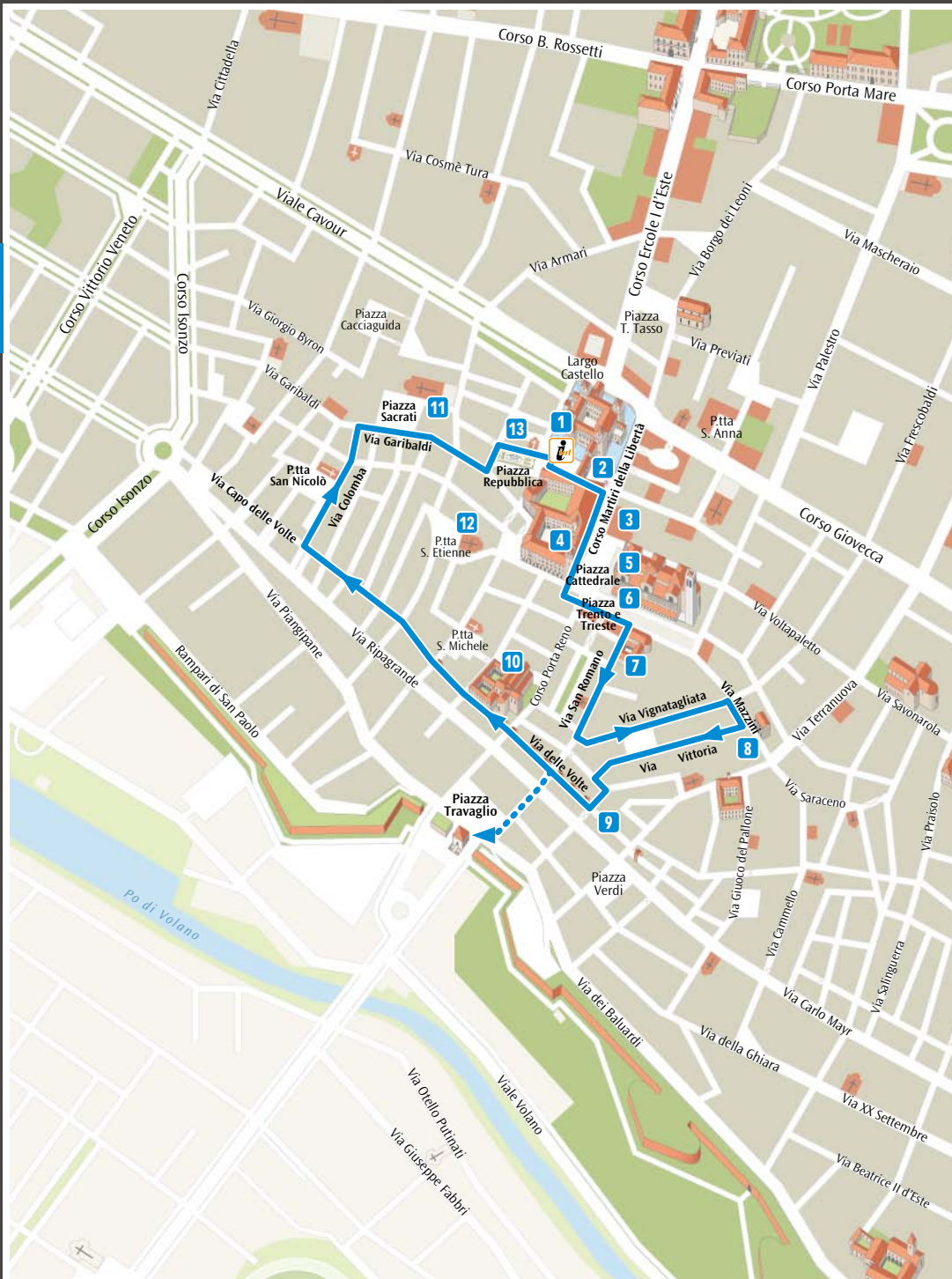


## THE MEDIAEVAL CENTRE

From the Middle Ages to today, the area around the Cathedral has always been the focus of the city life. The seat of the various rulers over the years and a commercial and historical area of great importance, the centre is still the favourite meeting place of residents and visitors alike.

The original layout of the ancient city, which has been developing along the banks of the river PO, is still clearly recognizable in the famous area of *Via delle Volte*.



