**Orvieto**



Orvieto is on the tentative list as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. I would say that it is an “extreme” hilltop town in that the old town sits a top of a volcanic tuff plateau surrounded by sheer cliffs. This rugged geology has shaped its history and urban development. Orvieto’s dramatic topography made it a highly defendable location for settlement and refuge, while limiting the town’s ultimate footprint. Its geographic location set it on a different course than towns to the north like Montepulciano. Orvieto and Montepulciano both struggled with domination and influence from powers afar, yet for Orvieto it was from Rome, whereas for Montepulciano it was from Siena and Florence.

Some websites with brief histories of Orvieto:

<http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/344/>

<http://www.orvietoviva.com/en/orvieto-history/>

**Some potential points of interest to visit:**

**The** [**Funicular**](http://www.orvietoviva.com/en/orvieto-water-funicular/) carrying visitors up the cliffs provides an opportunity to examine the geology of the town’s base (€ 1.30 including city minibus). A reminder of a more sustainable form of transportation can be studied from a restored model of the old water-powered funicular located under the current train station. For more info on geology:

<http://www.orvietounderground.it/index.php/en/orvieto-underground-en/geological-orvieto>

<http://www.earth-of-fire.com/2016/08/orvieto-a-secret-city-carved-into-volcanic-tuff.html>

<http://accounts.unipg.it/~corcen/GGA.Orvieto.pdf>

**Orvieto Cathedral** (*Duomo di Orvieto; Cattedrale di Santa Maria Assunta*) “is the prime masterpiece of Italian decorative Gothic”. Constructed over three centuries, it evolved from Romanesque to Gothic with elements of classical architecture foreshadowing the arrival of the Renaissance style. The [façade](http://www.inorvieto.it/en/visit/orvieto_s_duomo/the_facade.html) by Sienese sculptor and architect [Lorenzo Maitani](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorenzo_Maitani) is considered a masterpiece of the Late Middle Ages. “The interior, rich in works of art, houses among other things the fine marble group of the Pietà, sculpted by Ippolito Scalza in 1579. The artistic jewel in the Duomo is the [Chapel of San Brizio](http://www.inorvieto.it/en/visit/orvieto_s_duomo/chapel_of_san_brizio.html) on whose walls the artist from Cortona, Luca Signorelli, frescoed (1499-1504) a Universal Judgement which is one of the highest testimonials of Italian painting”. The blood-stained linen cloth from the [Miracle of Bolsena](http://www.inorvieto.it/en/visit/orvieto_s_duomo/duomo_and_miracle_of_bolsena.html) **is enshrined in the cathedral (tying it to our Vatican trip where we will see the miracle represented in** [Raphael’s Mass of Bolsena](http://mv.vatican.va/3_EN/pages/x-Schede/SDRs/SDRs_02_01_012.html)**).** (€ ???)

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orvieto_Cathedral>

<http://www.inorvieto.it/en/visit/orvieto_s_duomo.html>

**Other** [**Orvieto churches**](http://www.orvietoviva.com/en/orvieto-churches/) preserving outstanding pictorial or sculptural works are **San Francesco, San Domenico, Sant’Andrea, San Giovenale, San Lorenzo de Arari, and San Agustino**. [San Domenico](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Domenico,_Orvieto) may be of particular interest for students of philosophy, psychology, and history of science for it is where St. Thomas Aquinas taught (and his desk is presently housed). San Francesco is associated with the canonization of the French King by [Pope Boniface VIII](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Boniface_VIII).

**Palazzo Soliano** (adjacent to the Duomo) housed popes taking refuge in Orvieto. Five popes resided in Orvieto during the 13th century, including Boniface VIII. It presently houses [Museo dell’Opera del Duomo](http://www.orvietoviva.com/en/museo-opera-duomo-orvieto/) (€ 4.00) and a [museum that includes a major collection of Sicilian sculptor El Greco’s works](http://www.orvietoviva.com/en/modern-art-museum-greco/) who made the bronze doors for the Duomo (€ 2.50).

In total,[**five museums**](http://www.orvietoviva.com/en/orvieto-museums/) are located in Orvieto. Three house archeologic artifacts. [Ceramics](http://www.orvietoviva.com/en/ceramic-orvieto/) are well represented, having been recovered in abundance from Orvieto’s extensive system of grottos and wells (admissions range up to € 4.50).

