

Welcome to Fiesole and to the self-guided walking tour of the World War II Resistance.

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This walk of approximately 45 minutes (excluding the extra content) offers visitors a look into the struggles of Fiesole in Italy's darkest hour. Be sure to wear comfortable shoes and bring enough water, especially if visiting during July or August. As Fiesole is quite hilly, much of the walk is either steep uphill or downhill. Instructions for an additional, more removed site are also included.



Monument to the Carabinieri, martyrs of Fiesole.

In seeing these sights, it is our hope to connect you to the stories of the brave men who fought to erase the scourge of fascism and Nazism from Italy. After you take a few

moments to enjoy the famous views of Fiesole, we begin with a brief explanation of the Italian Resistance. For those new to Italian history, it will be important context to fully appreciate the sites. For those more familiar with the historical setting, it's a quick refresher on the narrative of fascism, war, and resistance.

In 1922, Benito Mussolini's Fascist Party came to power in Italy, and put the country on the road to World War II. Throughout the 1930's and 1940's, the fragile consensus upon which Mussolini based his power eroded due to the unpopular moves to invade Ethiopia, intervene in the Spanish Civil War, and form an alliance with Germany. With the imposition of racial laws and entrance into World War II, opposition to Mussolini grew to a boiling point that would explode in the summer of 1943. In August of this year, the King of Italy, Victor Emanuel III, arrested Mussolini and appointed a new military officer, General Badoglio, as the head of the government.

On September 8, 1943, Badoglio announced an armistice with the Allies. Shortly thereafter, the German military moved quickly to occupy those regions of Italy not yet liberated by the Allies who had landed in Sicily in July. It is under this period of German occupation from September of 1943 until the end of the war in 1945 that the Italian Resistance, known as the partisans, fought a guerrilla war of liberation against the Nazi occupiers. Organized into small bands based on political party affiliation, the partisans ambushed, sabotaged, and fought the Nazi forces in open engagements from the Alps to the streets of Naples. These efforts proved quite successful. The commander of Allied forces in Italy, General Alexander, praised the partisans for diverting 6 full divisions out of the 25 in Italy to behind the front lines in order to combat the estimated 200,000-300,000 Italians participating in armed resistance.

The partisan fighters were very active in Fiesole. Overlooking the German's Arno Line of defense, the municipality was of great strategic importance. Operations against the Germans intensified in 1944 as the Allies approached from the South. When Allied troops reached Florence, they were surprised to find a nearly complete administrative organization established by Resistance forces. The partisans of Fiesole were critical to this success as the local hilly terrain offered a natural basecamp for operations around Florence. Allied forces would liberate Florence on August 10, 1944 with South African and New Zealand troops of the 8th British army leading the way. After weeks of fighting their

way up the hills, Commonwealth troops would liberate Fiesole on September 1, 1944. Italians partisans operated behind enemy lines and in great danger to aid the Allies and hinder their occupiers.

Begin the walk in Fiesole's historic center, Piazza Mino.

1. Across the Piazza from the Cathedral of Fiesole stands **Hotel Aurora**—a monument to a dark moment of the German occupation. In the summer of 1944, partisans of Fiesole



fought an engagement nearby at San Clemente in which they killed a German soldier. The German policy for such matters in occupied lands was to kill ten innocent men for every German lost. Thus, They gathered 10 men from Fiesole and held them here at the Hotel Aurora. Rather than immediately execute the captives, the Germans decided to hold them hostage to provide a deterrent to

any further partisan activity. However, the Nazis would soon decide to make more active use of their hostages. *Walk across Piazza Mino from Hotel Aurora and along the street on the right hand side of the cathedral. At the end of this short road is the archaeological site of the Roman Theater. Enter the archaeological site. Keep in mind that's its hours vary depending on the month, but generally it is open late morning to afternoon or early evening. There is a 5-7 Euro admission if you wish to walk through the site. Without paying admission you can peek in from the entrance area or café, but the view is admittedly quite limited from these locations.*