### THE ITINERARY IN BRIEF

- 1** **CASTELLO ESTENSE**   
*Starting point of the route*
- 2** Piazza Savonarola
- 3** Palazzo Arcivescovile
- 4** Palazzo Municipale
- 5** Cattedrale
- 6** Piazza Trento e Trieste
- 7** Museo della Cattedrale
- Via San Romano*
- 8** Ghetto – Museo Ebraico
- 9** Via delle Volte
- 10** Chiesa di San Paolo
- 11** Chiesa di San Domenico
- 12** Chiesa di Santo Stefano
- Via Garibaldi*
- 13** Chiesa di San Giuliano

## 1 Castello Estense

tel. 0532 299233



MUSEO  
DI QUALITÀ



In 1385 a dangerous revolt convinced Niccolò II d'Este of the need to erect mighty defences for himself and his family; thus the Castello di San Michele was built, a fortress erected against the people. Its imposing proportions, its moat, its drawbridges and its towers date back to that remote period. An elevated covered passageway, which still exists, joined the military building to the marquises' Palace (today Palazzo Municipale). Centuries went by and the risk of riots died down. So the castle became the magnificent residence of the court and was embellished with roof terraces at the top of the towers, marble balconies, the Renaissance-style courtyard (at the time fully frescoed) and sumptuous apartments.

### INTERIOR

Once passed through the entrance halls on the **ground floor**, the visit starts in the so-called **Gothic Halls**. The first, with its highly ornate ceiling decorated with ramified vegetation motifs, hosts a scale model of the Castle as it appeared in the fourteenth century. The following three Halls of the series are given over to exhibits showing different aspects of life at Court under the rule of the Este dynasty.

The **Castle Kitchens** were located in the following two rooms. Replica ovens are on display in the second. Next comes the so-called Corridor Hall, which was probably a guards room.

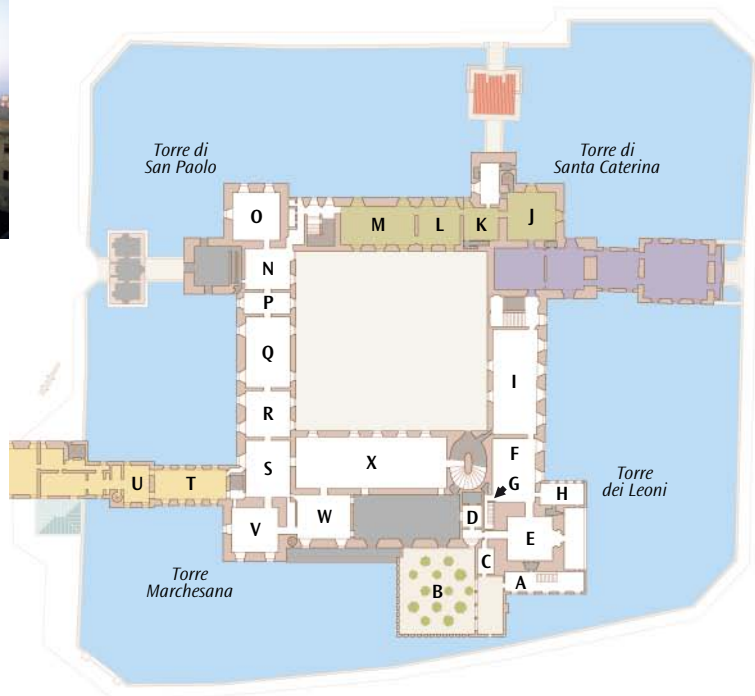
A narrow corridor and a low doorway lead on to **Don Giulio's Prison**, so called because the brother of Alfonso I, Prince Julius, was imprisoned here for having led a famous conspiracy. The graffiti on the walls were made by prisoners and date back to the sixteenth century.

After backtracking to the corridor and climbing down some steep steps, the visitor reaches **Ugo's and Parisina's Prisons**. These two luckless lovers were the protagonists of one of the saddest stories under the rule of the Estes.

Parisina Malatesta was the second wife of the marquis Niccolò III, who was a womanizer and much older than her. After seven years of uneventful marriage she fell in love with her stepson Ugo, whose mother, Stella dei Tolomei, was Niccolò's favourite. The two lovers were discovered, summarily judged and beheaded after a short but distressing period spent in the castle dungeons. It was the year 1425; Parisina was twenty, Ugo still nineteen.

