

MONTEFORTINO

Altitude: 638 m

Population: 1400

Location

Montefortino is a small hill-top town, facing the high peaks of Monti Sibilla, Piora and Castel Manardo, whose impressive rocky cliffs have been eroded by the waters of the River Tenna.

Origins of the name

It is thought the name derives from a rocky fortress built at the top of the hill by the lords of Monte Passillo.

It was around this fortification, later destroyed in the XV century, that the existing town was built.

Historical Interest

Even if the origins of the town are relatively recent, the area has been inhabited since ancient times. During the reign of Emperor Cesare Ottaviano Augusto, it was part of the Roman centurization which is dated at 15 B.C.

With the fall of the empire it became the dominium first of the Goths then the Lombards. In 1262, Montefortino was freed from the lords of Monte Passillo and fought to consolidate and defend its territorial rights from the attentions of the towns of Montemonaco, Amandola, Visso, Camerino (Dominium of the Duke of Varano) and Fermo. In 1318, it agreed a federal pact with Fermo, even if it was a contract with onerous concessions, including the promise to build a protective castle. In exchange Fermo was bound to send a lord of the manor and a garrison of soldiers, guarantee the protection of the territory and pay all the town's debts, even if on this last point there remained Montefortino's right to self-administration according to its laws. So, on October 9 a magistrate from Fermo took control of the possessions and the castles of Montefortino. From this date began an on-going dispute in which Fermo re-affirmed on various occasions its possession rights. These were eventually revoked only in 1537 by Paolo III, with the introduction of the Ecclesiastical State of Agro Piceno. In the following years Montefortino governed itself, even if during the papacy of Sisto V, with the aid of the Garrison of Montalto, it lost its privilege of mayoral elections. Then began a long period of peace and prosperity up to the French Revolution. In 1860 it became part of the Kingdom of Italy under Vittorio Emanuele II.

Itinerary

A visit to the town's historic centre is particularly worthwhile thanks to its typical medieval buildings, characterised by the alignment of the roads and buildings along semi-circular concentric lines, leading from the central point of the little piazza next to the church of S.Francesco. The itinerary starts from the public gardens (1) where the church of Madonna del Fonte (2) is also located.

Built in 1647, the church follows a Greek cross plan and has an octagonal dome which is beautifully decorated with lime plaster and painted in baroque style, with a small clerestory above. Above the main altar is a fresco depicting the Virgin and Baby in her embrace, with a beautiful gold leaf sculpted frame. Previously it was located at a nearby chapel but on completion it was moved to the church, which was an important destination

for pilgrims who gathered here to venerate the painting, which was valued for its miraculous properties. Crossing the road the route arrives at the Santa Lucia Gate (3), through which is the old town. Following the steps to the right, the route climbs up the "Girone" hill (so called in reference to the curved fortifications of the castle walls), where the oldest part of the town is found; the route continues to the top of the hill where stands the church of San Francesco (4) built in 1550 from a previous XII century building, dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Inside the single nave has a vaulted ceiling. There is an interesting presbytery made from plaster in the baroque style and painted with oil paints on the walls. Descending along via dell'Ospedale the route meets the church of Sant'Agostino (5), dating from the XIV century, marked by an ancient doorway and windows with pointed arches. Inside is a single nave with elevated presbytery and numerous frescos along the walls. It was here that the prior of an annex of the monastery of the Eremitani, in the XVI century, had the imperial power to create the Aurati Knights, Conti Palatini, doctors in Theology, Philosophy, Law and Medicine and graduates of Poetry. The convent was subsequently suppressed in 1670 by Pope Clemente X. Further down is the parish church of San Michele Arcangelo (6) built in the decade 1860-1870, after the pre-existing church of S. Maria Nuova was demolished. Inside the church is neo-classical in style with a single nave with pilaster strips. The apse and presbytery were built in a semi-circular area with ionic columns. Proceeding along the narrow streets the route comes upon the Leopardi building (7) constructed in the first half of the sixteenth century. A renaissance building with harmonious architectural lines, from the guelph windows and the studded doorway, framed with travertine, it can rightly be considered the most important building in the town. Inside, the building is linked to the town's art gallery, which hosts over 150 works of art donated by the citizen Fortunato Duranti (1787-1863), an extravagant artistic genius and art collector. The gallery has a precious array of works of art of various genres, from fifteenth century gothic to neo-classical nineteenth century works. The communal diocese museum is also found in the same building, with its collection of religious art, including a great part of the vast heritage of the churches found within the Montefortino area. Beside this building is a characteristic neo-classical building known as the house of columns or the Little Clock Temple (8) at the end of the little "Largo Duranti" piazza. Walking down via Roma the route meets the town hall (9), in ancient times known as dei Priori, already the mayor's residency, which was converted into a hospital for the poor in the XIX century. In the facing piazza is the church of Sant'Andrea (10), in front of which was built the original religious building.

The existing building was constructed in the second half of the XVIII century. In 1977, following a partial collapse of the roof, the works of art originally present in the church were transferred to the art gallery. They are of great interest, especially the XIII century wooden altar with an oil painting by the Fermo painter Alessandro Ricci and a round medallion painting depicting the "Fuga in Egitto".

The last section of this itinerary takes in the Case Torri (11) which can be seen on leaving the church of Sant'Andrea or reached in five minutes by car.

They are sixteenth century Extra Moenia constructions, that is, outside the town walls, a strategic position at the entrance to the Ambro and Infernaccio valleys, which suggests they were used as lookouts and for the defence from brigandry, diffuse in the XVI century. From the church of S. Andrea carry on until reaching the Subappennina road, which brings you back to the departure point.