

PRECI

Altitude: 597 m

Population: 1000

Location

Preci springs from a cliff above the Campiano river valley, a short distance from the Val Castoriana.

Origins of the name

The name Preci derives from *preaeceps*, that is "precipice" in reference to its location.

Historical Interest

The birth of Preci dates from the end of the XII century. Built on a previously existing medieval settlement, in 1276 it became part of the Territory of Norcia. In 1328 it was destroyed in an earthquake so violent that, according to the writing of Giovanni Villani, "there remained living neither person nor animal".

In 1527 the castle was sacked by troops of the Legato della Marca, for having granted refuge to Duke Rodolfo Varano and his wife Beatrice Colonna. The following year (1528), the town rebelled against Norcia so Norcia decided to destroy it and decreed that people could no longer live there but in 1533 the decree was revoked.

In 1703 another disastrous earthquake destroyed much of the town. Pio VII granted the town its own council in 1817. From the XIV to the XVIII centuries Preci gained celebrity for its Surgeons' School which was known throughout Europe. Its surgeons specialised in lithotomy (the extraction of calcium stones), in ophthalmics, in the removal of cataracts and in the treatment of hernias, sometimes with castration.

Itinerary

Leave the piazza Trento e Trieste and climb the steps to the piazza Marconi where the council headquarters is situated (1). Proceed to the church of Santa Maria (2), in the piazza of the same name, a Romanesque building built at the same time as the castle and overlooked by a high belltower. Inside is a single nave with eight altars, rebuilt in the 1600s. Originally it was affiliated to the basilica of S. Pietro in Rome and then to the Abbey of S. Eutizio. The large and irregular building includes a square presbytery, **il coro ligneo**, side chapels, a choir and an organ from the XVIII century placed above the principle door. Continuing on, to the left is the "Comunitas Precum" building(3). Walking up via Mazzini the route comes to the Scacchi district (4); the name derives from one of the most famous surgeons of Preci, Durante Scacchi, head surgeon to Sisto V and Brother Francesco, who operated on the cataracts of Queen Elizabeth of England in 1588. Having arrived at the Scacchi palace, dating from the XVI century, head down via Santa Caterina, at the end of which is the church of the same name (5), one of the most ancient in the Preci district (XIV century). Following various restorations virtually nothing remains of the original. Remaining are some frescos and a large painting of the Madonna, above the altar. Outside is a small open belltower, decorated with supporting column lions to the sides of the belfry, the gothic doorway built in the XIV century with the emblem of the Scacchi family; on the lintel and the capital is an inscription in gothic characters *ad portam vite precum o turba venite*. Going down the steps of via Cavalotti the route comes to the arch of Finocchioli (6), from where there is a wonderful view over the Castoriana valley (7). From here through via della Piana, whose name is probably derived from the fact that the steep

road leads down to the plain and quickly on to Preci Borgo. Until 1950 it was the most important road in the town; today even though the road is asphalted it maintains its medieval aspect. Along the via della Piana, at the bottom of the hill, cross the bridge over River Campiano to reach the Peschiera park where there is the church of the Madonna della Peschiera (8) which is probably located on the site of an ancient oratorium emanating from the Benedictine abbey of S. Eutizio. The church, which in 1598 was totally rebuilt following the appearance of the Madonna to a young deaf and mute local, still maintains its 16th century aspect: a square plan with an extension towards the entrance and with a recently added small open belltower to the right.

The main altar is decorated with an evocative fresco of the Madonna. Its ornaments (1634) were fashioned by the brothers Romolo and Andrea Carocci and by Claudio Mattioli (1654). Inside the single naved church is light and airy with a high arched ceiling and front and side windows. In addition two altars were constructed: one dedicated to the Madonna di Loreto, the other to S. Salvatore. In 1990 the church was restored thanks to the intervention of the regional office for public works and thanks to a generous private donation. Behind the building is the source of the Peschiera (9). To return walk back up the via della Piana until reaching the starting point.