A long ramp, originally used for artillery, leads to the ducal apartments.

On the **first floor**, some rooms can be visited; unfortunately, they lack the original furniture, but have magnificent ceilings whose colours have lost none of their former splendour.



- Bookshop and Cafeteria
- Areas closed to the public

- The Patience Suite
- The Duke's Private Chambers

### FIRST FLOOR - Itinerary

#### A The duchesses' Loggia

Going up a short modern staircase, you reach a bright ante-room with a few traces of decoration, where is situated an extensive description of the leading Estensi characters and what they did to the structure of the castle.

#### B Garden and Loggia of the Oranges

A small hanging garden for the duchesses and their most intimate friends. The terrace was adorned, as it is today, with large vases containing citrus plants around which were set out smaller vases with other plants in the form of flowerbeds.

#### C Camerino of the Bacchanalia

A small connecting room that was once entirely painted. Three scenes

inspired by the myth of Bacchus are still present on the right-hand wall.

#### D Ducal Chapel

This small room, with elegant geometric lines, was used for private prayer. The decoration, free of sacred images, is traditionally believed to have been ordered by Renata of France, the duchess with Calvinist sympathies, although this is contradicted by the ceiling with its paintings of the Four Evangelists and the white eagle of the Estense family.

#### E Chamber of Dawn

On the magnificent ceiling are depicted the four phases of the day. To the right of those entering from the chapel is *Dawn*: a young winged goddess who advances pulling the horses of the sun chariot by the reins. Proceeding in a clockwise direction we find *Day*, where

the sun chariot proceeds in all its radiance, preceded by the Dawn holding two torches; *Dusk*, with the sun chariot moving towards the horizon; *Night*, where Diana, with the disc of the moon on her forehead, reaches her lover Endymion. At the centre an old man surrounded by the three Fates, goddesses of life and death, represents time. Lower down, a long train of putti advance on chariots pulled by all types of animals. The great mirrors that are a feature of this room and the two following were set there to recall the name of these rooms, recorded in documents as 'The Apartment of the Mirror'.

#### **F** Small Chamber of Games

The centre of the ceiling is decorated with the round dance of the *Four Seasons*, all around are frescoes with "games" scenes from Ancient Rome.

**G** access to the "Torre dei Leoni" staircase.

#### **H** Small Chamber of Poison

It seems that this room was originally used by the court pharmacist for making medicines and, according to some, the poisons used against political enemies. The ceiling is nineteenth-century.

#### **I** Hall of Games

This large room was for evening entertainment, such as concerts or games. The ceiling is divided into eleven sections, each one showing a sport after the taste of Duke Alfonso II. The most



valuable, on the courtyard side, are the work of **Bastianino** and from the left, show *free-style wrestling*, *shot-put* and *Greco-Roman wrestling*. The athletes are nude in homage to the ancient Greek traditions.

#### **J** Room of the Tower of St. Catherine

The attractive ceiling is in the Renaissance Revival style. The highlight is a raised panoramic view of eighteenth century Ferrara.

#### **K** Gallery Ante-room

This room originally led into a long gallery which was subsequently partitioned to form smaller rooms. A panoramic view of Ferrara as it appeared between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is depicted in a large panel.

#### **L** "Hector and Andromache" Room

This Hall takes its name from the nineteenth century fresco painting on the ceiling. Aeneas says farewell to his son and wife Andromaca. A replica of a fresco painting showing the Dukedom of Ferrara is depicted in the panel.

#### **M** Gallery Room

The original decorations have been lost. Today, the Gallery hosts an exhibition of the "Delizie", the name by which the various leisure lodges the Estes had built throughout the Dukedom are known.

#### **N** Land Reclamation Projects

The exhibit here shows the various reclamation works carried out throughout the territory of the Province of Ferrara.

#### **O** Room of St. Paolo Tower

The Hall is decorated with grotesques and medallions in the Neo-classical style.

#### **P** "Governo" ante-room

This small room was where those who



Hall of Games

had asked for an audience with the duke waited. The ceiling is reminiscent of the one in the following room.

#### **Q** "Governo" Room

Commissioned by Ercole II d'Este (1534-1559) to dispatch government business, it still conserves its gold-painted panelled ceiling, one of the most beautiful of its type in all Italy.

