

Tour of the Castle

8 Oil storerooms

The **oil storerooms** consist of seven large rooms situated under the lawn in front of the Mirabella Tower. Originally built as water storage cisterns during the Roman period, they were transformed into warehouses in the 16th century. Four large vats once used as containers for cooking oil can still be seen there.



9 French Tower



The **French Tower** is three floors high and also includes an underground level. It owes its name to the city's brief period of French rule (1509-1516), when it was damaged by the explosion of a powder magazine and rebuilt by the French occupants who temporarily ousted the Venetians.

10 Coltrina Tower

The **Coltrina Tower**, named after its builder Jacopo Coltrino, is situated in the northern area of the castle. With its cylindrical shape and a high conical base, it consists of two casemates and is connected to the Middle Tower by a barrel-vaulted gallery featuring some embrasures and circular openings for ventilation.



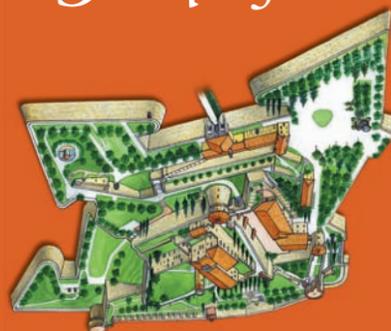
11 "Strada del Soccorso"



The **"Strada del Soccorso"** (relief route) is a flight of steps allowing access to the castle from the hillside beneath, via a fortified gateway defended by a drawbridge. This passage played a strategic role for the fortress as a kind of "service entrance" for relief troops to reach the besieged garrison. This route was used by Gaston de Foix's troops in 1512, when the city revolted against French control, and again in 1849 during the ten-day rebellion against Austrian rule, when General Haynau gained access to the castle and lifted the siege of the Austrian garrison by the local rebels. The "Porta del Soccorso", the gateway from where the Strada del Soccorso develops, was reinforced in 1523 after its original 15th century structure proved vulnerable during the French attack of 1512.



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EDITORIAL COORDINATION: Comune di Brescia - Assessorato al Turismo

TEXTS: Civici Musei d'Arte e Storia

TRANSLATION: Costanza Peverati
Centro Studi sul Turismo, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore - Brescia