2. Standing in the **Roman Theater**, you are surrounded by a rich history, which dates back to the first century BC. However, our focus is on the night of August 11, 1944. It was on



this night that three Fiesole *carabinieri*, police officers, who were also secretly members of a partisan band affiliated with the Action Party, hid from the Germans in the ruins. The hills of Fiesole during the summer of 1944 would have had many scenes such as this one—groups of partisans hiding out, awaiting the opportune moment to begin their next operation. The following morning, the

three men would hear of a German ultimatum that would rouse them from this historic hiding place. Either the town would turn in the police officers in hiding, or all hostages at Hotel Aurora would be executed. The Germans, correctly, suspected the police officers to be partisan fighters from the Battle of San Clemente—this was to be harsh revenge. *The next stop is the monument commemorating the sacrifice of these three brave Fiesolani. To reach it, walk up the road to San Francesco Monastery. Exit the archaeological site and walk back to Piazza Mino. Turn right and walk along the side of the cathedral. Take the road ahead of you that is slight left (there should be signs for San Francesco). Walk up the road about 5 minutes to reach Remembrance Park. If you reach the monastery, you have gone too far.*

3. When you reach **Remembrance Park**, find the large amorphous stone **monument to the Tre Carabinieri** (Three Police Officers) of Fiesole: Alberto La Rocca, Vittorio



Marandola, and Fulvio Sbarretti. The monument is situated on the slopes of the hill of Fiesole looking out on the valley. Tuscan police officers were well known for their participation in the armed resistance. Even when *carabinieri* were ordered North with the retreating Germans, nearly all refused orders and either joined the armed partisan bands in the hills, or went into hiding. However, the

heroism of these three officers stands out. On the morning of August 12, 1944, the three men freely presented themselves to the Germans in order to save the ten innocents at Hotel Aurora. At 10:30 that night, they were executed in the garden of the hotel. The ten hostages would be allowed to walk free three weeks later. For surrendering their lives so that others may go free, the monument stands to remember their sacrifice.

4. Embedded into the wall behind the monument of the Three Police Officers, the **plaque of Bruno Giugni** remembers a fallen partisan of the Resistance. A native of Florence and an experienced resistance fighter, he participated in the partisan efforts to weaken the German defense during the battle for Florence. On August 22, 1944, his patrol unexpectedly came into contact with German paratroopers walking from the nearby town of Maiano and engaged them. As his comrades fell back, Giugni stayed behind to defend



them as they transported their wounded to safety. He paid for this selfless act with his life. Like so many mortalities of the Resistance, Giugni tragically perished only days before Fiesole's liberation.

When facing the front of the sculpture, to its right you can find the **memorial plaques** displaying the names of every man, woman, and child of Fiesole who died in the War. Like many towns in the

Italy, World War II had a terrible affect on the small population. However, the monument and park carry a certain sense of optimism as well. Notice how the entire space looks south across the Arno Valley toward where the Allies approached on their mission to liberate all of Italy. Despite the sacrifices, the *Fiesolani* remember this hope for freedom that fueled their resistance. *Now, go back down the hill the way you came. When you reach Piazza Mino, turn right and walk along the sidewalk. In about 100 meters, you will reach Via Vecchia Fiesolana (Old Fiesole Road). Continue down this steep road for about 5 minutes until you reach a switchback. Stand in the shade of the large tree there and face back up the hill.*

5. The hills of Fiesole were critical locations for both the Resistance, and the German occupiers. On either side of you are two villas. On the right stands the **Villa Medici** (yes, it was once a retreat of the famous Medici family), an example of the great efforts made by the citizens of Fiesole to help those in danger from the Nazis. When the occupation of Florence began following the Armistice of 1943, many Florentines fled to Fiesole to lay low and avoid arrest, deportation, or worse by the Germans. The owners of Villa Medici secretly housed many Florentines in need of such assistance. As fate would have it, just next door, at the house on the left known as **Villa le Balze**, the Germans kept a command



center. With the panoramic view, it is easy to understand why they chose this location. *Take a moment to walk down around the switchback to the stone bench to admire the view.* From here, the commanders of the Wehrmacht could survey the valley below and watch the Allies slowly advance northward. *When you are ready, walk back up the Via Vecchia Fiesolana to Piazza Mino. About 50*

meters before you reenter the Piazza, look to your left and notice a gate marked Villa San Girolamo.

