



PISTOIA

A mix of history at the foot of the Apennines (77 km return)

Pistoia has Roman origins and is a real paradise for art and tradition lovers. Poets and writers have praised its charm, calling it the “**city of enchanted stone**” and the “**city with large streets and beautiful churches**”. The visitor will definitely enjoy a rich journey through **churches, palaces and monuments** dated from the Middle Ages to today, mainly standing around the **Piazza del Duomo, one of the most attractive squares in Italy**. Over the centuries, the city has been able to maintain a balance between its historic centre and more recent urban and architectural development, all looking particularly harmonious. The centre of town shows a mainly conservative structure where **monuments from the Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance eras** coexist with some of the **Baroque and neoclassical ones up to the 20th century with Giovanni Michelucci’s buildings**.

For the music lovers, Pistoia offers an event not to be missed: the famous **Blues Festival**, taking place every summer Piazza del Duomo, with famous artists such as **John Mayall, B.B. King and Bob Dylan**. While the visitors keen on history will enjoy the **Giostra dell’orso** (Joust of the Bear), a reenactment of a medieval tournament. Both events are part of the **Luglio Pistoiese**.

Art and history

Many monuments are the evidence of Pistoia’s most ancient origins. The city layout indicates that its initial settlement was most probably Roman and its present shape corresponds to the limits defined by the three ancient walls. The **Piazza del Duomo**, old civil and religious centre of the city, is today enclosed by the main buildings which have marked its political and religious life in the course of the centuries. The **Palazzo Communale** and the **Palazzo Pretorio** stand on the eastern and western sides of the square while the **Duomo**, the **Palazzo dei Vescovi** and the **Battistero** are on the southern side. The close-by Piazza della Sala is dated from the same period as well as the church of **Spirito Santo**, in the north, and the **Forteguerriana library**. Many old sacred buildings have been deconsecrated but they still illustrate the old religious organization of Pistoia. The modern road network around the city has been set on the limits of the first wall (via F. Pacini, via C. Cavour, via Curtatone e Montanara, via Abbi Paziienza, via del Carmine, via delle Pape).

Many vestiges of the city architecture can be found on this track such as the **Ospedale del Ceppo**, the old Benedictine monastery of Saint Mercuriale (today the Magistrates’ Court), and other palaces owned by noble families of Pistoia. Among those, the Rospigliosi Palace, hosting the museum Clemente Rospigliosi, is worth visiting as well as the **Museo Diocesano**. In via Cavour stands the **Palazzo del Bali** and the church of **S. Giovanni Fuorcivitas** with its characteristic white and black marble walls. Proceeding in via Curtatone e Montanara, lined with beautiful buildings in the Mannerist style, we get to the complex formed by the church S. Filippo Neri and the **Fabroniana library**.

You can end the tour of the city by walking around the top of its fortified third wall. It has the shape of a quadrilateral and, at each of its points, four doors used to open out onto the main external roads. During the Medicean era, a fortress, the **Fortezza di S. Barbara**, was built on this third defensive wall in order to protect the Florentine territory against possible insurrections from Pistoia. Nothing remains of the architectural structure of the doors but their names designate the adjacent quarters: la Porta al Borgo in the north, la Porta San Marco in the east, la Porta Carratica in the south and la Porta Lucchese in the west.

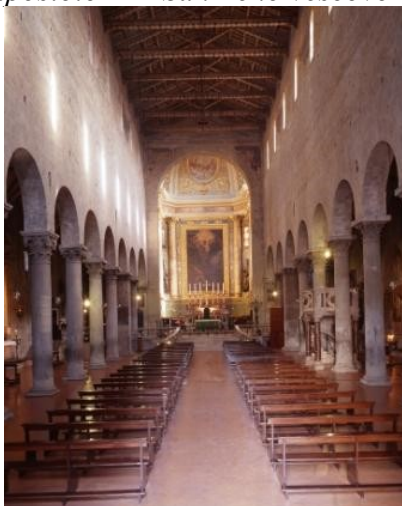
Piazza del Duomo

The city of Pistoia counts many monuments. The **Piazza del Duomo** was for many centuries the centre of civil and ecclesiastical power and among the buildings of remarkable artistic importance found there, the cathedral dedicated to **San Zeno** stands out.



