



Cortonaweb

CORTONA

TOWN GUIDE

*History, routes, restaurants,
shopping, tours and activities,
accommodation and surroundings*

www.cortonaweb.net

TIPHYS EDIZIONI

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Here is CORTONA

Cortona is a small, yet fascinating ancient town perched on a hilltop on the border of Tuscany and Umbria; however, don't call it a town unless you want locals to immediately take a dislike to you; despite its diminutive size, the Cortonese proudly call it a "city" and that's possibly the definition that best suits this unique gem of a town.

Celebrated over the centuries by artists and writers that often chose it as the subject of their masterpieces, the town enjoyed several different periods of prominence and can boast an unparalleled heritage in terms of culture, arts and history and scenery.

This is Cortona; a timeless place where past and present blend seamlessly together to write a new future; a welcoming town that invites visitors to discover the many treasures it has in store; the town's extraordinary archaeological and artistic heritage is unique; but Cortona also has many other strings to its bow including high quality food and wine, fine handicrafts, cultural events and much more; all against the extraordinary backdrop of a territory where man has learnt to live in balance with nature.

TOWN HISTORY



View of Cortona

Founded over twenty-five centuries ago, the town has been inhabited ever since; wandering through its maze of narrow cobbled-alleyways, precipitous streets and quaint squares, peering into its picturesque courtyards and its Etruscan heritage, you will be breathing history at every step of the way. Local tradition claims the town to be the “mother of Troy and grand-mother of Rome”: legend has it that Cortona-born hero Dardanus, left the town to travel to Troas where his descendants founded the city of Troy; then, after the city was destroyed by war, Aeneas, a descendant of Dardanus, returned to his homeland as a refugee to found Rome. That’s as simple as that! Beyond the myth, archaeological and historical evidence confirms that in Etruscan times

Cortona enjoyed a prominent position and was one of the twelve leading city-states known as “*lucumonies*”. Unfortunately, much of what was built in Etruscan times no longer remains; Cortona boasts, however, a unique Etruscan heritage including

the monumental burial mounds, or *tumuli*, at Sodo and Camucia (7th century B.C.), the impressive city walls (4th century B.C.), the burial sites of Tanelia Angori and Tanelia di Pitagora (2nd century B.C.). Conspicuous by their commanding size and structure, two of

Cortona mother of Troy and grandmother of Rome



Already known to Greek historian Herodotus, Cortona boasts an extensive mythographic tradition attributing it great significance and remote origins. Dyonisus of Halicarnassus claimed that the town was the first the Pelasgians (often identified with the Etruscans) conquered from the Umbrians and that from there they moved on to found other towns throughout Etruria.

Even Ulysses, known in Etruria under the name of *Nanos* (the wanderer), is believed to have lived out his life in Cortona, on mount Perghe, traditionally identified with the village of Pergo. Much of the Cortonese myth, however, was born out of Virgil’s *Aeneid*: legendary Dardanus left Cortona to found the city of Troy; his descendants, including Aeneas, fled burning Troy to land on the shores of Latium where they founded Rome; that’s why Cortona is called “the mother of Troy and grand-mother of Rome”.

the ancient gates along the massive city-walls appear to have retained their original Etruscan character: the monumental, double-arched Porta Bifora, located at the lower end of the Via Ghibellina, and the scenic Porta Montanina, located in the upper part of town.

