

HOLY PLACE

Amid art and history
Religious tourism itineraries



CITTÀ DI CARPI





Holy places

■ The growth of Carpi's city centre has been tied to historical events and environmental situations the origin of which finds justification in the presence of settlements of an ecclesiastical nature. The first mention of the existence of a church dedicated to Mary in Carpi dates back to the year 879, even though it is traditionally thought that the building was erected in the 8th century. The privileges deriving from the fact that the church of S. Maria was a parish church were most clearly evident in the 12th century, the period in which Carpi was dominated by the Attonidi of Canossa and under the government of

Matilde. The bull of pope Callistus II of 1123 granted the Carpi parish church territorial jurisdiction and confirmed its religious freedom from any interference from bishops and answerable only to the Roman Holy See. The prestige achieved was confirmed by its consecration on 15 July

1184 by pope Lucius III. The memory

of this solemn act has been passed down in the name "Sagra", i.e., consecrated, assumed by the church since that time. The urban growth of Carpi, between the 8th

and the 15th centuries,

with new quarters,

took on concrete

shape thanks to

the existence of

the convents of

the mendicant

orders (the

Conventual Friars

of St. Francis, the

community of St.

Anthony of Vienne,

the Augustinians, the observant branch of the

order of Friars Minor, the Servants of Mary). In 1490,

the first women's convent was set up, that of the Poor

Clares, and in 1503 that of the Servites. Alongside

these convents were the churches officiated by the

lay brotherhoods (S. Maria della Misericordia with

the hospice of the Bastardini, S. Rocco with the

hospital of the same name, S. Sebastiano, S. Giovanni

Battista, S. Nicola da Tolentino, S. Bernardino da Siena, S.

Giuseppe). But the most important event was the building

of the collegiate of the Assunta, which later became

a Cathedral, begun in 1514. In the following period,

as a result of the Counter-Reformation, other religious

orders were established, from the Capuchin Monks to

the Jesuits and Capuchin Sisters, with the consequent

building of new churches and smaller buildings, chapels

and oratories. The establishment of the diocese, in 1779,

determined a change in the identity of the old area context

of Carpi by means of the unification, in 1821, of the

Mirandola parishes, taken from the diocese of Reggio,

and the addition, in 1872, of that of Rolo, from Mantua.



The holy buildings

Of Carpi old-city centre



1 Assunzione di Maria Basilica Cathedral



Work on the cathedral began in 1515 according to a project by Baldassarre Peruzzi inspired by the basilica of St. Peter's in Rome. It features classic elements based on models of the Roman Renaissance culture. Work was interrupted in 1525 and begun again in 1606. The original spatial concept was

enhanced in the late-19th century by beautiful interior decorations in neo-Renaissance style, the work of Carpi painters. The altars are enhanced with many works of art with wood, marble and scagliola altarpieces and precious altar-cloths, and paintings and sculptures of the 17th-cent. Emilia school.

2 Parish church of Santa Maria in Castello, called "Sagra"



Tradition dates the construction of this church back to the mid-8th century, by Astolph, king of the Lombards. Documentary evidence indicates that the church already existed in 879, but what can be seen today is the result of reconstruction work performed in the first decade of the 12th century, at the time of

Matilde di Canossa. Excavations have shown the presence of the crypt belonging to the initial late-medieval building resting on the remains of a rustic ancient Roman domus, of which remain parts of the brick and earthenware floor. Two thirds of the old church were destroyed in 1514 by Alberto III Pio, when the new collegiate was erected in the big square; the Romanesque aspect remains visible in the apsidal part and on the sides. The walls are made of brick, with bare stone inserts, some of which sculpted, such as the capitals in the northern side and the portal which bears a scene from the Crucifixion considered to be of the antelamic school. The beautiful facade in classic style and Bramante influence, enhanced with cotto inserts, was erected in 1515 to a design by Baldassarre Peruzzi. The church contains important remains of frescos in the nave with Stories of the New Testament and in the apse with the

