



**VERONA**

"*Non v'è mondo fuor di queste mura*" (there is no world outside these walls) ... so wrote William Shakespeare describing the city of Verona when he chose it as the setting for the trials and tribulations of the Capuleti and Montecchi families.

The great English playwright chose the walls of this city to enclose the sad love story between Romeo and Juliet, a romance that turned Verona into a shrine for lovers all over the world, offering historical beauty and an everlasting myth.

Whether merit of the legend or the undeniable beauty of its historical centre, Verona today is one of the most visited cities in Italy, admired for its many artistic treasures carefully conserved over the centuries.

Its historical and cultural importance was justly recognised at the end of 2000 when UNESCO declared the historical centre a patrimony of humanity.

Just a short history lesson so you can understand and appreciate the city to the full.

Already inhabited in prehistoric times, the first human settlements in Verona were made only in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC when a Roman colony was



established and became one of the most flourishing and best organised outposts in the Empire. Its position is certainly advantageous, lying at the foot of the Adige valley and at the crossroads with some of the most used main commercial roads: Via Augusta, Via Gallica and Via Postumia, fundamental for trade.

The new city takes on the characteristic Roman structure, with parallel roads and a centre, the *Foro*, centre of religion, politics and commerce: now it is the central Piazza delle Erbe, destined for centuries to be the hub of the city. In the XII century Verona becomes a free commune and is embellished with new buildings such as the San Zeno church and the Duomo, both rebuilt after the disastrous earthquake in 1117.

The Scaligeri family take over political control of the city at the end of the XIII century and start some radical transformation bringing Verona to the

peak of its importance under a financial and political aspect and also from an artistic and cultural point of view.

The Della Scala family then enjoy undisputed power until 1387; they are succeeded by the Viscontis then the Carraresi family after which, in 1405, Verona spontaneously submits to the rule of the Venetian Republic: a choice that permits the city to become even richer and to increase its culture.

The disastrous events in contemporary history - the two World Wars - fortunately did not damage the city's many artistic treasures. So do not miss the possibility of discovering Verona by walking along its narrow streets and exploring its many squares.

## *A tour of the churches*

This itinerary more or less coasts the sinuous flow of the Adige river, and crossing the various bridges, you can admire some of the most evocative churches in Verona, all loaded with historical and artistic value, as well as the Arena, the Roman Theatre, the Giusti Gardens to mention only a few attractions ...



Leave the car in one of the big parking areas nearby, you reach Piazza Brà, going under Portoni della Brà, two huge crenelled

arches once a part of the imposing city walls erected at the end of the XIV century. You will find the [Arena](#) in front of you. It towers over the square and is the city symbol as well as being one of the most well-preserved monuments in Verona.

It was erected in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, and is still used for many events, seating 25,000 spectators at a time. Visitors come every year from all over the world to watch and listen to famous operas. You can visit the external structure, still in a perfect state of conservation, with its double set of arches, and inside where you can admire the impressive view of the

concentric circles of steps descending towards the centre of the amphitheatre. The original structure of this spectacular complex once included another circle of walls, about 30 metres high, of which only a small portion remains (*h. 9.00-19.00; closed on Mondays*).

Carry on along Via Leoncino, starting from the edge of the square, almost behind the Arena, leaving the amphitheatre on your left. This leads you to Via Leoni, where an iron parapet protecting an opening at the centre of the square will draw your attention to the archaeological remains of the ancient [Porta Romana dei Leoni](#), dating from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

Go along the same road to reach [Chiesa di S.](#)

[Fermo Maggiore](#), an impressive basilica commissioned by the Benedictine monks who wanted the same construction we see today with its two distinct overlapping buildings. The lower structure, in Romanesque style, dates from the XI century. Inside, the pillars and walls are decorated with frescos dating from the XI and XIII centuries. The upper structure dates from the XIII century and is in Gothic style with a precious wood ceiling painted with figures of the Saints, dating from the 1300s.



Now go along the Rubele riverfront and cross Ponte Nuovo: follow Via Carducci until you reach Via Giardini Giusti, where you will find [Giardini Giusti](#), a spectacle of Nature combined with Art and History, created in 1570 by Agostino Giusti, an influential Tuscan politician, to embellish Palazzo Giusti. This extraordinary Italian Garden has preserved intact all its original 19<sup>th</sup>-century characteristics; take a stroll through flowering borders and box hedges and admire the fountains, the mythological statues and grottoes.



Once through the gate, you will see this vast park and its box hedges, and the famous cypress avenue that winds its way to a stalactite grotto. See the

maze and its tiny labyrinth of box hedges, one of the oldest in Europe, much appreciated by great historical and cultural figures such as Cosimo De' Medici, Mozart, Goethe, Carlo Felice di Savoia. (*open: 01/04 - 30/09, h. 9.00/20.00; 01/10-31/03, h. 9.00-19.00; open every day*)

Continue along Via Giardini Giusti, which becomes Via Santa Chiara, at the end of which, turning left, you can visit [Chiesa di S. Maria in Organo](#), an ancient Benedictine abbey whose current structure dates from the XIV century although it was built over the remains of a VII-century building. The three naves inside house paintings by Il Giolfino, Caroto and Brusasorci, as well as the famous wood-cuts in the chorus and vestry, certainly the most precious works to be admired in this church.

Via Rigaste Redentore takes you to [Teatro Romano](#), built in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, still with the foundations of its stage and part of the steps. The summer theatre season is held here each year. Not far from the Roman Theatre at number 2 of the same via, you can visit the [Museo Archeologico](#) where the cells of the ex Convento di San Girolamo house the Roman, Etrurian and Greek finds discovered in Verona and province (*open: h. 9.00/19.00; closed on Mondays*).

