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HISTORIC CENTRE OF URBINO

“Have you never been to Urbino? If you keep answering no, you will have to feel guilty because you will be missing a dimension of Italian civilisation. It is not only for its artistic heritage, no, it is for the very physiognomy of the city, for its air, for the extraordinary beauty of its land, Urbino is an enchanted landscape.”

Una città che non deve morire, Carlo Bo

A pearl called Urbino shines in the hills of the Marche region. It reached the height of its splendour in the 15th century, thanks to the enlightened personality of Federico da Montefeltro and his son Guidobaldo, who made this small medieval town an incredible royal court and an attractive centre for artists and intellectuals. Its splendour has been “handed down” to us intact: coming to Urbino is like browsing through an art book and finding in this historic centre the whole vision of Federico da Montefeltro, an enlightened prince who ruled over Urbino from 1444 to 1482 and was followed by his son Guidobaldo I da Montefeltro, who founded the town’s university in 1596. An ideal city for inspiration yesterday and a fundamental stopping place today on a journey in the Marche, Urbino does not live in the past: thanks also to its university and its students who throng the historic centre, it has been capable of looking to the future and adapting its tourism offer to the present day. Walking through its festive streets, you will get the idea that Urbino is under a good star.



CULTURAL HERITAGE
UNESCO DOSSIER: 828
PLACE OF INSCRIPTION: KYOTO, JAPAN
YEAR OF INSCRIPTION: 1998



CRITERIA FOR SELECTION: The small hill town of Urbino, in the Marche region, greatly flourished culturally in the 15th century, attracting artists and scholars from all over Italy and beyond, and influencing cultural developments in other parts of Europe. Due to the economic and cultural stagnation from the 16th century onwards, it has preserved its Renaissance appearance to a remarkable degree.



“Urbino, in that palace which is against the mountain, where Coletto il Brabanzone wove the Siege of Ilio, every Season the ancient history was woven in pale blue and red.”

Gabriele d’Annunzio is one of the many intellectuals who has written about Urbino and was impressed by the city, as can be seen in *Laudi del cielo, del mare, della terra e degli eroi* (Book II, *Elettra*). An itinerary through the heart of the city follows, to discover its history and artistic masterpieces.

A visit to Urbino starts from **1 Piazza Mercatale** (where people usually park), the majestic 16th century walls are admired and access to the city opens up, through Porta Valbona or the spectacular Helical Ramp, the work of Francesco di Giorgio Martini, to be ascended on foot beginning to understand that Urbino is all up and down. What you cannot miss in the city of the Montefeltro family is without any doubt the **2 Palazzo Ducale**, the seat of the **National Gallery of the Marche**, the centre of Urbino and the heart of power until the 16th century. You will be impressed first of all by the beauty of its palace, its characteristic towers, the balconies framed by small, arches of triumph, and by the charm of the rooms Federico da Montefeltro lived in. He commissioned Luciano Laurana and Francesco di Giorgio

Martini to build it and he welcomed to court talented and ambitious artists and commissioned important works from them. You must spend a few hours in the National Gallery of the Marche, if you want to go round it all, in order not to miss anything. It has extraordinary works to be admired by Bellini, Crivelli, Piero della Francesca, Paolo Uccello and Federico Barocci, to mention only a few. There is also a masterpiece here called *Ideal City*, attributed to Luciano Laurana or Francesco di Giorgio Martini, which is unanimously recognised as the manifesto of architecture in the history of art. Dazed by so much beauty, go and visit the **3 Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta**, rebuilt in 1789 by Giuseppe Valadier, which houses the *Last Supper* by Federico Barocci, particularly appreciated for the vivacity

of its colours. Cross the busy **4 Piazza della Repubblica**, bound by Palazzo degli Scolopi and the Collegio Raffaello, where the university students hang out, and go towards **5 Via Federico Barocci**, a lane at the end of which many people gather to take a souvenir photo of Urbino. Very close-by, there is the 16th century **6 Oratory of San Giuseppe** which houses the only Baroque church in Urbino, with an altar in polychromatic marble and a fine stucco Nativity scene by Federico Brandani. If you have been impressed by this place, get ready to literally gape as soon as you enter the door of the neighbouring **7 Oratory of San Giovanni Battista**, a riot of 15th century frescoes by Lorenzo and Jacopo Salimbeni, including, behind the altar, those of the *Crucifixion*, with magnetic colours and dynamism.



THE CHANCE TO STUDY IN URBINO

“So now we take our stand, halt opposite / Urbino’s windy hill: each scans the blue / And picks his spot to launch his long-tailed comet [...]”

The Kite, Giovanni Pascoli

This is how Giovanni Pascoli spoke of Urbino, where for a few years he studied at the Collegio Raffaello of the Piarist Fathers. There are many youngsters today who come to the ducal city to study in its ancient and renowned university, founded in 1506 and named after Carlo Bo, who was its rector from 1947 to 2001, for no fewer than 54 years, a period during which he changed the face of this university. From economics to law, from biomolecular science to the arts, and from science to communication studies, there is no lack of choice. In 2021 the University Museum System was also established, which completes and enriches the Urbino cultural offering: it is possible to visit the Physics Cabinet – Urbino Museum of Science and Technology, which is in the 18th century Palazzo degli Scolopi, the Botanical Garden Centre in the convent complex of St Francis, the Museum of Plaster Casts in Palazzo Albani and the mineralogical and geo-naturalist collections in the “Paolo Volponi” area. Despite not being as big as other university cities, Urbino is a small but lively town, full of events and stimuli thanks to its university and numerous students who come from all over Italy and the world.



"ITALY, WITH ITS LANDSCAPES, IS THE ESSENCE OF THE WORLD, THE MARCHE THE ESSENCE OF ITALY."