#### **R** Devolution Room

*Ferrara's devolution*, that is its transition from Este to Papal domination in 1598, is shown in the ceiling scenes. Clockwise we have: Lucretia d'Este, Duke Cesare d'Este, Cardinal Aldobrandin, one of the many feasts given in honour of Pope Clement VIII upon his arrival.

#### **S** Landscapes Room

This room takes its name from the section of the wall decorated with remarkable landscape frescoes, executed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by an unknown artist.

#### **T** Gallery Hall

This highly ornate room is decorated with grotesques in the Renaissance Revival style.

#### **U** The Duke's Private Chambers

Starting in the early sixteenth centu-

ry, Duke Alfonso I had these famous Chambers finely appointed by several of the most renowned artists of the time.

(Open for temporary exhibitions only)

#### **V** Geography Room

Splendid geographical maps of the Ferrarese territory, drawn in 1709-1710. Note the vast area covered by water and marshes, most of which has now disappeared following major land reclamation.

#### **W** Blue Room


Elegant nineteenth-century ceiling with rosettes and garlands.

#### **X** Coats of Arms Room

This room presents a double decoration from the papal period. The oldest decoration consists of a long series of shields with the Pope's tiara and St. Peter's keys. The lower part of the wall is taken up with a decoration executed in 1857 on the occasion of the visit of the Pope Pius IX. More coats of arms and some views of Ferrarese territory as it was at the time; the city of Ferrara (the castle), Comacchio (Trepponti bridge), Cento (the main square), Lugo di Romagna (the porticoes), and Pomposa Abbey




The sixteenth century spiral staircase brings back in the courtyard.

 Leaving the Castle behind, you find yourself in

## 2 Piazza Savonarola

In the centre stands the **monument to Girolamo Savonarola**, built in 1875 in honour of the famous reformer born in Ferrara in 1452. The small piazza is closed off to the south by a 16<sup>th</sup>-century loggia which forms part of the Town Hall, to the north by the Castle and to the west by the so-called **via Coperta** (Covered Route), a five-arched building intended to link the two ducal residences.

 Piazza Savonarola overlooks Corso Martiri della Libertà. Turn right towards the Cathedral where you can admire

## 3 Palazzo Arcivescovile

Corso Martiri della Libertà, 77

Built from 1718 to 1720 by order of the cardinal Tommaso Ruffo. It has a long façade divided into three bays, of which the two side ones are decorated with a pseudo fiat rustication. The windows are framed in marble and the majestic central portal, with a balcony above, is in the same material.

The interior, not open to visitors, has a luxurious staircase, with a double flight of stairs, and sumptuous apartments.

Opposite the Archbishop's Palace stands the

## 4 Palazzo Municipale

The building of the Town Hall started in 1243. This was the residence of the Este family up to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the court moved to the Castle. Right opposite the Cathedral stands the ancient entrance to the court palace: a **big arch** flanked by the statues of the Marquis Niccolò III on horseback and **Duke Borso of Este enthroned**. Passing through the arch we reach the former ducal courtyard, now known as the piazzetta Municipale.



A fine **grand staircase** can be admired, built in 1481 by the architect Pietro Benvenuto degli Ordini, next to which stands the **court chapel**, commissioned by Ercole I of Este and now used as a theatre. Inside, the following can be visited: the **Duchesses' room** - a small room possibly designed for Eleonora and Lucrezia d'Este and splendidly decorated in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the **Sala**

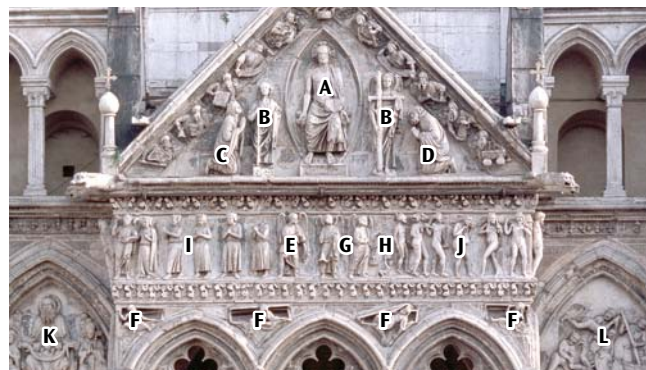
**dell'Arengo**, with frescoes painted between 1934 and 1938 by Achille Funi.

