

Pisa is very quaint and tidy

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On our way to Florence we decided to break up our trip by stopping in Pisa for a few hours. We had both seen pictures of the Leaning Tower. What we didn't realize was that Pisa is a lovely town.

Surrounded by mountains, Pisa is quaint and tidy. The homes all have terra cotta roofs and most of them are made out of brick or marble gathered from local quarries. The tower was leaning more than I had expected. I'm surprised it hasn't fallen. I managed to hike up the narrow circular stairway to witness the most fabulous view encompassing the entire valley. Vineyards were also dotted around the city's outskirts.

We arrived in Florence by early afternoon, making reservations at a small pension through the tourist information booth. A pension is equivalent to an English Bed and Breakfast. Most of these family run hotels are equipped with a shower and sink in your room, but the toilet is down the hall.

When visiting the continent be prepared to eat a lot of bread. A typical breakfast is made up of two rolls and jam and either tea, hot chocolate or very strong coffee.

When in a large city I am a firm believer in taking a city tour. They are definitely a value for your dollar. You'll learn more about the history of that particular spot and will usually see sights you wouldn't visit if you make up your own tour.

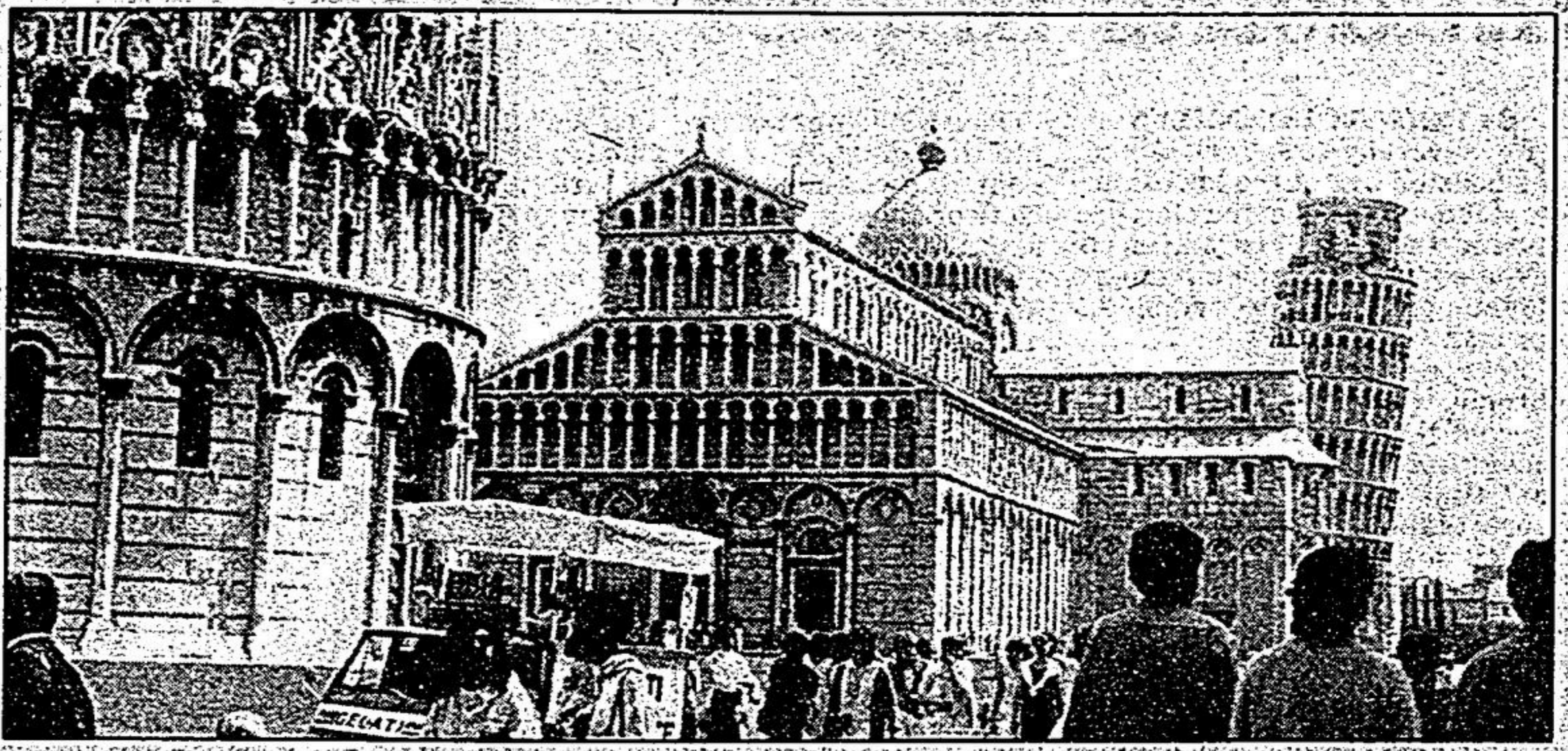
In Florence, C.I.T. offers a large variety of tours, both of the city and to destinations outside the area. Our first stop was at the Duomo, the third largest cathedral in the world.

We also boarded a bus to the other side of the Arno River which divides Florence and the Pizalle Michelangelo, where the wealthier citizens of Florence live in beautiful stately homes.

There are plenty of interesting sights to see in the city; the Uffizi Gallery, several palaces, the School of Leather, where monks create fine pieces of leather articles; the oldest bridge in the city and Ponte Vecchio.

The most interesting places to shop in Florence are the large outdoor markets where bartering with the merchants is a must. You can find everything from leather clothing and T-shirts to mosaic picture frames and gold jewelry.

In our next Weekender Travel Section I will continue along our route to Venice and will take you to Austria, Germany and Holland.



Although the Leaning Tower (right) is its most famous attraction, Pisa has much more to offer its visitors. Surrounded by mountains, the city is quaint and tidy. Vineyards also dot the outskirts of Pisa.

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