Cattedrale di San Zeno

The cathedral was built in the Pisan style and is dated to around the 12th-13th centuries. It was modified several times; inside, part of the most significant renovations added elements from the Baroque style but in 1951 it returned to its original appearance. The façade presents the characteristic forms of the Tuscan Romanesque style, very close to the Pisan one. Three levels of arches can be seen in the top part above an archway of thin marble colonnettes. The whole façade is in white and green marble, typical of the Pisan Romanesque style. The archway is made of seven arches with different sizes. The central arch is enriched with terracotta coffers, a work by **Andrea della Robbia**, who also made the bas-relief depicting a *Madonna col Bambino e due Angeli* (1505), placed in the lunette above the central door. In the top part stand two marble statues of *San Jacopo apostolo* and *San Zeno vescovo* by **Andrea Vaccà**.



The interior is simple and imposing, built with three naves; the central one is the largest, covered by trusses and divided by columns and two pillars. Around the window of the internal façade are the *Quattro virtù* painted by the Florentine **Bonaccorso di Cino**; inside a 17th century niche by **Leonardo Marcacci** are found three bas-reliefs remaining of the *Arca di Sant'Atto* from 1337. The **Fonte Battesimale** (baptismal font) was designed by **Benedetto da Maiano** and made by **Andrea Ferrucci da Fiesole**. At the entrance of the nave stands the **Monumento Sepolcrale di Cino da Pistoia**, a poet and lawyer from Pistoia who was **Dante Alighieri**'s friend; the work is due to a painter from Siena and dated 1337. Past a side door we see the beautiful painting on canvas of a *Crocifisso* by **Coppo di Marcovaldo** (1275).



Then we find the **Cappella del Crocifisso** with the magnificent **Dossale di San Jacopo**, a silver made altar representing one of the most important works in the Italian art of silversmithing. This piece was made by silversmiths from Florence, Siena and Pistoia between 1287 and 1456, mixing various styles and artistic techniques. The **cult of San Jacopo** (Giacomo Maggiore) is profoundly rooted in Pistoia. Medieval documents mention how the relic of the Apostle's body was given as a special gift to the city of Pistoia and to its **Bishop Atto** by **Diego Gelmirez** (1100-1140), the Archbishop of Compostella, in Galicia. The monumental piece is the result of many different building phases. It is made of a **large altar piece** and of a front part on three sides decorated with no less than **628 statuettes**, embossed on silver leaves. The central part depicts fifteen stories from the New Testament, the right hand side has nine panels with stories from the Old Testament and of the Virgin, the left hand side has nine panels with *Storie dell'apostolo Jacopo*.

The altar is crowned by *Il Redentore in maestà con coro di Angeli* while, below, statues of apostles and saints are set on two levels near the recess where stands the statue of Saint James. Inside two niches at the end are *Sant'Antonio Abate* and *Santo Stefano* and *l'Annunciazione* is found in the centre. On the side faces, among the various statuettes, two are remarkable: *i Profeti*, half-busts made by **Filippo Brunelleschi**, the great Florentine architect who was also a talented silversmith at the beginning of his career. The *Evangelista seduto* and *Sant'Agostino* are magnificent works of art.

Then we find the **Cappella del Giudizio** with frescoes of the *Giudizio Universale* by **Giovanni dal Ponte** (around 1420), on the right hand side of the main altar is the **Cappella di San Rocco** and on the left the **Cappella del Santissimo Sacramento o di San Donato** keeping the famous *Madonna di Piazza*, by **Lorenzo di Credi** and **Verrocchio**, admirable masterpiece of the

Renaissance, dated back to 1479-1490. The painting depicts the *Madonna in trono con il Bambino* and *San Giovanni Battista e San Donato* by her side, with an archway in the Classical style in the background and a beautiful landscape in the distance. At the entrance of the left nave is the **monument to Cardinal Forteguerri**, probably by **Verrocchio** (around 1477). _



Campanile

Next to the cathedral, we find the bell tower, built on an old Lombard tower. It is in the Romanesque style with three levels of arches and surmounted by a spire. It was rebuilt several times after devastating earthquakes at the end of the Middle Ages. It is 67 metres high.

Battistero

Still on the Cathedral Square we find the **Battistero** from the 14th century. Dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, it has an octagonal shape and a Gothic style with decorations in white and green marble from Prato. Designed by Andrea Pisano, it was built by Cellino di Nese, a sculptor and architect from Pistoia. The architectural decorations of the doors and the blind archway are very elegant. The main door with finely sculpted capitals presents in the architrave bas-reliefs telling the Baptist's story, while in the lunette above, dominates a *Madonna with Child*, maybe by Tommaso and Nino Pisano, Andrea Pisano's sons. A small Gothic pulpit from 1339 stands on the right hand side of the door. Inside the Baptistery we find the restored original baptismal font. Partly covered with finely sculpted and inlaid marble tiles, the elegant polychromatic marble font dated from 1226 was made by Lanfranco da Como (whose signature appears in a beautiful inscription).

