



Top tips for visiting: Miracle Square and Leaning Tower of Pisa Heart of the City

The Campo dei Miracoli in Pisa, or the Square of Miracles, is the largest preserved monumental complex of the Medieval world and was proclaimed a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. The square is not located in the center of the city as you might imagine but to the north-west of the fortified wall, almost out of the town, where tuscanysbus.com has its bus stop. Since the times of the Etruscans, the three structures found in the piazza have been considered central to religious life, symbolizing the main stages of a human's life: the Baptistery represents birth, the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta life and the graveyard, of course, alludes to death. The name Piazza dei Miracoli, or "Square of Miracles", has given to the square after the First World War when Gabriele D'Annunzio in his work "Forse che sì, forse che no, 1910" cited it with these words: "The Ardea rotated over the sky of Christ, over the meadow of Miracles".

Back in 1173, when its construction began, Pisa was one of the most powerful trading centers on the Tyrrhenian sea and the Mediterranean in general. They conquered many lands: Jerusalem, Cartago, Ibiza, Norway, Spain, Morocco...But they had one enemy as well... the Florentines. To show off their strength and wealth to the Florentines before anything else, the Pisans decided to build a magnificent cathedral. As it was custom back in the time when a town's success was measured by the splendor of its cathedrals and the height of its bell towers (55 meters, the tallest bell towers in Europe). But then something went wrong... due to the fact that it was built on marshy ground and that the foundations were too shallow, by the time its construction reached the 3rd floor, the tower started tilting. The construction of Tower of Pisa began in August 1173 and continued for about 200 years but by the time the Pisa tower was finished, the Pisans had no reason to show off anymore: they lost in the war against Genoa and a century later, the town of Pisa was sold to their worst enemy... Florence.

So, what did the people of Pisa do when they noticed the Pisa bell tower became the Pisa leaning tower? Well, when they got over one of the biggest embarrassments of architecture history, they tried to correct the tilt of course. So they started building each new story a bit higher on the tilting side, to make up for the difference... but the effect was even worse – due to all that extra stone, the Pisa leaning tower started leaning even more! By the 20th Ct, the Pisa tower was leaning more than 20 feet south, and a rescue effort began... the engineers had to remove the soil from the northern side to even it out as much as possible. Due to the work on it, the Pisa tower had been closed from 1990 - to 2008 because of safety fears! The restoration lasted 11 years and \$27 million later the lean was reduced by 15 inches. It is one of the most visited monuments in the world, it's almost as if we cannot believe it defies gravity until we see it for ourselves! If you want to guarantee your place in line to climb to the top of the Tower, reservations are strongly advised Here you can buy the tickets. <http://boxoffice.opapisa.it/Turisti/>

Tips of Leaning Tower History

The Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta - Duomo

Emblem of Pisan Romanesque architecture, the cathedral was designed by the architect Buscheto in 1164 and shows, in its brightness, the influence of various styles and cultures: Byzantine but mostly Islamic components which testify of the power of the Maritime Republic of Pisa at that time. During the trips in North Africa and Middle East, Pisan sailors could admire the characteristics of the different worlds they visited and were deeply influenced by them. Look at the columns within the Duomo: they will remind you of similar ones you find in many mosques! Despite a fire in 1956 within the Cathedral, many important works are still preserved within, including:

- the great mosaic of St. John the Evangelist in the apse (1302) by Cimabue
- the Pulpit, a masterpiece by Giovanni Pisano (1302-1310)
- Bas-reliefs executed by apprentices of Giambologna
- Works by Beccafumi and Andrea del Sarto in the chancel.

The Baptistery

The works for the realization of the Baptistery, the biggest in Italy, started in 1152 under supervision of the architect Diotisalvi; the structure is set in front of the Cathedral and was entirely revisited by Nicola Pisano and his Son Giovanni around the mid-thirteenth century. They changed the baptistry by adding Gothic elements, a lodge and a cupola. In the middle of the baptistry, the Baptismal Font by Guido Bigarelli is set center stage with natural illumination coming from a hole in the ceiling, now covered by the Cupola. The Pulpit by Nicola Pisano (1255-1260) has stories from Christ's life on the five panels, while the columns represents the Virtues. We can easily notice a classical style in the work, and for this reason Nicola Pisano is considered by many as a precursor to the Renaissance.

The Graveyard - Camposanto

The graveyard is an ancient monumental cemetery set on the north side of the Square of Miracles. Begun in 1277 by the architect Giovanni de Simone, it is a rectangular structure with an inner cloister with Gothic arcades. If you just wish to take a few photos of you propping up the tower and have a little walk around the Cathedral and the Baptistery, an hour in Pisa is enough!

If you think it would be really cool to have a lunch in Pisa, our recommendation will be... don't! If you're staying there just a few hours you will automatically gravitate towards the uber-expensive tourist-trap restaurants right by the tower and pay through the nose for very average quality food.

Our recommendation is: get to the Pisa leaning tower, take some photos, enjoy the setting and come back in Livorno where you can find lots of great place to eat...pizza, local food, sea-food, spaghetti....or delicious Gelato or super Italian caffè / cappuccino.

