

*A Walking Tour of Perugia, Italy:
Exploring the Building Stones Used in the City's Construction*



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Map of Italy showing Perugia and other important cities



Map of Perugia Below is the route of the eight- stop walking tour route. See the top of each stop page for more detailed directions.



Walking Tour Stops

1. Piazza IV Novembre
2. Pozzo Etrusco
3. Arco Etrusco
4. Porta Trasimena
5. Piazza San Francesco
6. Chiesa Di San Filippo Neri
7. Giardini del Campaccio
8. Porta Marzia



Rock Types



Travertine is a sedimentary rock formed by the precipitation of calcium carbonate near hot spring waters, lake basins, waterfalls and limestone caves (1). It is a porous rock that comes in different shades of white and tan. Its most common uses are for tile flooring and architecture. The travertine we will see in the ancient Etruscan monuments are quarried from the Santa Sabina quarry, about six miles south west of Perugia, formed approximately 115,000 years ago (2).



Marble is a metamorphic rock that forms by recrystallization of carbonate rocks and minerals when they undergo extreme temperature and pressure (3). Its main mineral components are calcite with mica, quartz, pyrite, iron oxides, graphite and other mineral inclusions (3). Marble is commonly used for sculpture, decoration on buildings and architecture, floors, steps, countertops etc. The marbles featured on this walking tour come from local cities, Assisi, as well as cities in other regions, Carrara.

About the Tour

This walking tour takes you on an adventure to see the architecture and ancient history of the beautiful hilltop city of Perugia. You will observe how travertine and marble were employed throughout different periods of the city's construction leading to the city we see today. Perugia holds a rich history of different civilizations conquering the city, constructing and reconstructing, each one contributing its own features. Civilizations like the Etruscans and the Romans had the most influence on the ancient architecture that is still standing today. Some of the architecture even displays how one civilization picked up building or modified structures where another left off.

Perugia's hilly topography produced a city layout that radiates out from the city center. Our starting point in the city center is at an elevation of 476 meters and has numerous streets that lead out of and back to it (1). While the outskirts receive more thru traffic, the historic city center and its surrounding streets are perfect for exploration by foot. This tour is approximately 1.6 miles (2550 m) long and may take one to two hours to complete depending on your walking pace and amount of time spent at each stop. I recommend wearing comfortable walking shoes and bringing along a water bottle. Some parts of the tour include some uphill slopes that may be challenging for some. Although these photographs reflect the late winter and early spring seasons, anytime of the year is good to explore the city.

Stop 1: Piazza IV Novembre Piazza IV Novembre, 06100 Perugia PG, Italy.

You are standing in the middle of the city center at Piazza IV Novembre. All roads radiate from and lead back to this point.

This tour begins in the heart of Perugia at Piazza IV Novembre. Located at the end of Corso Pietro Vannucci, it is the center of activity of the city. On a normal day there is daily traffic of tourists and Perugians that come to the city center to work, shop, eat lunch, and of course admire the beautiful historic architecture. Throughout the year, Perugia hosts pop-up street markets, holiday celebrations, demonstrations and conferences during which the streets are packed with people.

Sitting in the center of the plaza we find the elegant Fontana Maggiore built between 1278 and 1280. This fountain was built as part of a new plan to construct an aqueduct to expand the city's water system (1). It is a three-tier fountain with two polygonal bases each made out of white marble (2). The bottom base of the fountain is separated into twenty-five sections each decorated with different themes. They range from representations of mythological figures, the twelve months of the year, and the zodiac signs (3). The top base includes twelve panels of pink marble locally quarried in Assisi, a small-town east of Perugia. These panels are divided by white marble statues quarried in the town of Carrara (2). The statues depict representations of cities and people that were important at the time of its construction (1). The top bowl is made of bronze with three statues standing in the middle (3). The entire fountain sits on a circular staircase made out of travertines quarried in the region of Latium (4). Although this particular travertine was not as local as others we will see on the tour, it is not significantly far from Perugia and corresponds with the movement of building materials in this time period (4). If you take a step back and look at the entire fountain you see the elegance brought together by the contrasting colors of these rocks. This fountain beautifully displays both the geologic and historical stories of this region.