 Walking through the Vòlto del Cavallo (the Horse Archway) one reaches the

## 5 Cattedrale

tel. 0532 207449

The Cathedral dates from the 12th century and bears witness to all the historical periods of the city. The outstanding façade, divided into three sections, was begun in Romanesque style, still visible in the lower part. Note the St. George and the scenes from the New Testament above the central door, the work of the sculptor **Nicholaus** (1135). The upper part was built some decades later in a Gothic style and besides the numerous small arches and the splayed mullioned windows presents an extraordinary *Last Judgment* by an unknown sculptor over the central loggia.



- |                                                         |                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>A</b> Christ in Glory                                | <b>H</b> A small devil lowers the dish containing sins in an attempt to damn the souls being judged |
| <b>B</b> Angels with the symbols of the Passion         | <b>I</b> The blessed souls, dressed and crowned, set off for Heaven                                 |
| <b>C</b> The Virgin Mary                                | <b>J</b> The damned souls set off for Hell                                                          |
| <b>D</b> St John the Evangelist                         | <b>K</b> Heaven, Abraham seated with the blessed souls in his lap                                   |
| <b>E</b> Two angels play trumpets                       | <b>L</b> Hell: sneering devils                                                                      |
| <b>F</b> The dead leave their tombs                     |                                                                                                     |
| <b>G</b> An angel weighs sins and good deeds on a scale |                                                                                                     |

Under these sculptures there is an elegant Gothic loggia with a statue, once gilded, of the *Virgin Mary and the Child*, which dates from the early part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and is attributed to Michele da Firenze. In the lower part of the facade, on the left, a memorial tablet recalls the passage of power in Ferrara from the Este family to Pope Clement VIII, whose head in bronze is placed above the marble plaque. To the right, in a niche, stands a statue of the marquis **Alberto d'Este**, founder of the University (1391). The side facing Piazza Trento

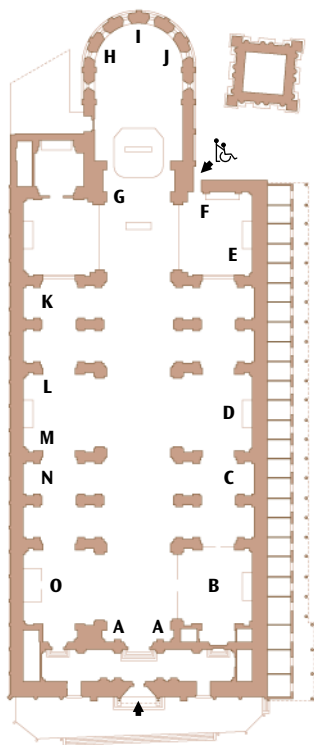
e Trieste is decorated with two galleries and small columns of various shapes. At ground level is the Loggia of the Merchants, occupied by shops since Medieval times. Half way along the south side what remains of the *Porta dei Mesi*, demolished in the 18<sup>th</sup> century can still be seen; some of its sculptures are conserved in the Cathedral Museum. The imposing Renaissance belltower, in pink and white marble, is an unfinished work attributed to **Leon Battista Alberti**. The brickwork apse, whose sober design is lightly embellished by terracotta arches and marble capitals, is the work of Ferrara's top architect and town planner, **Biagio Rossetti**.

## INTERIOR

Over the centuries the interior has been completely redesigned; the apse in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the transept in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the aisles in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Today it has a classic style, whose pictorial decoration is complex and sumptuous. Valuable works representative of various eras can be admired there.

**A** In the entrance to the cathedral there are some noteworthy works: *St Peter and St Paul*, frescoes removed from a deconsecrated church, the work of **Benvenuto Tisi da Garofalo** (1481-1559), maestro of the Ferrarese school. Above, in two niches, the monumental statues of the co-patrons of Ferrara, St George and Bishop St. Maurilius, realised in 1746.

**B** The Chapel of *Madonna delle Grazie*: here an image of the Virgin Mary particularly dear to the Ferrarese people is worshipped. It is conserved inside a magnificent polychromatic marble altar by **Agapito Poggi** and



**Andrea Ferreri** (18<sup>th</sup> century).

**C** *Madonna in Glory with St. Barbara and St. Catherine*; canvas by Sebastiano Filippi, known as **Bastianino** (1532-c.1602).