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PICTURES: Mauro Pini for Comune di Brescia - Assessorato al Turismo
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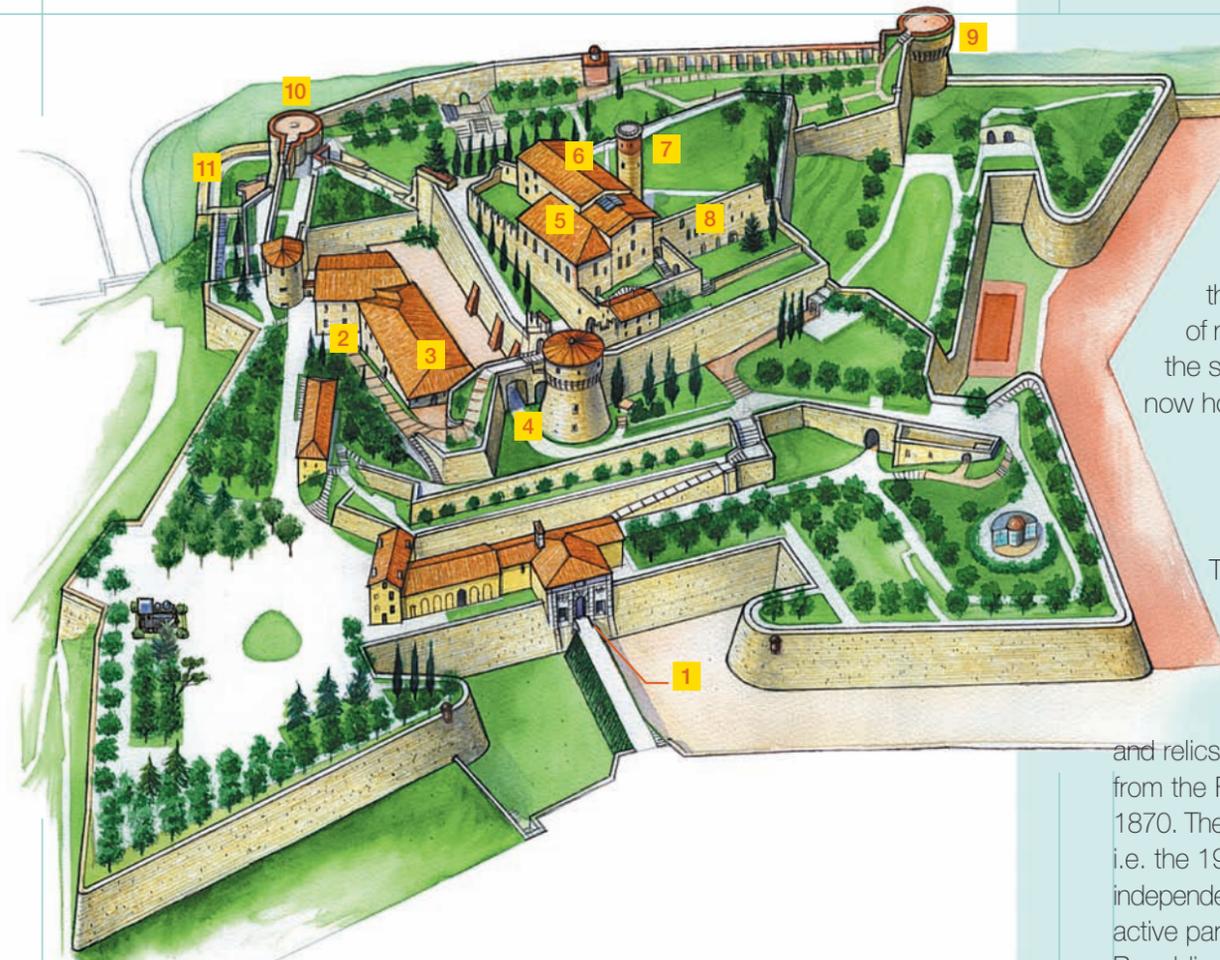
INFOPOINT TURISMO

Largo Formentone - 25121 Brescia
Tel. +39 030 2400357 - Fax +39 030 3773773
www.comune.brescia.it - infopoint@comune.brescia.it

The Castle of Brescia

Situated on top of the Cidneo hill, the Castle of Brescia is one of the largest and best preserved fortresses of Northern Italy. Its massive bastions, linked by imposing ramparts, date back to the mid sixteenth century. From the same period, its monumental gateway is topped by the Lion of Saint Mark, symbol of the Venetian Republic that dominated the city for four centuries. At the highest point of the hill is the Mastio, a strong keep built by the Visconti of Milan in the first half of the fourteenth century on the remains of a large Roman temple. A typical example of late medieval military architecture, it dominates the whole city together with the nearby Mirabella Tower.





Castle of Brescia

Opening times:
Daily, 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Information

Arms Museum: + 39 030 293292
Risorgimento Museum: + 39 030 44176
Group tours: + 39 030 2977834
www.bresciamusei.com

1 Gateway and bastions



The **gateway**, situated in the middle of the curtain wall that connects the bastions of San Marco and San Faustino, dates back to a radical restructuring of the external fortifications of the castle in the last decades of the 16th century, between 1580 and 1590.

On its left is the half bastion of **San Faustino**, which still preserves parts of its medieval structure in the brickwork and stone masonry on its western face. To the right, the bastion of **San Marco** is the only one featuring a traditional shape, with an orillon on both faces and openings at its base, from which defenders could fire on attackers. Further east is the bastion of **San Pietro**. From its top, one can see the "Sperone della Pusterla", a defensive system situated at the back of the castle.

