



## VILLA ADRIANA (TIVOLI)

*"[...] I have had copied for the Villa the Hermaphrodite and the Centaur, the Niobid and the Venus. I have wanted to live as much as possible in the midst of this music of forms. I have encouraged experimentation with the thought and methods of the past, a learned archaism which might recapture lost intentions and lost techniques."*

*Memoirs of Hadrian, Marguerite Yourcenar*

The ruins of Emperor Hadrian's suburban estate just outside Tivoli are magnificent. Built between 118 and 138 A.D., it took 20 years to develop into what stands as the finest example among the imperial villas of ancient Rome, pioneering advanced engineering and hydraulics techniques. Extending over an area of around 120 hectares, the villa lays on a tufa plateau between Acqua Ferrata ditch to the east and Risicoli or Rocca Bruna ditch to the west, nestled at the base of the Tiburtine Hills. This vast expanse made it one of the largest villas ever known, resembling a small town, divided into sectors housing representative and spa buildings, the imperial palace, a summer residence and monumental sites. Imagine a grand complex of classical architecture set amidst lush surroundings abundant with water, and conveniently close to Rome – a truly strategic location. Temples, libraries, theatres, an *odeon*, *nymphaeums*, thermal baths, and evidence of Hadrian's travels in the provinces abound, adorned with frescoes, stuccoes, mosaics, colonnades and water features. Visiting this site remains an unforgettable experience throughout history and today.



### CULTURAL HERITAGE

UNESCO DOSSIER: 907  
PLACE OF INSCRIPTION: MARRAKECH, MOROCCO  
YEAR OF INSCRIPTION: 1999

**CRITERIA FOR SELECTION:** The Villa Adriana at Tivoli is an exceptional complex of classical buildings created in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. by the Roman emperor Hadrian. It combines the best elements of the architectural heritage of Egypt, Greece and Rome in the form of an "ideal city". Studies of Villa Adriana influenced architects of later centuries, notably the Renaissance but especially baroque architecture. Its remarkable achievement in design continued to exert significant influence on notable architects and designers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.





*“His villa at Tîbur was marvellously constructed, and he actually gave to parts of it the names of provinces and places of the greatest renown, calling them, for instance, Lyceum, Academia, Prytaneum, Canopus, Poecile and Témpe. And in order not to omit anything, he even made a Hades.”*

**The Augustan History is a collection of biographies of Roman emperors, including Hadrian (XXVI, 5), in which his life – and his magnificent villa in Tivoli – are described in such a way that still invites the visitor to discover this celebrated residence.**

Thus, let the visit begin just after the entrance, with a stop instrumental into having a glimpse of what the immense residential area originally looked like at the **1 Plastic model** of the original villa, much of which was designed by Hadrian himself. Next, marvel at the spectacular **2 Pecile** pool area near the walls – a striking quadrangular square bordered by a portico with a central pool, inspired by the *Stoa Pecile* (painted portico) in the Agora of Athens. Proceed to the so-called **3 Cento camerelle** (Hundred Rooms), a network of small adjacent, aligned rooms

probably used for storing supplies and housing slaves, accessible from external balconies and strategically positioned to serve as a support structure to the Pecile. Explore the outstanding remains of the thermal baths, including the **4 Small Thermae**, which, despite their humble name, are among the villa's most luxurious structure intended for the imperial family and its esteemed guests, and the **5 Large Thermae**, for the residence staff. The tour continues into the **6 Mouseia** to admire the decorative and sculptural furnishings of some parts of the villa. Nearby, discover

the **7 Canopus**, a replica of the canal that connected the eponymous Egyptian town to Alexandria, here in the form of a pool lined with a refined colonnade and copies of Greek statues, serving as a venue for banquets and social gatherings. Before leaving, do not miss the view on the immense **8 Piazza d'Oro**, once embellished with impressive architectural decorations, likely used for public functions, and capture a photo at the **9 Maritime Theatre**, believed by archaeologists to be a private area of the estate.



## HADRIAN

*“By means of the staircase [...] you ascend to the hill above the Canopus. The view that opens up before you from the hilltop is breathtaking. The side loggias of the Canopus, the Thermae, the ruins of the Palace, Cento Camerelle, and the Pecile stand in striking contrast against the backdrop of pines, cypresses, and olive trees. In the distance, a small castle atop Mount Patulus completes the picturesque scene, filling a space that would otherwise be vacant.”*

*Viaggio a Tivoli, Filippo Alessandro Sebastiani*

Any trip to ancient Tivoli, or “*Tibur Superbum*” as Virgil called it in the Aeneid, must include a visit to its villas, namely Hadrian's Villa. Its impressive ruins can give us an idea of what it must have looked like in ancient times, and how versatile its creator, emperor Publius Aelius Trajan Hadrian, better known simply as Hadrian, must have been. Hadrian (76-138 A.D.) reigned for more than 20 years; he went down in history as a cultured, enlightened ruler, a lover of arts, philosophy, beauty, and anything related to Greek culture. He commissioned the construction of roads, harbours, baths, and theatres in many territories under Rome's rule, prioritizing peace and border defence over blind lust for new conquests. In addition to his Villa, he is remembered for his Wall in Britain, and for Castel Sant'Angelo and the reconstruction of the Pantheon in Rome between 112 and 124.