Palazzo dei Priori

Now, if we look to the south of Fontana Maggiore, we see **Palazzo dei Priori**. This grand building housed Perugia's nobility in the late 1200's; today it is the city's municipal building and holds the National Gallery on its upper floors (6). Travertine is the main rock used to construct this building. From the rooftop down to the stairs the palace shows off the creamy white carbonate blocks used in its construction (6). Similar to the Fontana Maggiore, pink and white marbles were used to decorate the palace creating a beautiful contrast with the travertine blocks (6). Despite how well the whole building fits together, it was actually built in two phases. The left side was first built between 1293-1297 and the right side replaced the church of San Severo in 1335 (5).



Cathedral of San Lorenzo

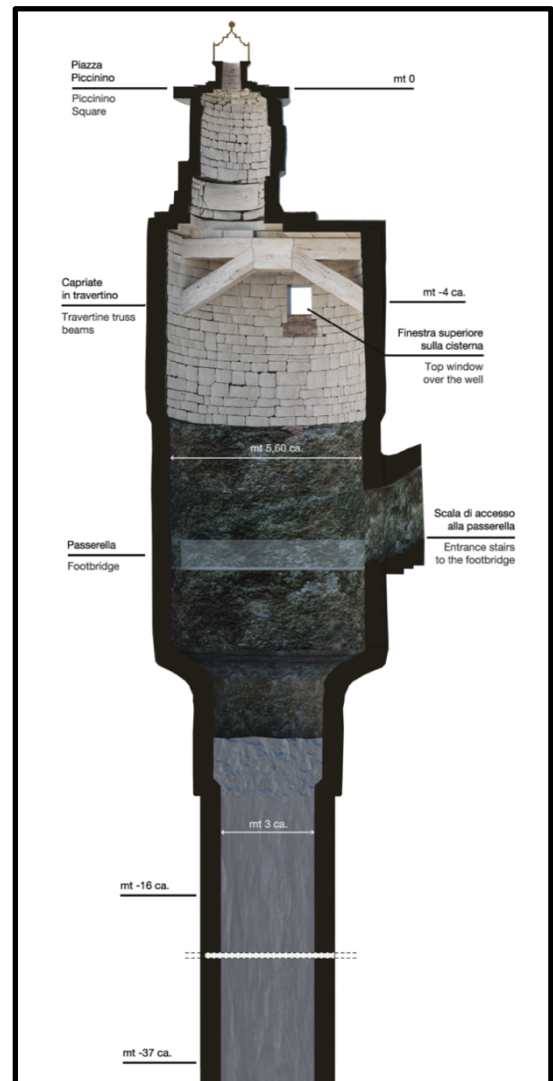
Turning our attention directly across from Palazzo dei Priori we will find the Cathedral of San Lorenzo. This church was built over what used to be the Etruscan-Roman Forum (7). The façade facing Piazza IV Novembre is actually the back side of the church, with the front facing Piazza Danti on the other side. On the far-left side of the building in the cathedral's corridor we find the Museo Capitolare (see page 16). This museum has a beautiful collection of typical Perugian-style art as well as an underground archaeological area where you can see part of the original Etruscan wall. The archaeological tour also includes artifacts such as Etruscan funerary urns carved out of travertine, discovered at a burial ground and now displayed as part of this underground exhibit.



Stop 2: Il Pozzo Etrusco Piazza Danti, 18

Now we walk out of Piazza IV Novembre, turn left heading northeast towards Piazza Danti.

Right in the middle of the small piazza Danti is il Pozzo Etrusco (Etruscan well). Built in the 3rd century B.C. it exemplifies some of the advanced hydraulic engineering developed by the Etruscan civilization (1). The surface structure and the underground supporting beams and well walls are made of the same travertine blocks used in the construction of the city walls (2). This 37-foot well is believed to originally have been a water tank that was later modified into the well (1). Its base has a diameter of 5.6 meters and like a funnel narrows down to 30 meters at its deepest point (2). The Pozzo Etrusco museum is located a couple feet away from the well at *18 Piazza Danti*. Here you can pay a small fee to go underground and see the architecture inside of the well. Although the well has suffered some damage from the traffic in the city center and has had some renovation, the travertine support beams and walls still stand strong stacked with no cement holding them together (2).



