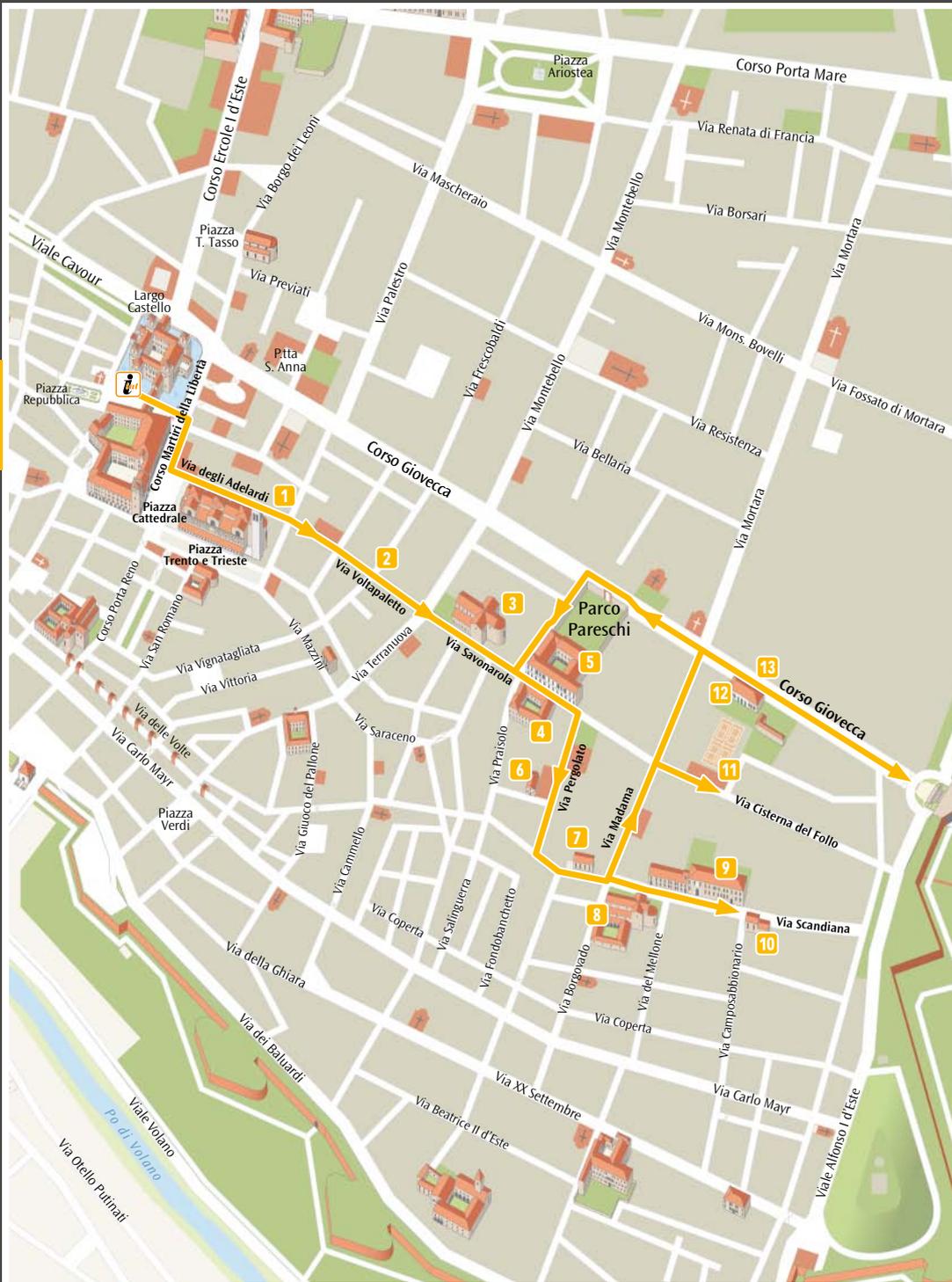


RENAISSANCE RESIDENCES AND CHURCHES

Along the ancient Via di San Francesco, the main thoroughfare of the new districts commissioned by Niccolò III and an elegant street in the Medieval city, stand many palazzos, patrician residences and major churches. The itinerary winds among these wonders to the "Delizie", dwellings built by the court for amusement and relaxation, far from the cares of governing.



