

PITIGLIANO: JEWISH HERITAGE IN SOUTHEASTERN ITALY



Pitigliano, more popularly known as Little Jerusalem, is a town province which is part of Grosseto in southeastern Italy. It is a small place with a population of just about 4000 people, yet it attracts 25,000 visitors a year. They often come to explore the local Jewish culture since most of the people living here are Jews.

Pitigliano's first mention as per written records dates back to 1061 AD. In the thirteenth century, it belonged to Aldobrandeschi family and by 1293 to the Orsini family. During this period there were a lot of on and off wars with Siena and in 1455, after reaching a compromise, Siena gave it the status of a country which was under its self-government.

Pitigliano has one of the most interesting remains of the Etruscan period. A few inscriptions during this period can be seen on the walls of the Tufa rock cuts. The cuts that are artificially on the tufa rocks indicate that they would have served some purpose during the period as the bottom part has been cut as channels indicating that this would have been roads or modes of water conveyance.

There are some interesting monuments as well in the town. The church of Santa Maria, the Orsini fortress, the former cathedral of Pietro Paolo which was built during the medieval reign, has gone through a lot of renovation and reconstruction in the subsequent periods. The main attraction of the cathedral is the view - It overlooks the palace of the community and the palace of justice - the Piazza San Gregorio.

The Synagogue of Pitigliano is dated back to the 16th century and the Bible verses are preserved as inscriptions on the walls. Famous for its religious architecture, the Oratory of the Holy Cross, Church of St Anthony, and the Church of San Rocco are good places to visit. Other places to visit are the Oratory rock, Church of San Michele, Church of Our Lady of the Flowers, Jewish Cemetery, Chapel of the Holy Apostles James and Philip, Church of San Fransisco, Convent of St Francis are all the must see destinations.

Other than the religious architecture there are a few civil buildings of interest too in Pitigliano. The Medicean aqueduct built in the mid sixteenth century was used to pump water for various needs from the streams nearby. Fountain of seven taps, is again from the sixteenth century. Twin fountains located at the Republic Square have one fountain in the north and another in the south. Eagle Castle located near river Fiora is a medieval fortress and its ruins are well preserved. The Open air museum, Diocesan museum and the Jewish trail are all attractions of this place.

Even though the majority of the population is Jews, there are a few foreign nationals too in this little city.

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