**D** *St. Lawrence and St. Francis, with a portrait of the donator*; by Ippolito Scarsella, known as **Scarsellino** (1550-1620).

**E** *The Martyrdom of St Lawrence*, by Giovan Francesco Barbieri, known as **Guercino** (1591-1666).

**F** Above the supine funeral monument of Archbishop Ruggero Bovelli there is a beautiful group of 15<sup>th</sup> cen-

tury bronze statues; The *Crucifixion with the Virgin Mary and St John*, the work of **Niccolò Baroncelli**; to the sides are *St. George and St. Maurilius*, realised by his brother-in-law, **Domenico di Paris**.

**G** Tomb of Pope Urban III. The pontiff died unexpectedly in Ferrara 1187, while staying in the city during a journey.

**H** Choir (early 16<sup>th</sup> century): the work of the **Canozzi** family from Lendinara, cabinet makers who worked all over northern Italy.

**I** The walls of the apse are covered in magnificent gilded stucco executed in 1583-84 by **Agostino Rossi** and **Vincenzo Bagnoli**.

**J** The bowl-shaped vault of the apse: *Last Judgment* by **Bastianino**. The fresco (completed in 1580) is

clearly inspired by the work of Michelangelo.

**K** *Crowning of the Virgin Mary and Saints*, canvas by **F. Francia** (1450-c.1517).

**L** *Betrothal of the Virgin Mary*, by **Niccolò Roselli** (16<sup>th</sup> century).

**M** *Mary as Intercessor*, executed by **Garofalo** in 1532 as a votive offering for the liberation from the plague which began in 1528.

**N** *Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints Sylvester, Maurilius, Jerome and John*, signed and dated (1524) by **Garofalo**.

**O** Baptistery Chapel: the baptismal font, based on Byzantine models, was made from a single block of marble in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It is surrounded by an elaborate neo-Gothic construction from the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century.

On the right side of the Cathedral opens the wide

## 6 Piazza Trento e Trieste

It was for centuries the location of the main town market. Nowadays it features a widening to the south of the Cathedral, whose southern wall, together with the bell tower, occupies one of its largest sides. On the opposite side a building built to a design by Marcello Piacentini from 1954 to 1956 in place of the 14<sup>th</sup> century **Palazzo della Ragione**, destroyed by a fire in 1945. Further on, past the side of the former **Church of San Romano**, there is the façade with large windows of the **Teatro Nuovo**, built from 1923 to 1925 by Sesto and Adamo Boari. The piazza is closed off to the east by the neo-classical façade of the



former oratory of **San Crispino**. This later building has a curious feature: on the capitols of the side arches of the portico shields with a shoe sole in their centre can be clearly seen: this is the mark of the guild of cobblers, for centuries housed in this oratory, dedicated to its patron.

Along the South side of the piazza, the former Church of San Romano with its brick façade, houses the

## 7 Museo della Cattedrale

Via San Romano • tel. 0532 244949




The Cathedral Museum mostly holds objects from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance belonging to the Cathedral.

Among these are the 13<sup>th</sup>-century panels from the Porta dei Mesi, the side entrance to the cathedral demolished in the 18<sup>th</sup> century; the *Madonna of the Pomegranate* by **Jacopo della Quercia**; the previous decorative panels of the organ, depicting the *Annunciation* and *St. George and the Dragon* by **Cosmè Tura**, the master of the 15<sup>th</sup>-century Ferrarese school. A rich collection of illuminated antiphonal hymn-books, reliquaries, paintings and other works of art complete this interesting museum.

 **Via San Romano** starts in front of the church and was a main artery in the mediaeval city.

This ancient road was the main link between the market square (currently piazza Trento e Trieste) and the port, which was situated at the present via Ripagrande.

Nowadays, as before, it is one of the busiest commercial streets and with several houses with porticoes.

 Turn left off San Romano into Via Vignatagliata that is one of the streets encompassed in the Jewish Quarter.