Other buildings on Piazza del Duomo

Among the other interesting buildings is the old **Palazzo dei Vescovi** with arches in the Gothic style on the first level of its façade, restored in 1981. In the underground floors of the palace interesting archaeological routes show an Etruscan stone typical of the Fiesole area, a Roman kiln and tracks of the ancient Pistoia walls. The **Palazzo Pretorio** or **di Giustizia**, still in the Gothic style, was enlarged in the 19th century; the courtyard inside is remarkable for its display of many coats of arms. The **Palazzo di Giano** or **del Comune** presents a beautiful façade with gomeled and trefoil windows. The church of **Santa Maria Cavalier** and the massive medieval tower of **Catilina** (30 m high), can also be found on the square. In the vicinity we can find the **piazzetta della Sala**, a small square where for centuries a vegetable market has been held around the central marble well called "del Leoncino" (lioncub).

Ospedale del Ceppo



Near the square stands the **Ospedale del Ceppo** and its museum of surgery instruments, its small anatomy room and the famous **Della Robbia frieze** with the seven works of mercy. Dated to the 14th or 15th century, its name was chosen in memory of the log of wood used to collect offerings. Its rich archway from 1514 is decorated with *tondi* and a beautiful polychromatic frieze made by Giovanni della Robbia.



The three central medallions depict scenes about the Virgin's history, the Annunciation, the Visitation and the Assumption. The "tondi" on the sides show the coats of arms of the Hospital and of the Medici family, while the half-sized "tondi" in the corners present the coats of arms of the Hospital and of Pistoia. This was Giovanni della Robbia's last work as the artist died in 1529, maybe victim of the plague. The rectangular tiles in the frieze were made by Santi Buglioni, one of Giovanni's collaborators. The frieze represents the seven works of mercy, alternated with the cardinal and theological virtues. The donor's face is represented in the middle of each scene, to emphasize the fundamental assisting role held by the hospital,

Chiesa di San Giovanni Fuorcivitas



The church of **San Giovanni Fuorcivitas** is dedicated to Saint John the Evangelist and is an important example of Romanesque art in Pistoia. It was given this name because it was built outside the city walls in the High Middle Ages. According to the tradition, it was built at the time of the Lombard's domination in the 12th century. From its settlement today remains part of the northern side, a beautiful polychromatic marble wall with arches and blind archways. The side door presents the Last Supper with Jesus and the apostles, sculpted by Gruamonte in 1162 and in the lunette is placed a small sculpture representing Saint John the Baptist, from the 14th century Pisa school. A singular scene is sculpted on the architrave showing two lions bringing down a man and a bear. The inside of the church has one nave and keeps numerous works of art. In the centre stands out the magnificent holy water font with the three crowned virtues (faith, hope and charity) sculpted on the shaft of the basin where projecting outwards are the busts of the four cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, courage and temperance); this work was made by Giovanni Pisano when he was young. On the right hand side wall, supported in the front by two columns held by lions, is located Fra Guglielmo da Pisa's pulpit, a disciple of Nicola Pisano, from 1270. The parapet displays in its centre the symbols of the Evangelists and two groups of prophets are depicted on the sides. The bas-reliefs represent scenes of the Christ's life, on the right the Ascension, the Descent of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin's Assumption. In the choir a retablo with eight stories of Saint John's life can be seen on the right hand side of the 12th century altar, dated 1370, it is a work by Giovanni di Bartolomeo Cristiani, an artist from Pistoia.



On the right side of the altar there is a polyptych by Taddeo Gaddi, a student and collaborator of Giotto's. It is an admirable masterpiece from 1350. In its centre, the Madonna on the throne with the Child is surrounded by angels and on the sides are Saint James the Great, Saint John the Evangelist, Saint Peter and Saint John the Baptist; above each of them there are two busts of saints, under small Gothic arches supported by small cable moulded columns. In the projection at the top we find a scene of the Annunciation under an image of the Eternal Lord. Taddeo Gaddi is

regarded as the closest artist to his master Giotto who inspired him to make robust figures, but with a stronger chiaroscuro and longer bodies.



Near the altar on the left side, another masterpiece can be found: the *Visitation* by **Luca della Robbia**. This work, dated 1445, is one of the greatest masterpieces using the glazed terracotta technique, here characterized by the white enamel. It depicts the encounter between Virgin Mary and Elisabeth.

