

Cammin Arte

FROM CASTEL SANT'ANGELO TO SAINT PETER'S BASILICA



Our walk takes us from the fascinating Castel Sant'Angelo – which over the centuries was transformed from an imperial tomb to a papal fortress – to the heart of Christianity: the Basilica of Saint Peter with its piazza surrounded by the celebrated Bernini colonnade.

Seeing Castel Sant'Angelo beside the Tiber is without a doubt both an amazing and unusual view: the fortress was built around the imposing cylindrical structure that formed the central section of Hadrian's mausoleum, today it is seen surrounded by square defensive walls with bastions at the corners. The emperor Hadrian began to build it in AD 123 so that it could hold his funerary remains and those of other imperial family members. A visit inside allows you to read the passing of events that led to the transformation of this imposing tomb into a fortress with not only an armoury and dungeons but also elegant apartments for the pope to stay in during times of danger. The famous Passetto di Borgo, built in the fifteenth century using a section of the Vatican Walls, guaranteed the castle's connection with the Vatican.

You will enjoy the particularly impressive view from the castle's terrace, which is overshadowed by the famous bronze statue of the Archangel Michael by Peter Antoon van Verschaffelt (1752) which refers to Gregory the Great's vision of an angel who appeared above the castle in the act of putting away his sword, this sign marked the end of the plague in Rome.

Our walk will continue down Via della Conciliazione which was laid out between 1936 and 1950 as a symbol of the agreement between the Vatican and Italian States following the Lateran Pacts. Its

construction caused the indiscriminate destruction of part of the Santo Spirito and Sant'Angelo medieval suburbs.

Arriving at Saint Peter's Square, it is impossible not to feel embraced by the famous colonnade that is one of Bernini's most important architectural works, and which marks the final conclusion of the



reconstruction works on the ancient palaeo-Christian basilica begun more than a century and a half before by Bramante. Bernini himself described its meaning perfectly:

“As Saint Peter's is almost the matrix of all churches, it needed to have a portico which symbolized that the Church welcomed Catholics with open arms to confirm them in their beliefs, Heretics to bring them into the Church, and non-believers to show them the true faith”.

We will look at Carlo Maderno's façade and discuss the original cupola project designed by a young Michelangelo, although he only saw part of it implemented. Inside the church we will look at some incredibly important artworks such as Michelangelo's Pietà and Bernini's bronze Baldachin decorated with gilding, wood and marble together with pope Urban VIII's funerary monument. Our visit will end under the basilica's incredible dome bathed in light, made more beautiful by the masterful mosaic decoration.