In Roman times, following the Social War of 90 B.C. and a slow, yet unrelenting process of Romanization, Cortona



Porta Montanina

eventually became a *municipium* and maintained substantial autonomy even in Imperial times; archaeological evidence from Roman times is rather sparse; however, Cortona’s ancient Roman layout can still be guessed in the two main streets running through the town centre which have remained substantially unaltered over the centuries: So, the current Via Nazionale-Via



The restored terrace-altar. Tumulo II of Sodo

Roma axis and the Via Guelfa-Via Benedetti-Via Dardano axis are traditionally assumed to

of the ancient Roman *Corito*. So, in all probability, the *forum* was located at the intersection of these two axes, in the area today enclosed between the Piazza della Repubblica and the Piazza del Duomo; none of the public buildings usually overlooking the ancient forum was unfortunately preserved to this day, except for the complex water-supply system; a series of wells and cisterns found in the upper part of town possibly supplied water to the public fountains and buildings that customar-

have been respectively the *decumanus maximus* and the *cardo maximus*



Piazza della Repubblica

INFO

ROUTE LENGTH: 1.200 m
WALKING TIME: 2 hours and 30 minutes
NOTES: wear comfortable shoes, bring a bottle of water and your camera; the route is short but pretty challenging and offers some unique sights you may want to immortalize.

1-11 Sights marked on the map

Although short, the route includes some pretty long mild to steep uphill stretches. So, put on your walking shoes, bring a bottle of water and prepare for a challenging climb!

This strenuous route along some of the steepest streets and alleys in town takes us through the more genuinely medieval part of town; an area close to the town centre in terms of distance, yet looking so far away in time that earned the town the reputation of "city of silence". From the Piazza della Repubblica, a short walk up the Via Benedetti and the steeper Via Maffei, takes us in front of the commanding Church of **San Francesco** 1, sitting at the top of a dramatic stone stairway. The church was built

THE MEDIEVAL "POGGIO"

Streets:

Piazza della Repubblica, Via Benedetti, Via Maffei, Via Berrettini, Piazza della Pescaia, Via San Niccolò, Via Santa Margherita, Piazzale Garibaldi

Sights along the route:

Church of San Francesco, Church of Sant'Antonio, Roman cistern, Berrettini's house, Church of San Cristoforo, Porta Montanina gate, Church of San Niccolò, Church and convent of Santa Chiara, Church and convent of Ss.ma Trinità, Porta Berarda gate, Church of San Marco.



Church of S. Francesco, façade

between 1245 and 1247 to designs by Frate Elia Coppi, First General of the Order of the Minor

Friars as well as the designer and architect of the Basilica Maggiore di S. Francesco at Assisi (he

was later buried in the church, behind the high altar). Frate Elia erected both a convent to house the minor friars and a church which was to remain over the centuries a unique example of Gothic style in town. The church, originally entirely frescoed, has retained much of its original structure with large ogival windows despite the extensive alterations that were made to it over the centuries: the gothic windows on the right-hand side (overlooking the old town hospital



Church of S. Francesco, back façade

a simple gothic portal with 16th century wooden door. The spacious interior has one nave with painted trussed ceiling and three cross-



Church of S. Francesco, interior

built by Santa Margherita) were replaced by rectangular windows, the frescoes were plastered and replaced by 17th century sandstone altars; the crypt (a grilled opening giving access to it can be seen to the left of the entrance steps) was filled in with debris. The façade has retained

vaulted apsidal chapels. In the 1600s, the newly added altars were embellished with paintings by some of the most celebrated artists of the time including *The Immaculate Conception with St. Christopher and St. Catharine* (1609) by Andrea Comodi (1609), *St. Anthony and the miracle*

of the mule by Ludovico Cardi known as "il Cigoli" (1597) and the *Annunciazione* by Pietro Berrettini da Cortona (1669), last work painted by the Cortona-born *maestro* of the Italian Baroque before his death.

In the chapel located to the right of the high altar, is the funerary monument of Ranieri degli Ubertini, the first Bishop of Cortona (1360). In the main chapel, the magnificent marble tabernacle above the high altar houses the priceless *Reliquiario della Croce Santa* that Frate Elia brought to Cortona from the Holy Land. This consists of two parts: a historiated ivory tablet containing the relic, dating back to the age of emperor Nicephorus II Phocas (963-968) and a templet-shaped tabernacle. Other notable cult objects housed and wor-

The first traces of Cortonese cuisine go back to the time of the Etruscans. Their tradition has been reproduced over the centuries to the present day. The main ingredients that constitute the gastronomic foundation are bread and oil, unquestionable protagonists of countless preparations. Pork is mainly used since even the less wealthy could prepare it. Mush-



rooms and

chestnuts

from forests around Cortona are used in every kitchen. Instead, the production of wine originated before the Etruscans; today the area is known as D.O.C. and Cortonese cellars offer a wide variety of well-known wines all over the world.