THE ITINERARY IN BRIEF



CASTELLO ESTENSE

Starting point of the route

- 1 Via degli Adelardi
- 2 Via Voltapaletto - Via Savonarola
- 3 Chiesa di San Francesco
- 4 Casa Romei
- 5 Palazzo di Renata di Francia
- 6 Monastero del Corpus Domini
- 7 Oratorio dell'Annunziata
- 8 Chiesa di Santa Maria in Vado
- 9 Palazzo Schifanoia
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- 11 Palazzo Bonacossi
- 12 Palazzina Marfisa d'Este
- 13 Corso Giovecca

 From Piazza Girolamo Savonarola, turning right towards the **Cathedral** (page 21), you will reach the 18th century **Palazzo Municipale** (page 20) with the Palazzo Arcivescovile on your left. When you reach the Cathedral, turn left into

1 Via degli Adelardi

It flanks the northern side of the Cathedral, in fired brick and tiles throughout. Here stands the ancient Bishop's House, which can be recognised by the long row of paired windows framed in fired brick. The same building houses the most ancient *osteria* or hostelry in the world, also mentioned by Ludovico Ariosto.

 Continuing along this street will lead you to

2 Via Voltapaletto - Via Savonarola

This is a thoroughfare “added” by Niccolò III, formerly known as *via di San Francesco*, from the church of the same name which stands at the corner with *via Terranuova*.

3 Chiesa di San Francesco

Piazzale S. Francesco • tel. 0532 209646



The present church is the third one built on this site where the Franciscans had settled as early as the 13th century and was built by **Biagio Rossetti** from 1494 onwards. The brickwork façade is divided up by pilaster strips in marble in the first order and in fired brick and tiles in the second, which is linked to the lower one by very large side scrolls. The brickwork frieze in the line separating

the two orders is remarkable, with its portrait of St. Francis, borne by angels, which is repeated tens of times. The interior has a Latin cross plan, with three naves and eight chapels on each side. Only a few traces of all the decorative patterns formed over the centuries remain today. Particularly interesting is the first chapel on the left, with an unusual altar-piece sculpted in tufaceous stone *Jesus Praying in the Garden of Gethsemane* from 1521. The right-hand wall has the splendid fresco *The Capture of Christ* (1524) by Garofalo. In the right wing of the transept we can see the grandiose **mausoleum** of the Marquis Ghiron Francesco Villa, famous general under the Savoia family: an almost unique example of a Baroque tomb in Ferrara.

 Passed the Church of San Francesco stands

4 Casa Romei

Via Savonarola, 30 • tel. 0532 234130

This house, an almost unique example of an aristocratic residence of the 15th century, was built for the banker Giovanni Romei and, on his death, became part of the adjacent Corpus Domini monastery. The courtyard is extremely fine, with its double loggia and large monogram of Christ in terracotta on the back wall. It should be noted how the architect, probably Pietrobono Brasavola, used Medieval elements and Renaissance features, effortlessly juxtaposing them.



In the ground floor rooms there are **frescoes** from the original decoration, in an international Gothic style, in addition to a large painted Medieval fireplace. In other rooms on the same floor there is a small museum, with sculptures of various origins.

On the first floor an apartment, built in the 16th century for Cardinal Ippolito II of Este and used for centuries by the illustrious guests of the Monastery, can be visited. The “grotesque” decorations of the ceilings recall those of the ducal residences but are more understated and, given the setting of the rooms in a religious environment, the main pictures represent Biblical scenes, in place of the mythological scenes in fashion in aristocratic houses. In the decorative bands the heraldic symbol of Cardinal Ippolito II, the white eagle, is often to be found.