A long set of steps by the side of the theatre take you up to Castel S. Pietro where you can enjoy a panoramic view of the city.



Now go over [Ponte Pietra](#), a five-arched bridge and precious testimonial of the Roman period. The bridge has been restructured only twice in the course of the centuries: first the arch close to the right bank of the river in 1298 under instructions from Alberto Della Scala, the second intervention was necessary to repair damage suffered during the Second World War. The original stone blocks were recovered from the river to carry out the work.

Now turn right towards the [Duomo](#), built on the foundations of an ancient church erected by St. Zeno in the IV century. The cathedral, dedicated to

our Lady of the Assumption, has undergone changes and extensions during the centuries until assuming its current aspect enhanced by Romanesque features such as the façade and base, as well as the Gothic cross-vaults inside, supported by robust clustered piers. Its elaborate chapels and altars contain the works of Renaissance and Baroque artists such as Falconetto, Liberale and Tiziano.

From inside the cathedral there is direct access to two other churches: S. Giovanni in Fonte and Sant'Elena.

The church of *S. Giovanni in Fonte* was severely damaged during the 1117 earthquake and underwent massive restructuring works. It is renowned for its octagonal Romanesque font standing at the centre of the church and dating from the XII century. Obtained from a single block of marble, it is embellished with bas-reliefs sculpted by Brioloto and his school.

The *Chiesa di Sant'Elena* was also restored in 1140 after being damaged in the 1117 earthquake. Its interior boasts a wooden beam ceiling. Remains of previous IV and V century structures are preserved outside the presbytery and in the entrance. One illustrious guest of the church was Dante who, on 7 January 1320, read his oration "*Quaestio de aqua et terra*" before a congregation of important personages from the religious, political and cultural life of Verona.

In the same square you can visit the Biblioteca Capitolare, a library conserving manuscripts, incunabola, illuminated codes, parchments and precious bindings, one of the oldest collections in Europe, among which the 5<sup>th</sup> century "Evangelarium Purpureum" and St. Augustine's "De civitate Dei". The same building houses also the Museo Canoniale e Pinacoteca, exhibiting sculptures and paintings dating from the XII to XIX century (*open: h. 9.30-12.30; open also Tuesday and Friday afternoons, h. 16.00-18.00; closed on Thursdays*).



Follow Via Duomo to the next church, the beautiful Chiesa di Sant'Anastasia, started in the XIII century, its façade was never completed. Its interior, with three naves, is grandiose with the original pavement laid in 1462, *i Gobbi*, the two famous

stoups supported by squatting human figures, paintings and frescos among which Pisanello's masterpiece *San Giorgio e la principessa*. High up on the left wall of the church there is the tomb of Guglielmo di Castelbarco.

Close by, in Via Forti 1, you will find the Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, with works by 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Italian artists, as well as collections dedicated to the most important protagonists of the national and international artistic scenes (*open: h. 9.00/19.00; closed on Mondays*).

Follow Corso Sant'Anastasia to reach Piazza Erbe then along Via Mazzini to get back to Piazza Bra'.

The last church to visit, the [Basilica di San Zeno Maggiore](#), is perhaps too far to go on foot. But if you are not tired, from Piazza Brà follow Via Roma; turn left into Corso Cavour and turn immediately right, following Regaste S. Zeno until you reach the basilica.

Otherwise you can get there by car. From the car park, go onto Corso Porta Nuova, turn left and continue to the traffic lights where you turn right. Go straight on to the 3<sup>rd</sup> traffic lights, then turn right.

A splendid Romanesque church dating from the IV century, the St. Zeno Basilica will amaze you with its magnificent façade, the rose window decorated with sculptures of human figures, and its solemn portal with sculpted bronze fascias illustrating scenes from the Old and New Testaments. Its interior is breath-taking, richly frescoed with works from the XIII and XIV century, among which the magnificent Mantegna triptych *Madonna con Bambino tra angeli e santi*. From the church you can go through to the raised presbytery and the crypt where the Saint's remains are preserved. See also the precious XIII century cloisters in Romanesque style.

**Trattoria AL CALMIERE**

Piazza San Zeno, 10 / tel. 045 8030765

(Average cost, excluding wines: € 31.00; closed Wednesday evenings and Thursdays)

Opened in 1921 as a hostelry, it is now a lovely traditional trattoria, situated in one of the most evocative squares in Verona, facing the steps of the splendid Romanesque Church of St. Zeno. The centre of the dining room is occupied by a huge chimney place for preparing barbecued meat and vegetables. Bigoli and tagliatelle for the first courses are made on the premises and served without dressing: you choose the sauce, be it with meat, fresh tomato, chicken liver and peas, from the sauce boats on the table. Second courses, vegetables, cheeses and desserts are all served from the trolley.

**Hostaria LA VECCHIA FONTANINA**

P.tta Chiavica 5 (vicino Chiesa Sant'Anastasia)/ tel. 045 591159

(Average cost, excluding wine: € 16/20.00; closed on Sundays, open every day through summer)

A new and pleasant, colourful locale, with small rooms ready to welcome guests seeking typical regional cuisine revisited with imagination. The dishes on the menu follow seasonal products, typical of the Veneto region, such as tripe, but also bigoli with nettles, and pasta with horsemeat sauce, to be thoroughly original. Second courses again feature mainly horsemeat, with the grilled dishes that have this restaurant famous. Desserts are prepared on the premises.

The wine list is exceptional, offering national and foreign labels.



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