UNESCO MONUMENTS

Ravenna is recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. This is why eight Early Christian basilicas have been added to the UNESCO World Heritage list: “The sites of outstanding universal value by reason of their importance as a source of continued and outstanding inspiration for present and future generations by reason of their universal significance for the understanding of humanity, or by reason of their significance for specific aspects of human artistic culture.”

1. Basilica of San Vitale

Consecrated in 548 AD, it is one of the most important monuments of the Early Christian art. The Eastern influence is evident in the facade: above the nave and two aisles but a central octagonal plan topped by a large cupola. In the upper parts, the eyes are embedded in the mosaic decorations of the apse and the extraordinary representation of the Byzantine imperial couple, Justinian and Theodora.

2. Mausoleum of Galla Placidia

This oval Mausoleum with a Latin cross plan was built halfway through the 5th century by Galla Placidia, the sister of Emperor Honorius. However, it was never used by the Empress because she was assassinated by Alaric. The simplicity of the interior contrasts with the lavish decoration of the exterior. The countless mosaics and the tombs of the most famous citizens of Ravenna, including the jazz player Cabo Porter.

3. Battistero degli Arian

It was built in the late 6th century under Theodoric, when the Arian cult was the official state religion. Nothing remains of the ancient structure and decoration of the interior walls, but the original mosaic is still preserved: the Baptism of Christ and the 12 apostles can still be seen. The mosaics are an evident sign of the Arian belief of the church, though inspired by the inscriptions of the Baptistry of Neon.

4. Battistero degli Oterodici (or Neon)

It is one of the most ancient monuments in Ravenna, probably dating back to the early 5th century. Its decoration goes back to the time of Bishop Neon (4th-5th century). The brick building is octagonal in shape, the interior is decorated with marble, stucco and mosaics of Ancient Roman influence. The ceiling mosaic depicts the Baptism of Christ surrounded by the 12 apostles.

5. Cappella di S. Andrea (or Cappella Arcivescovile)

Built as a private chapel by Bishop Peter during Theodoric’s reign, it is the only intact archbishop chapel of the Early Christian era. The cross-shaped chapel is supported by two vaulted buildings, both covered with marble and mosaics showing an anti-Gnostic concept of Christ. The decoration of the vault of the vestibule shows 92 species of birds – some of which typical of Ravennas natural area are golden eagles.

6. Basilica of S. Apollinare Nuovo

Erected in the 6th century by Theodoric’s close to his palace, the Basilica was originally a private church of the Arian religion. The original mosaics of the interior document the evolution of Byzantine wall mosaics from the era that Theodoric was a patron. The 25 Christological scenes from the period of Theodoric are one of the biggest monument cycles and the main artistic work of the New Testament of all times.

7. Mausoleo di Teodorico

Erected by Theodoric around 520 as his own resting place, this mausoleum of Teistone stone is divided into two decorative orders crowned by a monolithic door measuring so in diameter. Over the centuries, its decorations were gradually stripped off and the tomb was used for different functions. In its interior, there is a circular pulpit where Theodoric was presumably buried.

8. Basilica di Sant’Apollinare in Classe

8 km away from the city centre, the basilica was built in the first half of the 6th century on an ancient burial area, where Sant’Apollinare – one of the first bishops of Ravenna – was probably buried. The church is one of the greatest examples of Early Christian basilica. Despite the plundering over the centuries, the basilica has preserved its original appearance. The church is now adorned for its polychrome mosaics and ancient marble sarcophagi of archbishops.

OTHER MONUMENTS AND MUSEUMS

9. MAR - Museo d’arte della città di Ravenna, Loggetta Lombardesca

This museum is housed in the Loggetta Lombardesca, a 14th century monumental belonging to the castle of the Church of Santa Maria in Porto, the only permanent art exhibits, the art museum hosts a collection of medieval and modern art and some contemporary mosaics from the past few years to the present day. It also includes the International Centre for the Documentation of Mosaics (ICDM)

10. Museo Nazionale di Ravenna

Housed in the caslers of the former Benedectine Monastery next to the Basilica of San Vittore, the museum houses important collections of minor arts (archaeology) finds, precious textiles, ivory, etc., as well as the collection of 14th century frescoes of Santa Chiara, now Rave Theatre.

11. Museo Darsenese e Tomba di Dante

Located in the Sansestremone on the backside of the ancient Franciscan Cloisters, the museum houses a collection of works inspired by Dante Alighieri. The museum remains rest inside the adjoining Dante’s tomb, built by architect Camillo Morighello in 1792. The lamp burning inside is fed with olive oil offered every year by the city of Florence on the poet’s death anniversary.

12. Museo Arcivescovile

Situated in the Archepiscopal Palace of Ravenna, the museum contains numerous artworks that belonged to the ancient cathedral and other buildings now demolished. It contains the throne of Maxentius, one of the most renowned vases and carvings of all times and the work of 6th-century Byzantine artists. The museum is home to the Chapel of St. Andrew.

13. Domus dei tappeti di Pistoria

A museum space of the most important artistic discoveries of the last decades. It consists of a complex of buildings dating back to the Roman Empire up to the Byzantine period. One of these is particularly interesting: a small palatial complex with so rooms and a courtyard covered with marble floors and mosaics showing refined patterns and figures made of polychrome tiles have been identified (4th-6th century).

14. MUSEO TAMO – Tutte l’avventura del mosaico - Complesso di S. Nicolò

TAMO is a space dedicated to the mosaic art and a tour through important finds (some of which still unknown to the public) belonging to the Ravenna mosaic heritage and to its territory, from the antiquity to the present day.

15. Palazzo Raspanti delle Tate

The construction of Palazzo Raspanti began in the late 17th century. It was later called “Tate’s House” because of the blindfolded Muses and lion heads decorating the windows, along with the crossed lion paws showing the claws (the so-called Tate), today, it houses exhibitions and cultural events.

RAVENNA CITY STREET GUIDE