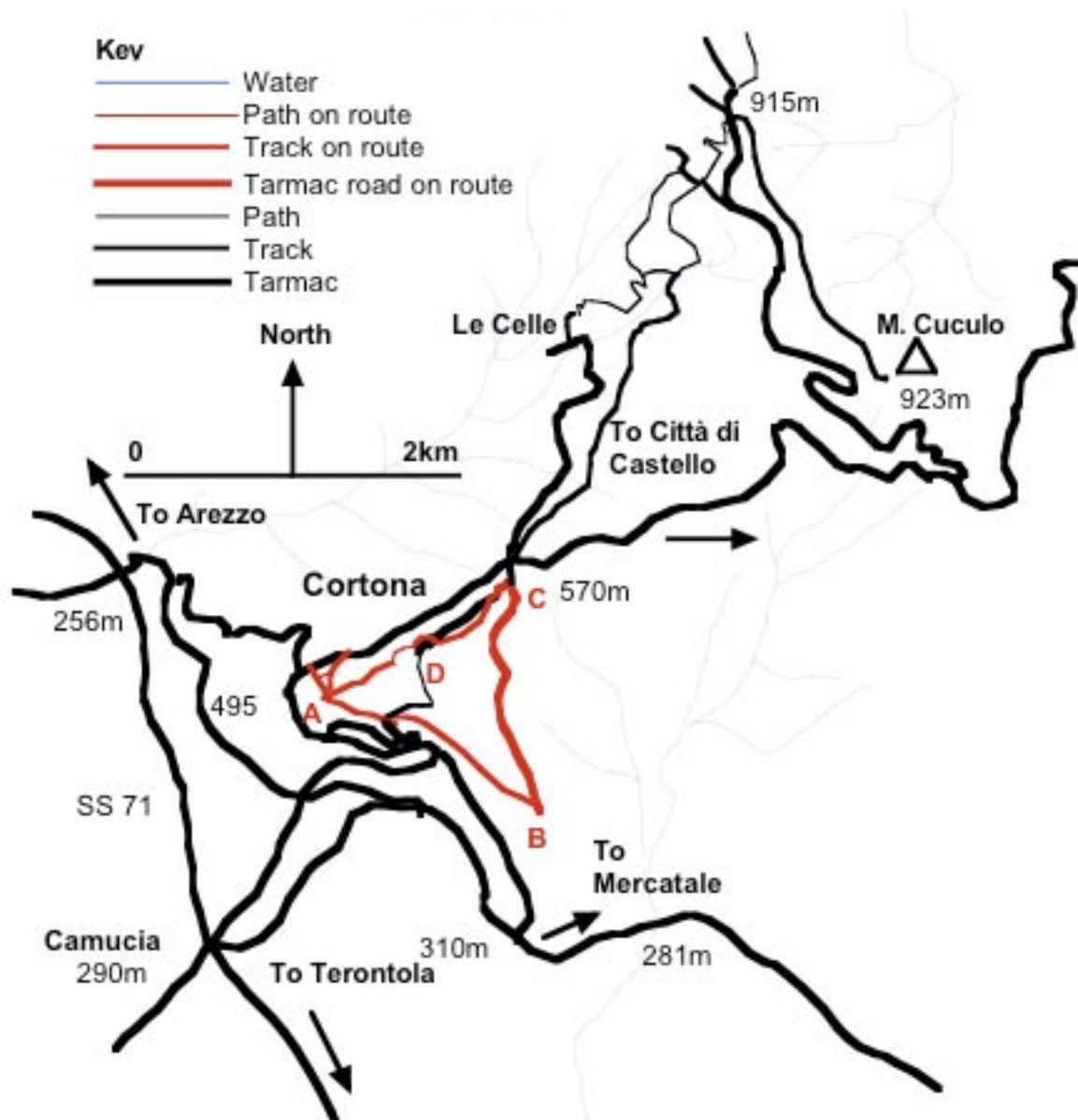


Cortona City Walk



Walking time: 1 hour 20 minutes. Fairly easy, but a steep descent. Cortona is an ancient town dating back to Etruscan times. Look in the lower parts of the town walls and you can still see the huge blocks of stone that the Etruscan wall was built from. Apart from the property and tourism boom that the town is currently undergoing, its heyday was in the medieval period from around 1100 to 1400. During this era, Cortona was an independent city-state and its grandest buildings date back to this time. Later, it was a Florentine outpost on the border with the city-state of Perugia and then the Papal States. A combination of high taxation and underinvestment left the centre in a medieval time warp. There are two fine Renaissance churches outside the walls but very little architecture from this period within the town.

To Find The Start Park in one of the car parks outside the town walls, these can be full during the tourist season so it's best to arrive early. The walk begins in the Piazza della Repubblica in the centre of Cortona. The most impressive building in the square (and the town) is the medieval town hall, the Palazzo Comunale, which dates back to the 1200's.

Walk synopsis

A - B Leave the centre of Cortona and go through the park (18 mins).

B - C Climb to Torreone, a hamlet at the top of the town (26 mins).

C - D Take a track to the church of Santa Margherita (13 mins). Optional detour to the Medici Fortress (6 mins).

D - A Return to the Piazza Signorelli through steep medieval streets (9 mins). A view from the cathedral wall, then more medieval streets before returning to the start (8 mins).