Adoration of the Magi, works of a Po Valley artist of the late-12th century with Byzantine influences. A major 12th-century piece is the marble ambo with the Symbols of the Evangelists considered to have been made by Nicolò, while the sarcophagus of Manfredo Pio, first Lord of Carpi, dates back to 1351 and was made by Sibellino da Caprara. Of exceptional artistic value, and belonging to the late-Gothic Emilia school of painting (second decade of the 15th century) are the frescos decorating the S. Martino Chapel, the work of Ferrara artist Antonio Alberti and the Saint Catherine, by artists from the school of Giovanni da Modena. The high tower (about 50 metres) alongside the church was erected between 1217 and 1221 and has an imposing structure of Lombard origin with a double upper series of lancet windows with sculpted capitals representing a medieval bestiary. The tower terminates with a cone-shaped cusp with, half way in between a dodecahedron loggia supported by piers and surrounded, at the four extremities, by turrets which also end in pinnacles.



3 Church of S. Nicolò di Bari



Starting in 1493, Alberto III Pio reconstructed, in monumental style based on Lombard and Bramante models, an original place of worship outside the city walls. This was completed in 1516 according to a project by Baldassarre Peruzzi. This building has a very harmonic and unitary shape and,

especially the interior, achieves extraordinary architectural perfection. The decoration, renovated in the 19th century,

is the work of the painter Giovanni del Sega and is in original Renaissance style. Of major importance are the paintings which date back to between the 16th and the 19th centuries, and the admirable scagliola works, altar-pieces, altars, headstones, frontals. The adjacent Franciscan Monastery features two 15th-cent. cloisters.



4 Church of S. Francesco d'Assisi



The church was rebuilt several times; the last time in 1681 with the reversal of the plan – the facade was turned towards the city and the building took on its monumental baroque appearance with the interior centred on a single cross-shaped nave. The facade was left incomplete, with rough masonry showing, while the

tall bell-tower is a fine piece of architecture. Inside the church, besides scagliola altarpieces are precious 18th-cent. paintings by Modena artists and major frescos dating back to the early-15th century. The marble 15th-cent. sarcophagi recall the Lords of Carpi.



5 Sanctuary of the Holy Crucifix or Church of the Adoration



The origin of this church is related to the veneration of a fresco showing the Deposition of Christ from the Cross. The ingenious architectural style presents a modular cuspidate facade embellished with stucco work, while the cross-shaped interior achieves dilated stage-setting effects, thanks among other things to the presence of stucco work, engraved woods, scagliola pieces and 18th-cent. paintings.



6 Church of S. Chiara d'Assisi



Attached to the vast convent of the Poor Clares, it bears the title of the Annunciation. It was consecrated in 1500, while the building of the convent complex was begun in 1490 by Camilla Pio. It is subject to enclosure and on the outside maintains its late-15th century appearance.

The church facade was modified between the 17th and 19th centuries, the open interior dates back to this period, (1845). In the presbytery is a 16th-cent. tablet showing the Adoration of the shepherds by Bologna artists Giacomo and Giulio Francia.



7 Church S. Ignazio di Loyola and Diocesan Museum of sacred art “Cardinale Rodolfo Pio di Savoia”



The church belonged to the Jesuits, present in Carpi since 1622. It was finished in 1682 and has an imposing Greek cross-shaped plan surmounted by an octagonal dome cladding. The interior features frugal stucco decorations and large ancons. Of considerable interest is the large canvas showing St. Francis Saverio by Lamberti.

Also imposing is the main altar complex in scagliola. The museum contains artefacts from the city's churches and diocese, with works of a prominent pastoral and didactic nature. Other exhibits include sacred furnishing and objects, 16th-20th century silverware, precious paintings, engravings, sculptures, fabrics, scagliola pieces.



8 Church of San Bernardino da Siena



Dedicated to the Patron Saint of the city, the church was built by the Brotherhood of the same name starting in 1604. The style is uniform throughout and the furnishings consist of gilded-wood 17th-cent. works, altarpieces, altars, pulpit, frames and frontals in scagliola and paintings. At item of devotion and historical memory is the relic bust of St. Bernardine, made of

silver. Begun in 1515, according to a project by Baldassarre Peruzzi, inspired by the Basilica of St. Peter's in Rome, the church features classic elements based on Roman Renaissance cultural models.

