



HOW MANY DID IT TAKE?

Ravenna - The City of Mosaics

We all have paintings in our homes--oil, watercolor, or other mediums. Over time, however, they probably fade a bit and don't shine with color as brightly as when they were first hung. But if you go to Ravenna on the eastern coast of Italy, you will see artistic creations 2,000 years old, shining and sparkling as if they were made yesterday. They are made of cut glass and gold leaf and they just don't fade—ever!

How were they made? The artisans drew the design (a job in and of itself as they are very intricate) and calculated how many pieces of glass and what colors would be needed. The glass was made and then cut into fingernail-sized pieces. Finally, the process of putting the puzzle together started, taking a lifetime of patience. From a distance, they appear to be beautiful and intricate paintings.



Intricate little chips of glass...



...become a seamless vision

Eight of Ravenna's monuments and churches from the 5th-6th centuries are designated UNESCO World Heritage Sites, mostly because of their spectacular early Christian mosaics. The city itself is clean and not too big. The main mode of transportation is a bicycle so there is a quiet swoosh of noise in the streets rather than noisy cars burping gas fumes. The mosaics are plentiful, but there are two sites that are an absolute must.

The Basilica di San Vitale is Ravenna's most-visited site and one of its UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The Basilica's mosaics are the largest and best-preserved Byzantine mosaics in Italy. The entire apse and altar area are still covered by the original mosaics. It is drop-dead beautiful and it's the only church from this period that has remained intact and unchanged. Here's a sample of what you'll see.

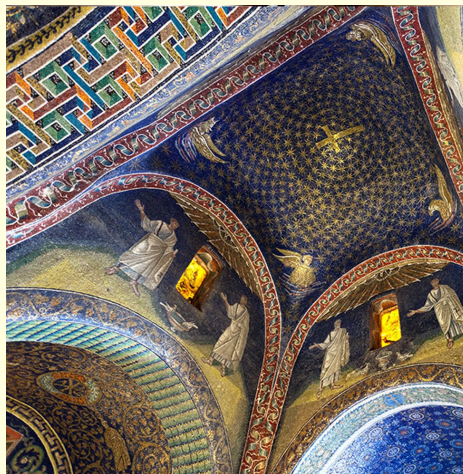


Pretty nice--guy on one side and a lady on the other. But there's a story behind it. On the left, Emperor Justinian, wearing the imperial purple robe and jeweled crown, leads a group of men. On the right is a mirror image: Empress Theodora leads her group of well-dressed women. Justinian, at age 43, married his twenty-something girlfriend, the commoner Theodora, renowned for her beauty

and notorious for her past as an actress and prostitute! Despite objections, he made Theodora his queen and adviser. So, Theodora got equal billing with her own mosaic.

These high-quality mosaics are made from thousands of tiny chips of gold, glass, and stone the size of your fingernail. He wears a robe pinned at the shoulder with a jeweled brooch. Theodora has a gown with a brocaded hem embroidered with the Three Magi. Her head and shoulders are dripping with rubies, emeralds, and pearls. Both Theodora and Justinian wear halos designating them as divine rulers. They were definitely a "power couple." Together, they transformed the stagnating Roman Empire into one of the greatest in the world.

Theodora was not just a bit of fluff. Never forgetting her upbringing, she closed brothels and created safe houses for prostitutes. She passed laws that prohibited forced prostitution, outlawed the execution of women for adultery, and guaranteed rights for divorced women. She was centuries ahead of her time! There's a lot of "story" behind these mosaics that just seem like lovely art pieces.



The second not-to-be-missed mosaic is the mausoleum for Galla Placidia. She was the daughter, sister, wife, and mother of Roman emperors. She was empress-in-charge of Ravenna and is largely the reason for many of the city's beautiful architecture and mosaics. Her mausoleum was built in the 5th century next to the San Vitale Basilica and the mosaics are some of the oldest in the city. They cover every square inch of the ceiling and apses. The cupola's glimmering stars are truly spectacular. There is not an inch of space left without a chip of glass or gold leaf. Gall Placidia never used this mausoleum as she ended up being buried in Rome.



In other churches in Ravenna, you will literally be surrounded by mosaics, top to bottom--every wall.

Rick Steves was impressed by the city of Ravenna and the art. He had quite a bit to say about it and show. [Click here to see short video.](#)



Beneath your feet, more mosaic

How would you like a stone carpet in your house? The House of Stone Carpets is located under the Church of Sant'Eufemia. You can go underground to see the geometric mosaic patterns of a 5th-century Byzantine home. The mosaics were truly a part of everyday life in this city. They're not the gold leaf, sparkling glass type as they were meant to be practical--walked on, not looked at. It was a once-in-lifetime investment, a really good one, as we can still see them today, thousands of years later!

Want to see a little more of the beautiful mosaics? Below are a couple more photos. Also, you can [click here for a short video](#) where you'll see more closeups and views.



©2020 Lincoln Hills Italian Club | Lincoln Hills Italian Club

[Web Version](#)

[Preferences](#)

[Forward](#)

[Unsubscribe](#)

Powered by
[GoDaddy Email Marketing](#)®