## 8 Ghetto - Museo Ebraico

Via Mazzini, 95 • tel. 0532 210228




The origins of the Jewish community in Ferrara are very ancient and the city boasts a tradition of religious diversity. Many groups of Jews, driven out of their native countries

- Spain (1492), Portugal (1498) and Germany (1530) - were welcomed by the Este family. They settled in Ferrara and created a strong and well-organised community. The ghetto was set up in 1627 by the papal government which, after the devolution of 1598, ended the previously liberal policy. The area set aside included the present via Mazzini, via Vignatagliata and via Vittoria. The **Synagogue** is found in via Mazzini, at n. 95. The front of the building is distinguished from its neighbours by the memorial stones at the entrance.

Among the most important parts inside are the former German Synagogue, used for the most solemn ceremonies, the erstwhile Italian Synagogue, and the Fanese Oratory, used for Sabbath worship. In this historic building there is also the **Jewish Museum**: liturgical objects, 18<sup>th</sup> century furnishings, and printed documents with works of the celebrated Isacco Lampronti, a doctor and theologian who lived between the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

As a matter of interest - The column supporting the statue of Borso d'Este facing the Cathedral was built using miscellaneous grave stones from the Jewish cemetery.

 Walking along via Ragno, one reaches the charming

## 9 Via delle Volte

In this long and narrow road, whose unmistakable appearance has become one of the symbols of Ferrara, much of the commercial activity of the Medieval city took place.



There are still many elevated passages (known as “volte”) which joined the merchants’ houses (on the south side) to their warehouses (on the north side). According to another interpretation, the volte were used to regain living space in a highly populated area.

 Diversion for the southern city walls at Porta Paula.

Following Via delle Volte will take you to the junction with Corso Porta Reno where we suggest you make a little detour by turning right to visit the


## 10 Chiesa di San Paolo

Piazzetta Schiatti • tel. 0532 765284





The current church was built after the earthquake in 1570 by the architect **Alberto Schiatti**. Officiated for centuries by Carmelite monks, the church was the object of a number of legacies and donations which made it today’s sumptuous building. On one side there still stands the former convent, with two elegant cloisters.

Interior: the frescoes and excellent paintings from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries make this church a museum of late Renaissance Ferrarese art. Particularly fine are some works by **Bastianino**. In the bowl-shaped vault of the apse there is the fine fresco *Elijah’s Abduction* by **Scarsellino** (16<sup>th</sup> century). [TEMPORARILY CLOSED]

 You can return to the planned route by taking Via Capo delle Volte. Keep on going until you can turn right into Via Muzzina.

The streets in this mediaeval area are laid out in “riviera” style and were initially designed to provide housing for soldiers. Continuing along Via Muzzina you will come to the wonderful Chiesa di San Nicolò with its famous apse designed by Biagio Rossetti.

 The street ends at the junction with Via Garibaldi, one of the oldest and most important arteries of the city. It was once known as Via della Rotta (breach) in an obvious reference to flooding caused by breaches in the banks of the River Po.

 Little diversion along via Spadari to reach the

## 11 Chiesa di San Domenico

Via Spadari • tel. 0532 203383

The church was built in its present form in 1726, in place of an older one, of which a chapel and the bell tower remain, to be seen to the right of the façade.


**In the interior:** pictures by Ferrarese painters of the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The floor is covered in ancient tombstones, an example of what was once a common feature of churches. The apse contains a wooden choir built in 1384.

 Little diversion along via Bocccanale di Santo Stefano to reach the

## 12 Chiesa di Santo Stefano

Piazzetta Saint-Etienne • tel. 0532 203969

A very ancient church (11<sup>th</sup> century), it has been rebuilt a number of times. The present façade, the work of extensive restoration performed in 1825, has an elegant decoration in brickwork and a marble portal taken from another church, no longer standing. The three-nave interior contains interesting works by Giacomo Parolini and Scarsellino (17<sup>th</sup> century). Opposite the church stand Medieval houses which are worthy of note.

 The tour continues into Via Garibaldi until it meets Via della Luna where, a left turn will take you to the Piazza Repubblica where you will be greeted by the façade of the

## 13 Chiesa di San Giuliano

Piazza Repubblica

This small church was built in 1405 in place of an older one, demolished during the building of the Castello Estense. The lines of the building are Gothic, with decorations in the typical brickwork of Ferrara, in particular those of the tricuspid portal, above which a marble relief represents St. Julian killing his parents. The interior was rebuilt in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. [NOT OPEN TO THE PUBLIC]