Work was interrupted in 1525 and started again in 1606. The original spatial concept was enhanced in the late-19th century by beautiful interior decorations in neo-Renaissance style, the work of Carpi painters. The altars are enhanced with works of art with wood, marble and scagliola altarpieces and precious altar-cloths, and paintings and sculptures of the 17th-cent. Emilia school.

9 Former Church of S. Maria delle Grazie, also called S. Rocco



The church, dedicated to the Madonna of Mercies, and the convent have been rebuilt several times. In 1771 the church was taken over by the S. Rocco Brotherhood, hence its current name. The convent, with its portico cloister, is home to Cultural Institutes, while the church has been closed to worship and converted into an auditorium.



Religious itineraries

In the Carpi countryside
and beyond



■ The district around Carpi is full of Parish churches and signs which religious faith has placed alongside the roads, in farm houses or old country mansions. These consist of pavilion oratories, pillars, majesties, tabernacles, niches dug out in the fronts of houses and which contain holy images, mainly the Madonna with Child, or which recall local items of devotion or visual memories of places of pilgrimage.

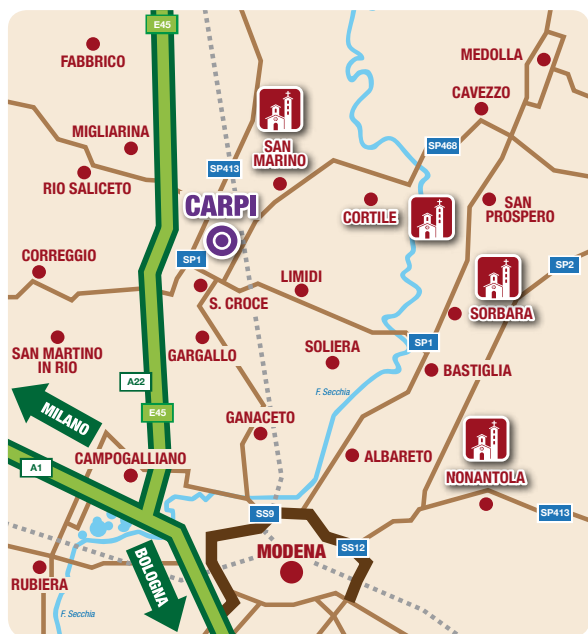


■ **The itinerary starts in the south** In the direction of Modena, the parish church of Quartirolo, dedicated to the Madonna della Neve (Madonna of the Snows), built in 1574 and renovated in the 18th and 19th centuries, houses scagliola frontals and important paintings. The parish church of Santa Croce, built in 1450 and subsequently renovated in late-baroque and 18th-cent. style, with alongside the high cuspidate bell-tower, is deemed a real sanctuary for the image of the Madonna dell' Aiuto. The sober 18th-cent. architecture of the parish church of S. Lorenzo di Gargallo represents the renovation of a sacred building dating back to 1123. It houses scagliola frontals and 17th and 18th-cent. paintings. Beyond the municipal borders, the church of S. Giorgio di Ganaceto has important architectural features with 12th-cent. Romanesque apses and the body of the building which was renovated in the 15th century with 19th-cent. innovations. Near Campogalliano is the sanctuary of the Madonna della Sassola, whose image is worshipped in the pavilion built in 1745. In the vestry is a rich collection of votive offerings, expression of popular devotion. In the district of Reggio Emilia, across the river Secchia at Rubiera is the church of Saints Faustino and Giovita. Renovated in the 20th century, this ancient Romanesque building is shaped like a basilica with three aisles and contains remains of Byzantine-style frescos.

