

# THE HISTORY OF TREIA

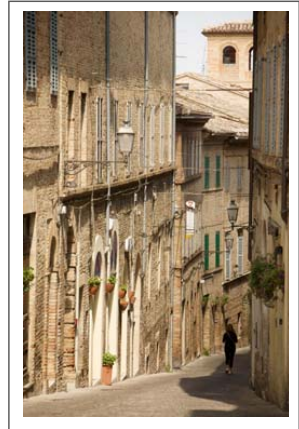


Treia is an enchanting small hill town full of winding cobbled streets and ancient buildings. The centre of the town boasts a beautiful piazza – the site of many a summer concert or Christmas celebration, and Treia is surrounded by its ancient fortified walls – perched on the top of a hill with views for miles around.

Treia has been named one of the most beautiful villages in Italy, and its charm has been well preserved and well restored over the years. With a population of just 9,700 people, it is an area of little or no unemployment, and very low crime.

The origins of the town are surrounded by fascinating legends about its connection to the Egyptian goddess of fertility - Isis, and the vicinity to the mysterious Sibillini mountains. Yet another source suggests that the town derived its name from Trea-Jana, a goddess of Greek-Sicilian origin who was revered in the area.

What all sources seem to agree on is that the original town (spelled Trea) was founded by the Sabine people in 380 BC. Its original site was two kilometres from the current town, in an area called Santissimo Crocifisso, which was on a branch of the Via Flaminia – the ancient Roman road leading from Rome to the Adriatic sea.



In 109 BC the town became a Roman *municipium* but it was not until the 10<sup>th</sup> century that the people of the town searched for a more secure site on the hill where the current town of Treia sits. The new town was named Montecchio, taken from the latin word *monticulum* which means small mountain.

The town sided with the Pope during the wars between the Pope and the Emperor, and was besieged several times. They built a fortified wall around the town to protect themselves. In 1239, the town was besieged by the imperial troops of Enzo, a son of Federico II, and again in 1263 by Corrado d'Antiochia, who was caught by the Treiesi (the people of Treia) and imprisoned for several months in what is now a café in the town. In 1790, Pope Pius VI rewarded the faithfulness of the people by reinstating the name of Treia, and at the same time raising it to the official rank of "city".

On the site of the original town of Treia there is now a magnificent church, the Santuario SS Crocifisso, built at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Two large Egyptian religious statues of the Roman period were found there, and were incorporated into the façade of the Santuario, although they have since been replaced by copies, the originals being kept in the town's museum. These statues are unique in Le Marche.



Apart from the beauty of the town, it is also famous for a ball game – the Disfida del Bracciale. Once played throughout Italy, Treia is now the only town that hosts its own competition, and the winners of the town competition go on to compete throughout Italy.



To play the ball game, two teams of three players take their positions by the highest point of the old walls. The players use their special 'bracelets' (bracciale) to hit the studded ball against the walls of the town to fall on the far side of a central line – almost a cross between squash and tennis.

Teams come from the four quarters of Treia, and are symbolised by different strands of society. The four teams each represent one of the aristocracy, the farmers, the artisans and the gypsies, and the town is filled with brightly coloured banners supporting the different teams.

The Disfida del Bracciale takes place throughout the last week of July and the first week in August, culminating in the grand final on the first Sunday in August. This is accompanied by a grand parade, with all the participants dressed in the appropriate outfits of the team they support. The gypsies are by far the most colourful, and are often accompanied by men riding bare back on beautiful horses.

During the week of the festival, each night there is a concert or *spettacolo* in the main piazza – and other events dotted around the town. Perhaps the most unusual are the jazz concerts that take place in the gardens of the ancient convent. Entrance is via the small door in the wall, and ticket money is collected by the nuns. The concerts vary greatly – from various tribute bands to winners of the Italian X Factor - or opera or even tango dancing! The culmination of the festival sees a magnificent firework display over the town, visible for miles around.



Each of the town's 'quarters' sets up its own *locanda* – an eating area – usually in the open air – where local ladies prepare the specialities of the town, washed down with local wine.



At around the same time of year, just 12 kilometres away in the town of Macerata, there is an impressive international opera festival. The operas take place at the magnificent neoclassical Sferisterio – an open air elliptical sweep of colonnaded balconies, built in the 1820s as a ball court - right in the heart of Macerata.

This is a spectacle not to be missed, and lovers of opera come from around the world to enjoy the occasion.

## MORE HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS OF TREIA