<https://www.pozzoetrusco.it/en/home-4/>

Stop 3: Il Arco Etrusco Via Ulisse Rocchi, 39

From the Etruscan wall we walk about 170 m west and take a right onto Via Ulisse Rocchi. At the end of this road we walk through the great Arco Etrusco.

Il Arco Etrusco also known as “Arco di Augusto” is the main gateway on the north side of Perugia, part of a massive system of walls and gates that once surrounded the city. The walls are known as the “Mure Etrusche” or Etruscan Walls of Perugia. They were constructed of large blocks of travertine, in the 3rd century B.C. These travertine blocks were quarried from the ancient Santa Sabina quarry located near Perugia (1). Each of the five main gates built were connected to the large walls and each had its own purpose. The Etruscan Arch served as the only entrance for military purposes (2). Unfortunately, not all of the gates are still standing. Il Arco Etrusco is one of the grandest and best preserved of the ancient gates, along with Porta Marzia which will see and discuss on stop 8 of this tour.

The architecture of the Etruscan Arch is typical of Etruscan style. The travertine blocks are set on top of each other without the use of any cement (3). The structure has two trapezoid shaped towers on each side that rise up about 20 m. The arch itself is semicircular, made out of wedge-shaped travertine blocks called voussoirs that are compressed against the middle block, called the keystone, which holds them together (3). The original structure has been modified, starting above the first arch, by the civilizations that came after the Etruscans. One of the most notable modifications is the inscription “Augusta Perusia” on the first arch. This was the name Augustus Caesar gave Perugia after conquering the city in 40 B.C. (3).



Stop 4: Piazza San Francesco

After admiring the Etruscan Arch we take a right onto Via Cesare Battisti. As you follow this street notice that on the left hand side attached to the Etruscan Arch follows remains of the Etruscan wall. Then take the first right onto Piazza Morlacchi and follow the road down until you find Via Francolina where you will take a left. Then take the first right on to Via della Tartaruga and follow it until you find Via del Poggio where you will take a left and follow the street all the way down until you are on Via San Francesco. Take a right and walk down Via San Francesco where you will arrive at Piazza San Francesco.

Piazza San Francesco is a plaza located on the west side of Perugia. This small square holds the *Oratorio di San Bernardino*, *Chiesa San Francesco al Prato* and the *Academy of Fine Arts Pietro Vannucci*. On a typical day, students who attend the academy are coming and going, people are playing with their dogs or picnicking on the green lawn while admiring the beautiful *Oratory of Saint Bernardino*. This oratory was built in the 1450's, a period of civil unrest amongst the people of Perugia (1). St. Bernardino was a very influential Franciscan preacher who brought peace to Perugia during this time. In his honor the *Oratorio di San Bernardino* was built and in 1461 Agostino di Ducci, an Italian sculptor, was hired to design its façade (1). Ducci used light pink and blue marble and creamy terracotta to create the depiction of St. Bernardino in the middle of the arch with the angels, griffins, garlands surrounding him (1). To the right of the oratory is *Chiesa San Francesco al Prato*. Since it first opened in the 13th century, *San Francesco al Prato* became an important church in the city of Perugia (2). However, it did not always look as it appears today. Over the years, the church has undergone many renovations due to damage from earthquakes and landslides dating as far back as 1340 (3). *Chiesa San Francesco al Prato* has housed the Academy of Fine Arts Pietro Vannucci, since 1901 (4). In addition to being a higher education art institute, the academy has a museum with three galleries: sculptures, paintings, and engravings/drawings. Some of the works of art have been donated from other institutions but most of it has been gifted by student and professors that were affiliated with the academy.

Oratorio di San Bernardino



Chiesa San Francesco al Prato



Stop 5: Porta Trasimena

From Piazza San Francesco we will follow the loop of via S. Francesco, turn left onto Via Curiosa and make one final left onto Via dei Priori.