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4 Drawbridge and Prisoners' Tower



The **drawbridge**, with its medieval structure dating from the first half of the 14th century, is the gateway to the fortifications on the topmost area of the hill. At the beginning of the Venetian rule, these underwent considerable restructuring works: the Mastio was extended with an entirely new wing to the west and the walls were reinforced, yet without any alteration of their original layout.

The **Prisoners' Tower**, with its three levels of casemates and arrow slits, is the only tower lacking openings or gun ports, even for light artillery. This aspect indicates that it was built in the Visconti period (1337-1403). In the second

half of the 15th century, it underwent major structural changes under the Venetian rulers.

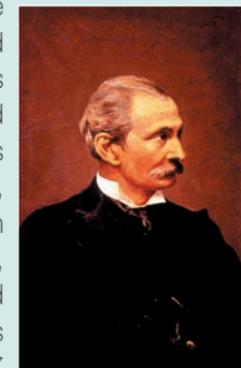
2 "Piccolo Miglio" and "Grande Miglio"

Erected between 1597 and 1598 during the Venetian rule, these rectangular buildings were originally used as storehouses for grain. They feature vaulted ceilings on the ground floor and massive outer walls of neatly squared blocks of local "medolo", the stone from the hillside on which the castle rises. The "Grande Miglio" now houses the Risorgimento Museum.



3 Risorgimento Museum

The **Risorgimento Museum** is hosted in the spacious rooms of the "Grande Miglio". Founded in 1887 and transferred here in 1959, it displays numerous paintings, hundreds of prints and official documents, uniforms, manuscripts and relics that bear witness to different historical events, from the French Revolution to the Liberation of Rome in 1870. The main focus of the collection is the Risorgimento, i.e. the 19th century movement for Italian unification and independence from foreign rule, and in particular the town's active participation in the revolutionary risings. The 1797 Republic of Brescia, the ten-day insurrection of 1849 and the second War of Independence, with the decisive battles of San Martino and Solferino, are all widely covered with both iconographic and documentary sources. A special section is dedicated to the exploits of the national hero Giuseppe Garibaldi and to the third War of Independence which, like the previous one, was fought in the Brescia area. Besides a vast archive, the Museum hosts a wealth of decorations, diplomas and photographs belonging to local politician Giuseppe Zanardelli, Italian Prime Minister from 1901 to 1903.



5 Visconti Mastio



The **Mastio**, which now houses the "Luigi Marzoli" Arms Museum, is a rectangular 14th century keep which, despite numerous alterations, is the only major remaining part of the fortress's original lay-out during the Visconti period. It was erected on the foundations and remains of a Roman temple dating from the second half of the first century A.D., whose front steps were brought to light during recent restoration work and are now visible inside the building. Particularly noteworthy are the fresco fragments that decorate the inner rooms on both floors. In the southern hall on the ground floor, they can be dated to Archbishop Giovanni Visconti's episcopate (1343-1354), as the paintings show traces of an abraded coat of arms flanked by the Archbishop's keys and mitre. Since the wall decorations in the other rooms are thought to date from the same period, the building as a whole can be safely regarded as slightly earlier.

6 Arms Museum



Housed in the Mastio, the **Arms Museum** is among the richest collections of weaponry in Europe. The museum boasts a large variety of weapons, firearms and armour, arranged and classified according to period and type. Its main feature is an invaluable collection donated to the city in 1965 by Luigi Marzoli. With over a thousand exhibits, this collection covers the history of arms production in Brescia and Milan between the 15th and 18th centuries. It includes particularly rare, superbly crafted 15th century sallets together with 16th century armour for infantry battles and mounted combat. Dating from the same period are a variety of parade swords and shields with splendid decorations and gilding.

7 Mirabella Tower

The cylindrical **Mirabella Tower** is thought to be the only fortified work dating from the communal period in medieval Italy, though it is difficult to date it exactly because of the visible alterations to its external and internal walls. Exact dating must also take into account that the tower stands on a rectangular base from the late Roman period, indicating that it must have been built on the site of an earlier building. The internal walls still preserve fragments of a 13th century fresco cycle with flower and plant motifs.