“THE COMPLEX HAS BEEN HARMONISED BY IMPOSING TREE AND GARDEN SETTINGS SCATTERED WITH FOUNTAINS, NYMPHAEUMS, AND ORNAMENTS OF ALL KINDS. IT MUST HAVE APPEARED BOTH SCENIC AND UNIFORM, POSSESSING SUCH UNMISTAKABLE SINGULARITY THAT IT FINDS NO COMPARISON IN SIMILAR WORKS OF ART, BOTH ANCIENT AND MODERN.”

This is how Francesco Fariello describes the gardens of Hadrian's villa in his *Architettura dei giardini*, 1967. The greenery is just one of many features that impress children most when visiting Villa Adriana; thus, let's set off with the whole family on this itinerary in and around the Tiburtine countryside. To begin with, a visit is due to **1 Villa Gregoriana Park**, barely half an hour from Rome, a great romantic garden – an unmissable stop on the Grand Tour of 19<sup>th</sup>-century young European aristocrats – where nature, history, and archaeology blend to perfection amidst woods, paths, grottoes, and waterfalls. Created in 1832 at the request of Pope

Gregory XVI for a grandiose hydraulic engineering work to manage the continuous flooding of the Aniene river, it has undergone periods of change, and was finally reopened in 2005 by FAI. The park enchants all visiting children, who are usually eager to capture the great waterfall, the remains of the **villa** of the Roman consul Manlius Vopiscus, and the Roman temples on the acropolis, including the scenic temple of Vesta, particularly popular during the Renaissance. Furthermore, there are plenty of footpaths to explore and enjoy recognising more than 60 tree species as well as spotting camouflaged natural caves. At the top of Tivoli's acropolis is the **2 Temple of the Sibyl**, a Roman complex standing next to the Temple of Vesta: in addition to its architectural charm, what intrigues children most is its reference to Albunea, a mythological character endowed with prophetic powers. Interesting educational visits await you at the **3 Mensa Ponderaria** concerning public weighing practices and their use in the Augustan age. Among Tivoli's highlights is the remarkable **4 Sanctuary of Hercules Victor**, one of the major sacred complexes of Roman architecture and the largest sanctuary dedicated to Hercules in Italy; dating back to the Republican period, it is a massive construction encompassing a theatre, a square and a temple. If you want to give your children a better understanding of who the ancient Romans were, keep an eye out for the archaeo-tours organised at **5 Villa Adriana** by Archeoroad, i.e., guided tours for children aged 6 to 12 facilitated by archaeologists that combine cultural and recreational activities. To round off the day, try age-specific adventure trails up and down swing bridges, tunnels, zip lines, and footbridges at **6 Parco della Merla di Poli**, half an hour from Tivoli.



## VILLA ADRIANA in books

Reading suggestions to get to the heart of Villa Adriana.

• **Augustan History**, The Life of Hadrian (4<sup>th</sup> century). This collection of biographies of Roman emperors from Hadrian to Numerian by an unknown author includes *Animula vagula blandula*, a poem named after its first verse. It is a very famous quote that emperor Hadrian, full of melancholy and close to death, addresses to his soul. The verse is also quoted by Marguerite Yourcenar in *Memoirs of Hadrian* (Little soul, gentle and drifting, guest and companion of my body, now you will dwell below in pallid places, stark and bare; there you will abandon your play of yore).

• **Dialogue between Epictetus and Emperor Hadrian** (second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century). In this anonymous text, the dialogue between young Epictetus and the emperor covers various themes, including the bond between God and humankind.

• **Viaggio a Tivoli**, Filippo Alessandro Sebastiani (1828). The account of a very personal journey to Tivoli in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century – to picture the town and its timeless beauties as they appeared to a past observer.

• **Memoirs of Hadrian**, Marguerite Yourcenar (1951). There is nothing like the novel by the French-Belgian writer to introduce the figure of the emperor who created Villa Adriana at Tivoli. This acclaimed work, divided into six parts, is in the form of a long letter from Hadrian, now tired and ill, to his young friend Marcus Aurelius, who will become his adopted grandson and future emperor.

• **Architettura dei giardini**, Francesco Fariello (1967). It deals with the story of gardens across various historical periods and their relationship to arts and architecture, with a section specifically devoted to the gardens of Hadrian's Villa.

• **Hadrian**, James Morwood (2013). Not only does it trace Hadrian's life and exploits, but it also delves into his psychology, providing the

profile of an educated, talented man capable of great successes, yet full of contradictions.

• **Adriano. Roma e Atene**, Andrea Carandini, Emanuele Papi (2019). Co-written by two of Italy's most illustrious archaeologists, this work describes the places associated with the emperor, from the Pantheon to Castel Sant'Angelo, recounting the lives of Hadrian, his relatives, and all those who inhabited these locations in a blend of history and architecture.

• **Antinoo, un uomo, un dio**, Raffaele Mambella (2021). As a member of Hadrian's inner circle, the story of young Antinous offers an insight into the emperor's soul, uncovering the great distress that struck him when the boy died.

## Children's books:

• **L'enigma di Boussois (I misteri di Villa Adriana)**, Pier Federico Caliarì (2022). A noir novel featuring the Frenchman Charles Louis Boussois set among the remains (and history) of Hadrian's Villa.