In front of you is la **Porta Trasimena**, one of the original Etruscan gates mentioned earlier at stop 3. It is also known as “Porta San Luca” after a nearby church or “Porta della Luna” (1). The gate has been modified since it was first constructed but, we can still see its original local travertine blocks along the vertical supports until the beginning of the arch (where to the two horizontal blocks stick out) (1). The pointed present-day arch replaced the original Etruscan one. On the front side of the arch there is a half moon and cross inscribed in the middle and to the left stands the remains of a travertine lion statue (1). The gate is named *Trasimena* because it faces west towards Lake Trasimeno. This lake is also known as the lake of Perugia because it was a very important resource for the Etruscan civilization (2).



Stop 6: Chiesa di San Filippo Neri Via della Stella

Now we will go through la Porta Trasimena and continue straight up Via dei Priori.

We come to a stop at the corner of Via delle Stelle where the beautiful *Chiesa di San Filippo Neri* stands tall. It is one of the greatest examples of baroque style architecture in Perugia. It was constructed in 1626 where another church, Batistery of San Giovanni Rotondo, once stood (1). The first block of the church was set down on the same day as the immaculate conception. As a tribute to the Virgin Mary the churches sub-altars depict her stories and the main altar depicts the Immaculate Conception as illustrated by Pietro da Cortona (2). After it's construction, Paolo Murascelli was chosen to design the great façade of the church (2). At all hours of the day the church's pearly white travertine blocks brighten up this street corner (1). Although this is a more modern construction, it follows the theme of using travertine as a prime building stone in Perugia.



Stop 7: Giardini del Campaccio Parco Cuparella

From Chiesa di San Filippo Neri we turn right and go all the way down Via della Cupa.

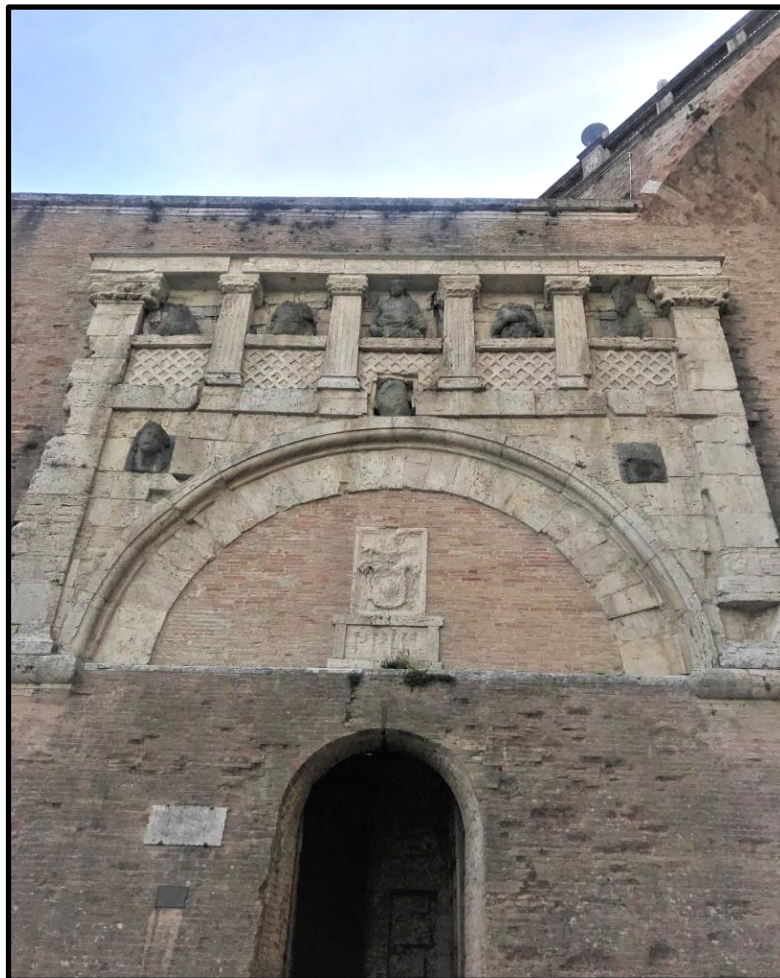
At the end of Via della Cupa we find *Giardini del Campaccio* also known as *Parco Cuparella*. This park holds a section of the great Etruscan walls of the 3rd century B.C we observed earlier at stops 3 and 5. *Giardini del Campaccio* is the only place we see where the Etruscan wall and Medieval age reconstructions meet (1). The top of the wall made of smaller stone blocks and bricks is Medieval in age while the larger creamy travertine blocks have stood sturdy at the base of the wall since the Etruscans constructed it (2). If you observe the base closely you can see there is no cement between the travertine blocks, a building technique typical of the Etruscans. In addition, at the base of the wall is a small gate called “Postierla della Cupa” (3). It was used for pedestrian traffic between the main city and outskirts. This small gate has a twin gate “Postierla della Conca” located near the Etruscan Arch that served the same purpose (3). Both the gates were incorporated into the Etruscan walls during their construction.