[**Underground Orvieto**](http://www.orvietounderground.it/index.php/en/) provides another perspective on geology, as well as on past culture. Soft volcanic tuff allowed for extensive tunneling over the last 2500 years resulting in about 1200 grottos lying beneath the city’s surface. The tour (~45 minutes) is said to provide a glimpse “of daily activities since the city’s origins back in Etruscan times”. Groups leave everyday 11.00 and 12.15, 16.00 and 17.15 (€ 6,00)

**Pozzo di S. Patrizio (**[**St. Patrick’s Well**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pozzo_di_S._Patrizio)**)** is an extraordinary engineering solution to an environmental problem created as a result of seeking refuge on Orvieto’s unique geology. Its construction was ordered by Pope Clement VII to ensure a water supply when he sought refuge from the troops of Charles V as they sacked Rome in 1527. This is your opportunity for a long climb down rather than the usual up (though I suppose you’ll have to climb back up). The well is 60 meters deep and wrapped with an ingenious double helix staircase that prevented descending pack animals from interfering with ascending ones carrying water. (€ 5.00)

[**Albornoz Fortress**](http://www.orvietoonline.com/orvieto_fortezza_orvieto.html) was built in the 14th century also to improve papal security. It is located adjacent to Piazza Cahen near St. Patrick’s well at the eastern end of the town. (free)

[**Torre del Moro**](http://www.orvietoonline.com/orvieto_torre_del_moro_orvieto.html) provides a 360° view of the town and surrounding countryside. (€ 2.80)

The **medieval district** occupies the western part of the city. “Characteristic and precipitous, it offers an exceptional walk along the banks, down very steep and narrow streets that go back over the old rounds”.

Etruscan sites include [**Tempio del Belvedere**](http://www.orvietoviva.com/tempio-del-belvedere/) (free, I think) at the eastern bluff of the town, and the [**Necropoli di Crocefisso del Tufo**](http://www.inorvieto.it/en/visit/must_to_see/crocifisso_del_tufo_necropolis.html)located north of town (€ 3.00; **combined ticket** with the National Archaeological Museum  € 5.00). Orvieto is also believed to be [the site](http://www.inorvieto.it/en/discover/the_fanum_voltumnae_archeological_site.html) of [Fan Voltumnae](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fanum_Voltumnae), the chief sanctuary of the Etruscans and annual meeting place of the 12 Etruscan city-states (free, but tours must be arranged in advance as archeologic work is on going).

Several [**wineries**](http://www.orvietoviva.com/en/orvieto-wineries/) surround the town (80% of the Umbria’s vineyard area lies here). Orvieto is known for its [white wines](http://www.wine-searcher.com/regions-orvieto) (the “[Wine of Popes](http://www.orvietoviva.com/en/the-wine-of-the-popes/)”), with evidence of wine production [dating back to Etruscan times](http://www.inorvieto.it/en/taste/orvieto_s_wine/orvieto_s_wine_and_its_history.html). Again geology and hydrology have played a role. Volcanic bedrock has produced ideal soils, and Orvieto’s soft tuff base is quite suitable for the excavation of [wine cellars](http://www.lamiaumbria.it/scheda_ristorazione_en.asp?pag=1442).

**Other Resources:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LntYoDVji3k>

Food

<http://www.keytoumbria.com/Orvieto/Home.html>

Maps

<http://www.mappery.com/map-of/Orvieto-Map>

<http://www.tourvideos.com/Images/maps-big/Italy/Umbria/Orvieto.jpg>

Unique cumulative tickets: € 5.00 per person for the Chapel of San Brizio Cathedral, Palace Soliano (Collection Emilio Greek), Papal Palace (with sinopias hall gallery of frescoes), Library Alberi, and Church of St. Agostino (containing the statues of the Apostles and Saints).

**Cartica Unica Ticket** includes the **Duomo**, including the **Chapel of San Brizio**, the **MODO**, the **Faina Museum**, the **National Archaeological Museum**, the **Crocefisso del Tufo Necropolis**, **Saint Patrick's Well**, the **Moro Tower**, the **Pozzo della Cava** and **Orvieto Underground**