Basilica della Madonna dell'Umiltà

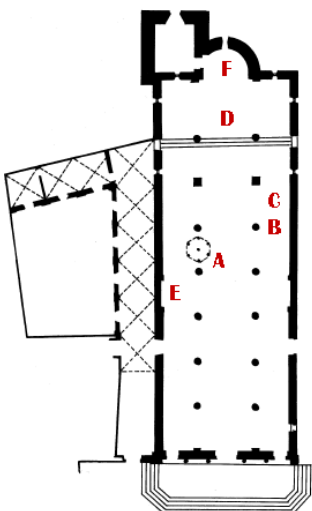
The basilica was erected by V. Vitoni following some of Brunelleschi's elegant principles. The outside is rough and severe while the interior is made of a spacious rectangular vestibule with a beautiful barrel vault and an octagon with niches. There are two levels of gabled windows and a large cupola following Vasari's design (1561).

Chiesa di San Francesco

This is a grand church erected in the course of the 14th century with a façade from the 17th century. The interior is simple and noble according to characteristics of Franciscan architecture. The plan is in the shape of a Latin cross, with a single nave and a large transept with five apse chapels. The choir with its height and wide bare central room follow the Gothic style, much appreciated by the Franciscans. The ceiling with trusses keeps the old decoration and along the apse chapels one finds many frescoes from the 13th and 14th centuries. The big chapterhouse with its numerous beautiful frescoes is admirable.

Chiesa di Sant'Andrea

This is one of the most relevant examples of Romanesque architecture in the centre of Pistoia. The suburban church of Saint Andrew is certainly of Lombard origins. Facing west, it was inside the first set of walls, probably dated back to the 7th-8th centuries. The church of Saint Andrew acquired its current appearance after renovation works dated from the mid-1200s. Its distinctive features are firstly noticed in the three big doors and their polychromatic aspect. The main door shows a historiated lintel which was sculpted in the second half of the 12th century by Gruamonte. It represents the *Viaggio dei Magi*, in an unusual iconography based on the special connection between the church and this part of the *Via Francigena* on which it was built. Regarding their style, both Gruamonte and Enrico, who made the capitals supporting the lintel, followed models developed for the cathedral. The inside of the church has three naves with columns and semicircular apses according



to criteria used for other major churches in Pistoia at a time of general renewal, in the mid-1200s. Its current appearance is the result of series of restorations; the most recent demolished the biggest part of the previous ones to recreate an austere but beautiful appearance, with some remaining frescoes illustrating its past chromatic sumptuousness. The church keeps very valuable works of art making it one of the most interesting places to visit in the area.



Among those stands out the *Pulpito* (A) that Giovanni Pisano sculpted at the end of the 13th century and the wooden *Crucifix* (B), placed on the first altar on the left, coming from Santa Maria di Ripalta and also made by Pisano.



Giovanni Pisano's pulpit (A) made from 1298 to 1301 is an undisputable masterpiece of the Italian medieval sculpture. It shares some resemblance with the pulpit his father Nicola had made for the Baptistery in Pisa, for instance in the hexagonal structure resting on seven columns. Nevertheless its powerful beauty inspired someone to write that "the father had been surpassed". The bas-reliefs of the parapet represent the Annunciation and the Nativity, the Worship of the Magi, the Massacre of the Innocents, the Crucifixion and the Last Judgment. The most dramatic scene of all is the Massacre of the Innocents. One can feel the violent moves of the people while Herod, on the top corner, orders the massacre. The tragic moment is perfectly expressed in the mothers' desperate faces in their attempt to save their child from death as their innocent bodies are experiencing excruciating pains. In the *Crucifixion*, Pisano succeeded to express intensely the Christ's suffering. On the left hand side wall is found the venerated wooden *Crucifix* (B) made by Pisano while he was working on the sculptures for the pulpit. In the pulpit he has demonstrated his skills to use the Gothic style, especially in highly dramatic scenes like the Crucifixion one. Following the Franciscan philosophy, he represented a suffering Christ made man. His approach to show the agony of a man on the cross with dislocated limbs and breathing faintly is more elaborate on the carved wood than on the stone. This model was very successful and was reproduced several times in his workshop. There is in fact another small wooden crucifix (E) in this church, very close to Pisano's style even though it has not been fully attributed to him.

Inside the choir, the panels sculpted in the Romanesque era and found today on the right wall (C), were described last century in the following terms: "around the choir are placed marble tiles with roses and decorated with bas-reliefs".