Stop 8: Porta Marzia Via Marzia

From Parco della Cuparella we take a left on to Via della Luna and follow it until you reach Corso Pietro Vannuci. Take a right and follow the road until you reach a large building with public escalators on the right outside wing. The escalators will take you into the underground fortress ruins of Rocca Paolina. Follow signs for Porta Marzia that will take you to the Via Marzia exit, where above it hang the remains of another great Etruscan arch.

Porta Marzia was the south oriented gate entrance of the Etruscan Wall chain. Like all the other Etruscan gates and walls, Porta Marzia was constructed of the locally quarried large travertine blocks. Above the arch of the door sit five decorative statues and above them the words “*Augusta Perusia*” similar to the inscription on the Etruscan Arch (1). Porta Marzia was seen as the monumental entrance of the city, facing south towards Rome, welcoming allies (1). Only the arch of the original gate exists today because Antonio da Sangallo carefully dismantled and reconstructed the arch when the fortress *Rocca Paolina* was built between 1540 and 1543 (1). What is left of Porta Marzia sits above the Via Marzia entrance to *Rocca Paolina*, thankfully preserving a piece of the ancient Etruscan architecture of Perugia.



Now from Porta Marzia, follow Via Marzia north and take a right onto Via Baglioni. Continue straight then turn left on Via Guiseppe Mazzini which will put you back on Corso Vanucci, the city center’s main road. Continue straight and you will eventually find Piazza IV Novembre, where we started our tour. Catch your breath on the steps of the Cathedral of San Lorenzo, a perfect place to rest and reflect after exploring the streets of Perugia.

Museums and Archaeologic Sites

Museo Capitolare

The Museo Capitolare is found next to the Cathedral of San Lorenzo on stop number one of the tour. It features various artworks that reflect the different styles used in the cathedral and throughout Perugia's history. At the museum you can also buy a ticket to see the archeological site under the San Lorenzo Cathedral. It includes part of the Etruscan walls that had been constructed underground to support the structure of the old town. The archeologic area also features the remnants of a Roman house that burned down and Etruscan age funerary urns made of travertine.

Galleria Nazionale

The National Gallery, housed in Palazzo dei Priori included on stop number one of the tour, holds a very prestigious collection of artwork. They vary from wood works, paintings, sculptures that represent the artistic evolution in this region from the 13th to 19th century.

Museo Archeologico Nazionale Dell' Umbria (M.A.N.U)

The Archaeologic museum of Umbria is divided into different sections dedicated to the different time periods and people that lived in Umbria. Among their collections we find many Etruscan objects made in marble and travertine. Another important find is the "Cippus of Perugia" an important document of Etruscan age and language, engraved in a travertine slab.

Museo Dell' Accademia Di Belle Arti

The Museum of the Academy of Fine Arts can be found at Piazza San Francesco, stop number four on the tour. Many people have contributed to the collection of paintings, plasters, drawings and engravings of the academy. Both students and teachers of the academy have gifted their works to contribute to its artistic heritage.

Pozzo Etrusco

The Etruscan Well is stop number two on our walking tour. While the well sits in Piazza Danti you can walk a couple feet to the right and enter the Pozzo Etrusco Museum, which allows you to go underground and see the inside and bottom of the well.

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Museums and Archaeologic Sites:

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