On the opposite side stands

 On the opposite side stands

5 Palazzo di Renata di Francia

Via Savonarola, 9

The palazzo was built around 1475. A few years later Biagio Rossetti took over, as seen by the decentralised position of the main portal, once more grandiose and still today crowned by the Este device of the unicorn.

The building takes its name from the wife of Duke Ercole II who often lived there, possibly to stay away from the court where she was kept under close

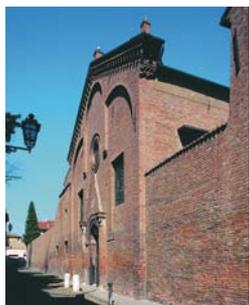


control due to her approval of the ideas of the Reformation. The courtyard still has a Renaissance appearance, while the façade and the interior were totally rebuilt in the 18th century. Since 1963 the building has housed the University. Behind the building opens the park, now a public garden, surrounded by high walls. The entrance is on *corso Giovecca*.

 After Casa Romei, turn right into *Via Pergolato*: on the corner with *Via Campofranco* stands the

6 Monastero del Corpus Domini

Via Pergolato, 4 • tel. 0532 207825



Founded in 1406, this convent of cloistered Clarisse nuns conserves the heirlooms of St. Catherine de Vigri, a mystic and a writer who lived here until 1456. The convent owes its fame to the fact that several members of the Este family are buried in the nuns' choir: Eleonora d'Aragona, Alfonso I, Ercole II, Alfonso II and the famous Lucrezia Borgia. The interior of the public church was richly decorated in the Baroque era.

 Turn left at the end of *Via Pergolato* into *Via Borgo di Sotto* to arrive at

7 Oratorio dell'Annunziata

Via Borgo di Sotto, 49 • tel. 0532 741009

The Oratory, built in 1376 as the seat of the "Confraternity of Death", currently has a simple 16th-century façade, attributed by some to Aleotti. The interior is divided into two halls, lower and upper: the latter was decorated with frescoes which narrate the *Legend of the Wood of the Holy Cross*. The frescoes, the work of Camillo Filippi, Bastianino, Roselli and Dielaì, are not all of the highest standard, but they do represent a rare and interesting example of 16th-century decoration which is still intact. Behind the altar there is an older Resurrection with a Pisanello influence.



The Resurrection of Christ's detail

 Continuing along *Via Borgo di Sotto* will lead you to the

8 Chiesa di Santa Maria in Vado

Via Borgovado • tel. 0532 65127

Built near a ford (*vado*) of the Po, there is mention of this church from the 10th century onwards. In 1171 a miraculous event took place there: at the moment of the consecration, drops of blood sprayed from the Host, and washed over the vault of the church (at that time small).

Rebuilt in 1495 with the technical assistance of Ercole de' Roberti and Bigagio Rossetti, the church has a façade in fired brick and tiles, decorated by a fine marble portal and crowned by statues. Richly decorated, the interior has a basilica plan, with an apse, and divided into three naves by two rows of columns. The wings of the transept, with two chapels per side, house a 16th-century organ and the **Sanctuary of the Precious Blood**, in which the ancient vault is preserved with the traces of blood of the Eucharistic miracle.



 Along *via Scandiana* stands

9 Palazzo Schifanoia

Via Scandiana, 23 • tel. 0532 244949

The building was built in a green area by order of Alberto of Este in 1385 and was later converted and extended, above all during the era of Borso. The façade has a **large portal**, exquisitely sculpted, while the current open brick face replaces the original one, which consisted of plaster frescoed with brightly coloured hexagons. The interior decorations have also been greatly ruined, although what remains is unanimously considered to be one of the greatest masterpieces of the Italian Renaissance.

The most famous and interesting room is definitely the **Sala dei Mesi** (Room of the Months), frescoed by Ferrara painters of the 15th century: **Francesco del Cossa**, **Ercole de' Roberti** and others. Painted pilaster strips divide the walls into squares, each corresponding to a month.

