



FLORENCE

Florence, the Cradle of the Renaissance, was for over a thousand years a quiet town in the Tuscan countryside. Settled by the Etruscans, a Roman encampment, and then a domain of the Holy Roman Empire, its political and economic rise only began around the 11th-12th centuries when, in spite of various faction wars, prosperity from trade laid the way for its future leadership position. By the 12th century, this city-state had already many functioning guilds (the famous Corporazioni delle Arti) and the Florentine Fiorino had become one of the strongest currencies in all of Europe. In the 13th century the city's prosperity increased even more: Dante Alighieri wrote his *Divina Commedia* in the language spoken by the Florentines and not erudite Latin and so he laid the basis for modern Italian and Giotto and Arnolfo made their remarkable contributions to painting and architecture. In 1434, Cosimo de' Medici went to power in the city beginning three centuries of Medici rule. Lorenzo the Magnificent is credited with being the most influential patron of the Renaissance. At his court the arts flourished producing names such as Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, Donatello, Della Robbia etc.

The Medici and their successors, the Lorraine Grand dukes, continued to promote artistic endeavors of every sort commissioning great villas and monumental palaces for themselves.

The outstanding events of the 19th century were the Risorgimento struggle and Florence's

brief period as the capital of the newly established kingdom of Italy (1865-1871).

To this day Florence is renowned all over the world not only for its masterpieces, but also for its shopping delights, gourmet cooking and great wines.