This is what Guido Piovene wrote in *Viaggio in Italia*. And we could add that Urbino is a distillate of the Marche, with its panoramas where the eyes can sweep over the gentle hills. Urbino is also the ideal city when travelling with children, a place made-to-measure for families where the youngest members can find lots of exciting ideas and, walking through its streets, they may

not want to leave it. They will definitely be fascinated by the **1 mineralogical and geo-naturalistic collections** housed in the "Paolo Volponi" scientific-educational area: more than 4500 samples divided into showcases which form an interesting educational-narrative route. There are also the geo-naturalistic collections of local animals, rocks and fossils. Then there are countless events for children and workshops set up especially for them. When you leave here, if you intend to visit the **2 Palazzo Ducale** do not fear, because here too they will find something that could fascinate them, such as the words left written on the

walls of the palace over the centuries by courtesans, guests, servants and lords: tiny chronicles through which the authors left their mark for posterity. Children will be very impatient to climb up the southern tower and go down from the northern one to take a souvenir photo of their journey, and then see the faces of Federico da Montefeltro and his son Guidobaldo, observing the oil painting on wood by Pedro Berruguete, and peeping inside the prince's alcove, a small wooden room decorated with a sky made from mock fabric in gold and red. Children who like science will no doubt enjoy the **3 Physics Cabinet – Urbino Museum of Science and Technology**, in the Palazzo degli Scolopi, which boasts a fine collection of technical-scientific instruments and a virtual, interactive and multimedia reconstruction of the study of Duke Federico da Montefeltro in Palazzo Ducale. For a breath of fresh air, you can go for a walk in the **4 Botanical Garden**, founded in 1809, where children can spend time identifying the insectivorous plants, the tinctorial ones and the cacti, the medicinal herbs, the species from the undergrowth and ferns. On the other hand, if you want to offer the children an overview of the most famous sculptures in the world, you have to take them to the **5 Museo dei Gessi** in Palazzo Albani, where the moulds of famous works found in the most important museums in the world are on display. If they want to know more about Raphael, there is the **6 House where he was born**: it is quite impressive to see the place where the artist took his first steps and admire one of his first works, the fresco of Our Lady with the Child. You can conclude the excursion at the **7 Alborno Fortress** in the **Park of the Resistance**, where the children can play and enjoy a unique view.



KIDS



THE HISTORIC CENTRE OF URBINO in books

Reading suggestions to get into the heart of the university city.

- **The Kite**, Giovanni Pascoli (1897). In this poem in *Primi poemetti*, Pascoli evokes the good times past, when he studied in Urbino, with nostalgia and melancholy.
- **Elettra**, Gabriele d'Annunzio (1903). Elettra is the second book of the *Laudi*, a collection of celebratory poems, some of which are dedicated to Italian cities, such as Urbino.
- **Viaggio in Italia**, Guido Piovene (1957). Piovene travelled through Italy for three years to write this unique and meticulously detailed reportage, considered a classic of Italian travel literature. From the Alps to Sicily, stopping at Urbino, the author's gaze is an invitation to discover our wonders.
- **Una città che non deve morire**, Carlo Bo (1965). This is a speech by Carlo Bo, for years rector of the University of Urbino, which is published in the collection *Discorsi rettorali* (1973). During his many years in Urbino, Bo often spent some lovely words on the ducal city.
- **Via Volta della Morte**, Aurelio Picca (2006). Two students are found dead,

certainly murdered, in an Urbino street. Inspector Vittorio Macri, who is leading the investigation, and a lecturer suspected of the crime now enter the scene.

- **I sotterranei della cattedrale**, Marcello Simoni (2013). A historical thriller which takes place in the city of the Marche in 1790. The corpse of a man is found in the cathedral of Urbino, but it is immediately clear that it is not a natural death. A student who is destined to the priesthood becomes fascinated by the mystery and in his own way starts to investigate.
- **Urbino, Nebraska**, Alessio Torino (2013). The book is based on the death of two people, in this case two girls, Ester and Bianca. Made up of four stories linked to one another, the common thread running through them are Ester and Bianca and their memory. It is all set in Urbino, which from a geographic place becomes a universal place of the soul.
- **Il duca che non poteva amare**, Elena and Michela Martignoni (2015). This is a novel played out against the intrigues at court and the power games, between true love and forced love; the main character is the young Duke Guidobaldo da Montefeltro, who has just married Elisabetta Gonzaga. The reader is carried back to the Urbino Renaissance, between reality and imagination.

• **Pessima mossa, maestro Petrosi**, Paolo Fiorelli (2015). Set in Urbino, a city inspired by Urbino, the novel starts during a chess tournament in the village, with the participation of the maestro Achille Petrosi. Why does his opponent not turn up and is then found murdered in his villa: who is guilty?

• **I demoni di Urbino. La figlia del maresciallo**, Pasquale Rimoli (2017). A thriller which revolves around an investigation of Captain Sesti and the story of Giulia, his daughter. Everything happens in Urbino, a fascinating ducal city where events are imbued with culture, magic and mystery.

• **Mistero a Palazzo Ducale**, Gabriele Terenzi (2021). Based on a true event: the disappearance of some works from the Ducal Palace, in 1975. In the novel, it is the tourism entrepreneur Costantino Bez who sets off to look for the *Dumb Woman* by Raphael, the *Flagellation* and *Our Lady of Senigallia* by Piero della Francesca, trying, by investigating in Italy and France, to discover who has committed the theft.

• **Nulla accade per caso**, Vincenzo Biancalana (2023). This is the story of Tazio Tenaglia, a gallery-owner from Urbino, and his family. It is the 1950s and the discovery of some letters leads to the revelation of family secrets concealed by false respectability. Tazio is killed and Inspector Arturo Ferrel investigates.