This drive is the entrance to **Villa San Girolamo**. A convent until 2005, the Villa is famous for being the location of Michael Ondaatje's novel, *The English Patient* and the corresponding film of the same name. San Girolamo was, in fact, a wartime hospital used by the allies after the liberation of Fiesole. The villa represents yet another example of the city's heavy involvement in the war. *Continue back up to Piazza Mino.*

6. Once back in Piazza Mino, our final stop will be an overlook of the town of **Caldine.**



Again, head toward the Roman Theater. This time, take the road that runs to the left of the entrance to the archaeological site, Via Giovanni Dupré. Continue on the road past a bus stop and parking lot, which will both appear on your left. Continue around the switchback as road becomes Via Primo Conti. Walk about 100 meters and find a good spot standing on the ancient Etruscan wall.

*From here, look out over the tabernacle and the tall evergreen. This overlook offers panoramic views of the surrounding landscape. The large municipality of Fiesole actually encompasses most of what you can see before you. Look down to the small town straight ahead in the valley. It may be hidden behind the tabernacle or the tall evergreen. In this town of **Caldine**, a memory stone commemorates the death of the partisan native to the town, Vannini Franco, who died at the battle of Cetica some 50 kilometers east of Florence. Known as the Sergeant, Franco was a former soldier of the Italian army who refused the German orders of enlisting in the new, pro-German Italian army of Mussolini's puppet government in the North. He instead chose to join the partisans. In the late spring of 1944, his partisan band came under attack by Germans and Italian fascists. The occupation forces, forcing women and children to act as their human shields, were able to advance on the partisan position and overwhelm them. At the time of his death, he was 23-years-old.*

Take a moment at this point to appreciate the great contradiction this landscape presents to the viewer. Here, in a location so renowned for its beauty, there exists a history of violence, struggle, and resistance that left a community in shambles. It is in the beauty and

tragedy of these hills that one finds some of the most important stories in the creation of the modern Italian national ethos. *When you are ready, return the way you came to Piazza Mino. From here the number 7 bus runs to Florence at 15-20 minute intervals. Taxis can also be called to the taxi stand on the Piazza.*

7. Extra: Caldine

For those who wish to see the remembrance stone for themselves, the number 45 bus that leaves from Piazza Mino at irregular intervals will take you within several hundred meters of the site. The *Ufficio Turistico* (Tourist Office) at 3 Via Portigiani near the Roman Theater



can provide detailed information (in English) on the bus routes and times. This information can also be found on the ATAF website or on the posted schedule at the bus stop. Exit the bus at the Faentina 31 stop. Then continue along the same road passing Bar Luciano and a short alley on your left. Take your next left, which will be 300 meters past where you exited the bus. Follow this street

until it ends to find the memorial stone. *The length of this trip depends on the bus schedule. With a favorable bus timetable, expect about 90 minutes including transit time. Be sure to look ahead at the bus schedule so as not to be left with unplanned hours in Caldine. Keep in mind that buses sometimes leave 1 or 2 minutes before the scheduled time.*

It is possible to walk this site, though not recommended. Much of the 5 kilometer walk requires traveling along Via Faentina, which is a busy two-lane road usually without a pedestrian walkway. However, the walk is quite scenic. Beginning from Piazza Mino, head down Via Vecchia Fiesolana, turn right at Via Fontelucente, merge onto Via delle Palazzine, then merge onto Via Faentina. Walk 3 km along Via Faentina and then follow the instructions above to find the memorial stone.