

# Sulmona's Highlights - a walking tour

This tour, together with colour photos the various landmarks, features on [www.welcometosulmona.com](http://www.welcometosulmona.com)

Sulmona has numerous piazzas, churches and buildings of historical and artistic interest. If you are short on time, or just want a quick overview, here is our recommendation of what to see! We've listed them in order **starting from the Cathedral of San Panfilo**.

The historical centre of Sulmona is only just over one straight kilometre from the Cathedral at the Northern end to Porta Napoli at the Southern end and it's all flat. This route takes you principally along the main Corso Ovidio with one or two short diversions. *Allow a couple of hours for this tour.*

A city map is available from the tourist office at the Annunziata on Corso Ovidio.

The city's cathedral of San Panfilo, which sits on the northwest side of the old city, was built on the site of a Roman temple. Despite the 18th-century renovation of the main church, its crypt retains its previous Romanesque appearance.

**Walk through the 'Villa Comunale'** (town park) until you reach the beginning of Corso Ovidio. The Corso itself is the main thoroughfare which connects the principal buildings and monuments and is lined by elegant covered arcades, shops, and cafés. You will also find a number of shops selling confetti candies and other typical local produce.

**Palazzo Tabassi** on Via Ercole Ciofano (second turning on the right) was built in the late Medieval period. It has a wonderful window on the front facade dated 1449 and a charming internal courtyard. Walk a little further to the end of the building and you will see a small carved hunting scene set into the corner stones. This was almost certainly the tombstone of a hunter from the Roman era, re-used here in the building of this much later palazzo.

**Rejoin the main Corso and continue in the same direction.**

**The Annunziata complex** is one of the rare examples of late Medieval / early Renaissance architecture in Sulmona that survived the earthquake of 1706. Its facade contains fine sculpture and tracery work. Inside the Palazzo (middle section) is a museum showing the Roman history of the city as well as various artefacts. The church (left-hand section) is a fine example of Baroque architecture and has a beautiful interior and bell tower. The right hand section was the city's hospital and now houses the Tourist Office. Have a look around the door to the left and you will see the old wooden medicine cabinets.

*Continue along Corso Ovidio...*

**Piazza XX Settembre** is one of the main squares of the city and is dominated by the 1925 bronze statue of the Roman poet **Ovid**. The 15th century palazzo to the left of Ovid is called **Palazzo Giovanni delle Palle** and features a small statue of Saint George in the niche above the shop fronts.

*Continue along Corso Ovidio...*

Before you reach the **Aqueduct** and the main **Piazza Garibaldi**, you'll see the 15th century fountain called the '**Fontana del Vecchio**' on your left. So called because of the carving of the old man's bearded head.

Just a little further along on the right are the stairs leading up to La Rotonda of the Church of **San Francesco della Scarpa**. This was the side entrance to the 13th Church on Via Mazara which was damaged in the 1706 earthquake leaving only the wonderful arched portal with a 16th century fresco of a scene featuring Saint Francis. The area through the arch is now used as an exhibition space and this is also where you can buy your tickets for the Giostra Cavalleresca in July & August.

The **Medieval Aqueduct** is one of the rarest and most beautiful examples in the whole of Europe. It was built in 1256 during the reign of the Swabian King Manfredi. At this time, Sulmona was part of the Kingdom of Two Sicilies and enjoyed a position of importance both politically and economically; not only in Abruzzo but within the kingdom as a whole. The aqueduct has 21 magnificent arches and stretches over 100m.

**Piazza Garibaldi** is the main square and has a large Baroque fountain. A Palio-style medieval horse race known as the **Giostra Cavalleresca** takes place here every year in the summer. On Easter Sunday, crowds gather here to witness the **Madonna che Scappa in Piazza**. The square hosts a market twice a week on Wednesdays and Saturdays and it is the town's principal event arena.

**Walk right to the opposite end of the piazza to see two churches.**

In the far right-hand corner of the piazza, up a short flight of steep steps, is the 17th century church of **San Filippo Neri**. It is characterised by the Gothic portal and fresco on the facade which were reused from the nearby 14th century church of Sant'Agostino which was damaged but never rebuilt.

**Church of San Rocco**. This tiny little chapel, located behind the newspaper stands at the far end of the piazza on the left, was originally built in the 15th century but later rebuilt in the Baroque style. It's rarely used but opens on the feast day of San Rocco on August 16th.

The last church of note here in Piazza Garibaldi is the 13th century church of **Santa Chiara** located up near the Aqueduct at the top of the stone stairs and through the archway. Like many of Sulmona's early buildings it was rebuilt in the Baroque style after the earthquake of 1706. Despite the rather plain exterior it has some sumptuous internal decorations and a couple of fine oil paintings from the 17th and 18th centuries. Originally attached to a convent you can see the upper galleries where the sisters would have sat during services. The old convent itself is next door and is now used as a gallery and exhibition space.

**Leave the Piazza by passing under the last arch of the aqueduct** and turn left up the slope. Cross over Corso Ovidio and enter **Piazza Plebiscito** on the other side of the road.

The **Church of Santa Maria della Tomba** is one of the jewels of Sulmona's architectural history. Built on the site of a Pagan temple, it has a late Gothic facade with a magnificent rose window dating to 1400. Inside, the church is divided into a central nave with two side aisles separated by monumental columns. This church is the home of the Confraternity of Santa Maria di Loreto who are responsible for organising the popular Easter morning rite 'La Madonna che scappa in Piazza'. On display inside are the 18th century statues of Mary, Jesus and the Saints Peter and John which are used in this event.

**Re-join Corso Ovidio** and continue in the same direction towards Porta Napoli. After a few hundred metres on the right you will see the recent bronze statue of one of Sulmona's most famous personalities - **Pope Celestino V** (known as 'The Refuser') - erected here in 2013.

The 14th century **Porta Napoli**, at the southern end of the city, is one of the finest examples of the city's ancient system of defensive walls and gates. So named as it functioned as the exit to Napoli. Until at least the end of the 19th century there was a little booth located here to collect taxes from merchants entering the city. Its rusticated, rose-decorated facade also features the lilies of the coat of arms of the Anjou family and a couple of elements of recycled Roman stone work.

At this point you can either **retrace your steps** or venture down one of the side roads for an alternative route back to your starting point.