Westwards The border with the province of Reggio Emilia is marked by the river Tresinaro. The parish church of S. Giulia at Migliarina is among the oldest in the Carpi area. Traces of Romanesque architecture remain on the facade while the building structure is the result of 18th-19th-cent. renovation. The parish church of the Conversione di S. Paolo at Budrione was rebuilt on several occasions between the Romanesque period and the 19th century. Underneath the building, traces of a rustic ancient Roman domus have been found. At Fossoli, there are currently two churches, the old parish church of the Natività di Maria renovated in 1830, which replaced a much older 10th-cent. building, and the new church, which opened in 1996 in the centre of the town. Across the Tresinaro river is Correggio. The town centre boasts numerous churches full of art treasures – the collegiate basilica of S. Quirino, with its Renaissance plan, the churches of S. Giuseppe Calasanzi, Santa Maria della Misericordia, S. Sebastiano, the Madonna della Rosa, of the same period, the church of S. Francesco with its imposing late-Gothic lines, which contains the marble plaque marking the tomb of the painter Antonio Allegri known as il Correggio. The Correggio area also has numerous rural parish churches. The church of Fosdondo stands out for its Romanesque apses and facade, and then there are the churches of S. Martino in Rio, S. Giorgio di Rio Saliceto and Stiolo with their Romanesque erratic capitals. At Novellara, in the main square, is the collegiate church of Santo Stefano, designed by Lelio Orsi, alongside the roads the churches of the Madonna del Popolo, and of the Servi di Maria, as well as the chaming sanctuary of the Madonna della Fossetta.



Eastwards To the east of Carpi stand the parish churches of S. Agata at Cibeno and S. Biagio at S. Marino, a 12th-century building renovated in the 19th-century; the sanctuary of the Madonna dei Ponticelli was renovated in the 19th century. Here a fresco is venerated of the Madonna with Child dating back to the 16th century, thought to be associated with the art of Bernardino Loschi. Farther away is the parish church of S. Nicola di Bari at Cortile, a majestic 19th-cent. building in neo-Renaissance style. Virtually on the banks of the river Secchia is the parish church of S. Martino, rebuilt in 1858. The parish church of S. Pietro in Vincoli at Limidi is interesting by virtue of its remains of 15th-cent. frescos, while the appeal of that of S. Agata in Sorbara lies in its original Romanesque style. In the countryside around Bastiglia is the sanctuary of the Madonna di S. Clemente where a 15th-cent. fresco of the Madonna with Child is venerated. This itinerary leads to Nonantola with its well-known abbey of S. Silvestro and the parish church of S. Michele Arcangelo. Here history joins up with the major architectural aspects of the middle-ages and Benedictine art, with sculptures of the Wiligelmo school, the precious liturgical artefacts of the Treasure, documentary and historical artefacts in the Archive, and the exhibitions of the collections of the Benedictine and Diocesan Museum.





Northwards The extensive parish church of S. Michele at Novi has a basilica plan dating back to the 17th century, but underneath the apse are visible the architectural remains of at least two previously sacred buildings (10th and 12th century). In the church can be admired a marble slab with Christ Pantocrator and the symbols of the Evangelists of the Romanesque period, the remains of an ancient ambo. Medieval traces remain in the parish church of S. Zenone at Rolo, but in this place of worship, the most remarkable thing is the collection of 18th-cent. furniture and cabinets in the vestry. In the nearby church of S. Maria Assunta at Fabbrico (late-17th century), are examples of scagliola frontals of Carpi manufacture. The northern limit of the province of Modena is identifiable in the ancient feudal lands of the Pico family. In Mirandola, of considerable interest are the collegiate church of Santa Maria Maggiore, in late-Gothic style, which houses paintings by Sante Peranda, and the church of S. Francesco (15th century), which contains a chapel dedicated to the Madonna della Ghiara and the Pico sarcophagi (14th-16th centuries), and another dedicated to Jesus (17th century) with splendid locally-produced works in wood and paintings. In this same neighbourhood is the parish church of S. Michele at Cividale with the chapel of the Madonna del Borghetto, considered to be a real Marian sanctuary and the church of S. Maria della Neve at Quarantoli, an ancient religious centre, the upshot of 20th-cent. renovation and restoration. In the nearby district of Mantua, on the other side of the River Po, are a number of important churches dating back, it is believed, to the end of the 11th century and to the Matilde period – the parish churches of Gonzaga, Pegognaga, Coriano, Nuvolato. But the complex which expresses the most unitary value, both historical and artistic, is the abbey of Polirone, at S. Benedetto Po, built by the Canossa family (10th century). It is here that Matilde was buried. Traces of medieval architecture and sculptures still remain in the abbey, though the basilica was rebuilt in the 16th century by Giulio Romano. Of great interest is the Museum of Po Valley Culture housed in the monastery premises.


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