Start (A)

0:00 In the Piazza della Repubblica, stand with your back to the steps which lead up to the Palazzo Comunale, and walk along Via Nazionale; this is the street at the right corner (east) of the Piazza. After 3 minutes, you should be at the end of the street, ignore Via Santa Margherita going up to the left. The flagstone-paved street finishes and joins a tarmac road on a sharp bend.

0:03 Continue straight on, ignoring the road descending to the right near a war memorial. A minute later, you pass the church of San Domenico on your left. There is a badly damaged fresco by Fra Angelico behind glass above the entrance door. Just after the church, turn left into the public gardens. You pass another war memorial and then a fountain on the right. A minute later, there is a play area on the left.

0:05 Continue straight on, there are great views of the Val di Chiana and Lake Trasimeno from here. Every tree that lines the road represents a person from the area killed in World War I and II. As you can see, the loss of life was considerable. 13 minutes from the play area, the gravel ends. On your left there are some indoor tennis courts (B).

0:18 Follow the tarmac road around to the left, and continue straight on, climbing steadily. The road is not busy but it is a sensible precaution to walk on the left so that you face any oncoming traffic. 3 minutes after joining the tarmac, the road is lined with cypresses. You pass several houses on the way up, after 15 minutes you pass Bramasole, the house that featured in the book *Under the Tuscan Sun*. It is covered in orange/yellow stucco and has a madonnina set in the wall.

0:36 After another 8 minutes, you arrive at the junction at the top (C). There is a bar on your left; it's a good spot to refresh yourself after the climb (closed Wednesdays). Turn left here and after a minute turn left again onto the cypress-lined track (sign posted with red and white markers by the Club Alpini Italia (CAI)). After 3 minutes, the track curves sharply right and a minor tarmac roadheads off to the left.

0:48 Continue along the track and after 8 minutes, you join a tarmac road (this is further along the road that you were on when you first joined the track). Turn left onto the road; go through the city walls, and a minute later, you are in front of the church of Santa Margherita (D).

0:57 Take a quick detour up to the Medici Fortress (which was also the site of the Etruscan fortress), this is often shut, but the view from up here makes the short walk worthwhile. Facing the church, take the path going up diagonally to your left. Just before you get to the fortress, take a small path on your left, 3 minutes from Santa Margherita you should be standing on a level piece of ground with a fantastic panoramic view.

1:00 Return the way you came (3 minutes) and cross the square, keeping the facade of the church on your left. Go through the gap in the balustrade and turn right down a cobbled path. 3 minutes later, the path emerges onto a street at the top of Cortona. Turn left and then right (straight on), there is a small church on your right. A minute later, you come to a square with ilex trees (it is actually shaped like a triangle), turn right and head down the incredibly steep Via Berretini.

1:07 A minute later, you pass the house of the painter and architect Pietro da Cortona (Pietro Berretini 1596-1669) on your right. Immediately after, you pass a large medieval water cistern on your left. Continue down for another 2 minutes and you pass the church of San Francesco on the left, the first Franciscan church to be built outside Assisi.

1:10 Immediately after, go straight over the crossroads and down the pedestrian Via Santucci. 2 minutes later, you are at the bottom; continue straight on and you are back in the Piazza della Repubblica (A). You may feel that it's time for refreshments in one of the bars, if not, continue with the walk.

1:12 Pass to the right of the Palazzo Comunale and a minute later you are in Piazza Signorelli. Here, you will find the entrance to the Etruscan Museum (Museo dell' Accademia Etrusca). The museum houses the Etruscan artefacts found in the area, a collection of paintings and Egyptian mummies. It is well worth a look around, but if you are really interested in the Etruscans, see if you can join a guided tour. You can also arrange visits to the Etruscan tombs in the plain below Cortona, where many of the pieces on display were found.

1:13 Exit the Piazza down Via Casale (follow signs to the Cattedrale), cross Piazza G. Franciolini, into Piazza del Duomo. 2 minutes from Piazza Signorelli you should be admiring the view from the wall on the edge of Piazza del Duomo.

1:14 Turn around, on your left is the Duomo (Cathedral) and on your right, the Museo Diocesano, which displays art works from Cortona's churches. (Shut Mondays and open 10.00-19.00 from April to October; 10.00 - 17.00 in other months). The interior of the Duomo is only for serious church enthusiasts, but the small Museo Diocesano contains a wonderful altarpiece depicting the annunciation by Fra Angelico. It also has a couple of paintings by Luca Signorelli, the most famous painter from Cortona and a rather gloomy canvas by Pietro da Cortona, whose house you walked past earlier. Walk down Via Zefferini at the far right of Piazza del Duomo, take the first right onto Via Cioli and turn left onto a narrow street with overhanging houses, Via Ianelli. This is how much of Cortona would have looked; the overhangs were removed from most houses to allow light into the narrow streets. It is now 3 minutes from the wall on the edge of Piazza del Duomo.

1:17 At the end of Via Ianelli, you can turn left up Via Roma, which will take you back to the Piazza della Repubblica (A) in 3 minutes. Alternatively, you can turn right onto Via Roma and then immediately left along the town wall. Lose yourself in the maze of narrow streets running up from the wall; as long as you keep going up, you will eventually arrive back at the square.