Each square is in turn divided horizontally into three parts. The up-



per band depicts triumphs of pagan divinities: this part symbolises the world of God, who has provided Man with laws of behaviour. The lower part however symbolises the world of Man, through scenes from everyday life, both of the people and of the court. There is a third band between these two, with western horoscope signs, accompanied by the decans of the Egyptian zodiac. The meaning of this band is that astrology, a “science” much prized by the Ferrara court, is none other than a symbolic means whereby man can understand the will of God, otherwise unknown to him. Among the many other symbols which can be interpreted in the frescoes we must not forget the glorification of the patron, Duke Borso, repeatedly represented in every month while he wisely governs his states. After the serious damage to the frescoes over the centuries, today only the months from March to September (to be read anti-clockwise) can be seen.

In the adjacent **Sala degli Stucchi** (Stuccoes Room) a splendid gilded and painted panelled ceiling can be admired, created by **Domenico di Paris** (15th century) and depicting the cardinal and theological virtues and the Este family devices.

The Palazzo houses the **Civic Museum of Ancient Art**, with its many collections: archaeology, coins, bronzes and plaques etc., Particularly fine are the illuminated antiphonaries, the collection of medals, with many portraits of the Este family, paintings and ivories.



Opposite the palace, one can visit the

10 Museo Civico Lapidario

Via Camosabbionario • tel. 0532 244949

This museum is housed in the former **church of S. Libera** built in the 15th century. The Civic Lapidary has the main collection of Roman marbles from the Ferrara area. The finds are exhibited in topographical order. Particularly interesting are the great sarcophagus of the Aurelii (3rd century AD), a true masterpiece of craft from Ravenna, and the small sarcophagus of the child Neon (3rd century AD), from Voghenza, the most important Roman town in the area.



Return along Via Madama and turn right for

11 Palazzo Bonacossi

Via Cisterna del Follo, 5 • tel. 0532 244949

This was built in 1468 for Diotisalvi Neroni, a Florentine exile protected by Borso d'Este. His simple and austere palace has a tower with battlements at the centre. Its present appearance dates back to 1572, when it was bought by Francesco I d'Este to join it up with

the little Marfisa d'Este Palace. In 1643 the property was acquired by Conti Bonacossi who was responsible for the opening of the present windows, and the installation of balconies, besides the interior decoration from the baroque and classical periods.

This building is home to the **Musei Civici d'Arte Antica** that houses the prized **Riminaldi collection** made up of marble busts, miscellaneous paintings, statues, bronzes and fossils.



Take Via Ugo Bassi and turn right into Corso Giovecca to reach

12 Palazzina Marfisa d'Este

Corso Giovecca, 170 • tel. 0532 244949

This is a magnificent example of an aristocratic residence of the 16th century, once surrounded by splendid gardens in which other buildings stood.

Built by Francesco d'Este, the small *palazzo* formed part of a larger group of buildings, linked by the garden which is no longer in existence. Passed down as an inheritance to the daughter Marfisa, it then took the name of this princess, who lived there until her death, refusing to leave Ferrara even when her family moved to Modena. Inside we can admire the frescoes on

the ceilings, partially repainted in the 20th century, the work of the **Filippi studio**. The “grotesque” decoration here achieves great sophistication and sumptuousness. The *palazzina* is furnished with **furniture from the 16th and 17th centuries**, partly from Ferrara and partly purchased on the antiques market. Worthy of note are the marble bust of Duke Ercole I, the work of Sperandio da Mantova (15th century) and the sculpture of the *Madonna Worshipped by Duke Alfonso I*, of the **Lombardi school** (16th century).

The loggia, once open on the outside, has two fresco portraits of little girls on the walls: these are the two daughters of Francesco d'Este, Marfisa and Bradamante.

Through what remains of the garden a frescoed loggia, once used for concerts and small shows, can be reached.



13 Corso Giovecca

This Street forms the link between the Medieval city to the south, and the Addizione Ercolea to the north, thus forming the main thoroughfare of the city. The road is closed off to the east by the **Prospettiva archway**: a theatrical 18th-century arch built to a design by Francesco Mazzarelli, to serve as a permanent scenic structure at the end of corso Giovecca. From here, you can go up on to the city walls.