long left break; beginners can take lessons using rental equipment. Guests can stay in thatch-roofed villas that mimic traditional Sumbanese houses. [nihiwatu.com](http://nihiwatu.com)

# 11

## DANCE AT DAWN

MULTIPLE CITIES

Daybreaker, a series of early a.m. raves launched in New York, brings booze-free yoga and DJ-fueled dance parties to nightclubs. The clean fun can be found in London, Paris, Washington, and soon, Shanghai and Hong Kong. They're powered by green juice and fair-trade coffee. "I love that you see all shapes, ages, and sizes dancing and smiling," says D.C. fan Deepa Venkataraman. [dybrkr.com](http://dybrkr.com)

D.C.-based writer and fashion stylist JENNIFER BARGER can be found on Twitter and Instagram at @dcjnell.

PAGE 65: LJUPCO/GETTY IMAGES (BICYCLE); NERTHUZ/GETTY IMAGES (TELESCOPE); FIZKES/GETTY IMAGES (YOGA); MIKHAIL ABRAMOV/SHUTTERSTOCK (LOWER PEONY); OLEGANKO/SHUTTERSTOCK (UPPER PEONY); JOAKIM LEROY/GETTY IMAGES (STONES); SOLEG/GETTY IMAGES (SEAGULL); REBIUS/GETTY IMAGES (AIRPLANE). PAGE 66: LE MONASTÈRE DES AUGUSTINES (STATUE AND YOGA); JACKF/GETTY IMAGES (GUANACO); JAMES TAYLOR (TULIP); COURTESY INKATERRA (BIRD-WATCHER); YSBRAND COSIJN/GETTY IMAGES (SWIMMER); TEREX/GETTY IMAGES (GOGGLES); KANOKSAK DETBOON/GETTY IMAGES (CAMEL); SOLEG/GETTY IMAGES (BIRD). PAGE 67: CURUXOX/GETTY IMAGES (SNOWCA); LECHIENGRAND/GETTY IMAGES (FLOATPLANE); EDEL QUERINI/GETTY IMAGES (FLY FISHERMAN); BURAZIN/GETTY IMAGES (GIRAFFE); PRAPASSONG/GETTY IMAGES (ZEBRA); 4X6/GETTY IMAGES (BICYCLIST). PAGE 68: NO LIMIT PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES (HIKER); BRIAN MCENTIRE/ISTOCKPHOTO (BOOTS); 4X6/GETTY IMAGES (SURFER); CHORALE MILES/DAYBREAKER (DANCING WOMAN); OPOLJA/GETTY IMAGES (DISCO BALL); ANDREW RAUNER/DAYBREAKER (YOGIS STRETCHING)

# Nat Geo PLUS

Traveler subscribers' free all-access pass to our premium online content.

**GET** unlimited articles online  
**READ** exclusive ebooks  
**WATCH** films ad-free

Traveler subscribers: get free access at [natgeo.com/go-t](http://natgeo.com/go-t)

Learn more at [natgeo.com/plus](http://natgeo.com/plus)



Copyright © 2016 National Geographic Partners, LLC. All rights reserved.