In Cortona you will find an attractive

choice of restaurants, taverns and wine bars to suit all tastes and pockets.

A traditional cuisine is used, sometimes giving a modern touch and others simply following recipes that have been handed down over the centuries, always using local ingredients.



RESTAURANTS



Preludio

Via Guelfa 11
Tel. (+39) 0575 630104
www.ilpreludio.net

A few steps away from Palazzo Comunale (Municipal Palace), the restaurant *Preludio* is a place where time stands still. It has a welcoming atmosphere, is pleasantly classic and

elegant. The furnishings and menu change with every season.

There is a wide range to choose from, from appetizers to desserts. The large cellar is constantly maintained with the best years of the most important national labels. The cuisine is based on tradition but is also continuously evolving coupling creativity with continuity, and proposes fine dishes such as a trilogy of *foie gras*, fillet steak alla Rossini, *schiaffoni* with truffles and *Pici* with red wine sauce and pigeon ragout.



Il Melone

Loc. Il Sodo, 38
Tel. (+39) 0575 631133
www.ristoranteilmelone.it

If you wish to spend an evening in an elegant environment, if you are looking for an evocative setting where to have a romantic tête-à-tête, or celebrate a special occasion, this is where you will find a sober and

elegant atmosphere. There are many specialties and delicacies the Tuscan cuisine has to offer to the most curious gourmands. Within the *Borgo Melone* one can find the restaurant *Il Melone*, which offers a typical Tuscan cuisine, as well as *La Taverna del Sodo* for more simple tasty meals, and special homemade beers.



La Bucaccia

Via Ghibellina 17
Tel. (+39) 0575 606039
www.labucaccia.it

Critics have classified this restaurant as "The Gastronomic Temple of Cortona". *La Bucaccia* is primarily a characteristic restaurant where a typical cuisine is elaborated by the chef, Agostina. Romano, her husband and restaurateur, is also a refiner of DOC cheese, an expert on cold meats, but most of all, a lover of Aretine cuisine. The restaurant is situated in the historical centre of Cortona and has been restored from the basement of

a thirteenth century building. This is a place where one can cherish the taste of culinary delicacies made by the owners.



Trattoria Dardano

Via Dardano 24
Tel. (+39) 0575 601944
www.trattoriadardano.com

This is an informal, friendly atmosphere where one can enjoy the specialties of a traditional cuisine, faithfully prepared using top quality ingredients. On entering, you will see that the first room has an open kitchen where one can look around and watch how various foods are prepared. Eating at *Trattoria Dardano* means one appreciates the genuine products of the territory around Cortona and discovers the Tuscan rustic cuisine, which is simple and tasty. You have the opportunity to taste typical dishes including the "crostini neri", the "ribollita", the "pici" and, of course, the world-famous "Fiorentina steak".



Il Falconiere

Loc. San Martino 370
Tel. (+39) 0575 612679
www.ilfalconiere.it

The fabulous Michelin-starred restaurant of *Il Falconiere Relais & Chateaux*, is situated in a seventeenth century villa that has been in the Baracchi family since 1860. Built from an old lemon-house, the restaurant presents dishes that interpret the territory with elegance and are combined with wines of excellence. Amongst these wines, Baracchi's own production stands out. When the season is fair, there is nothing more pleasant than a candlelit dinner on the terrace, which has breathtaking views of Cortona and the valley.



Nessun Dorma

Piazza Signorelli 24
Tel. (+39) 0575 62038
www.ristorantenessundorma.com