

ORTONA

Ortona has almost 24 thousand inhabitants and it looks out onto the Adriatic coast from a natural banister that sits at 70 metres above the port. This was the ancient sea port of the Frentano population. Many relics belonging to the Roman era have been found here. In Medieval times Ortona was already a flourishing town when in 1258 the Admiral Leon Acciaiuoli brought the remains of the Apostle San Tommaso from the Isle of Chio to his hometown, and as a result the cathedral was then dedicated to San Tommaso. These holy relics attract pilgrims from all over the world. This building was damaged during the second world war although the splendid gothic portal has been restored and the interior has been restructured in Baroque style. At the end of the Middle Ages the recently restored Aragonese Castle was built and it dominates the northern spur of the hill on which the town stands. Another historic monument is the building Palazzo Farnese, building work started in 1584 requested by princess Margaret of Austria, daughter of Emperor Charles V, but it remained half built after the death of the princess. Today it is home of a picture gallery dedicated to the artistic Cascella Family, originally from Ortona. Palazzo Farnese stands on the main walkway known as the Orientale, from which there is a superb view of the port and the tall, rocky coastline.

Other religious places of interest include the church of Santa Caterina dating back to the XIII century and Santa Maria of Costantinopoli. The ex convent of Sant'Anna holds the "Battle Museum" which is a collection of memoirs and exhibits of the bloody battle between the Nazis and the allied troops in and around Ortona in December 1943 with great losses of military and civilian lives plus the complete destruction of the town, defined by Winston Churchill as "the little Stalingrad". Ortona was later awarded a gold medal for bravery in peacetime.

A Music Institute accompanied by a Museum is situated in the building, Palazzo Corvo dedicated to Ortona's famous son Francesco Paolo Tosti, a well-known novelist who lived between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

Ortona can be reached via rail (Milan-Lecce line) or by road (A14 motorway).

Abruzzo Audioguide

