



Castle of Porto Venere

PORTO VENERE

Location: Located on a rocky hill overlooking the fishing village of Porto Venere, it is one of the most impressive military building on the eastern Ligurian Riviera dating back to the Republic of Genoa.

Type of castle: Fortress.

Construction period: Records of the existence of a fortified building go back to the 11th century. During the 12th and 16th century it was rebuilt by the Republic of Genoa.

First appearance in literary sources: The village is mentioned in Ptolemy's Geography, written in 150 AD.

Strategic role: It played a key defensive role because of its strategic position: it was the last stronghold of the Republic of Genoa on the eastern coast before the Gulf of La Spezia.





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Further use: Under Napoleon's rule, the fortress served as prison. In the 19th century, as it was progressively dismantled, the fortress fell slowly into decay. Meticulous renovations were carried out only in the 70s by the Superintendency of Architectural Heritage of the region Liguria. The old Genoese fortress is now owned by the Municipality of Porto Venere and it hosts art exhibitions on special occasions.

Current condition: Restored.

Viewing: Owned by the Municipality of Porto Venere, the castle is open to visitors at different times of the year.

History: The Genoese began to build the castrum vetus in 1104.

In 1161, the castle was rebuilt in a more commanding position, and basically the new building was added to another fortified structure with two identical bartizans. The row of tower-like houses dates back to this period, when high houses were connected together for an effective coastal defence.

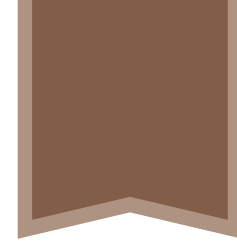
As the Colonia Juanuensis was fully surrounded by the possessions of the Counts of Lavagna, the settlement looked like an authentic walled village.

During the first years after the reconstruction, the two fortifications were governed by two different castellans, while the local podestà would reside in the lower building.

In the 13th century, the castle was at the centre of the fight between Genoa and Pisa, which aimed to conquer the nearby territories, until both the castle and the fishing village returned to be part of the vast fief in the eastern Riviera that belonged to Nicolò Fieschi.

It returned under the control of the Genoese Republic in 1276.

Due to the invention of long-distance firearms and the new political situation in Italy, which was characterised by ongoing tensions between the states, it was necessary to modify the function and structure of the castle. The main structure of the fortification was the upper castle, whose present appearance is the result of a modernisation and reordering process that was carried out only in the 17th century and involved the fortifications in the Gulf of La Spezia. The defensive structures were modified by the Republic of Genoa according to the architectural and military standards of that period.



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Structure: The Castle of Porto Venere, also known as the upper castle, is made up of two different structures, placed one inside the other. The internal structure dates back to the 16th century, while the external one from the 17th century encloses the central building with thick walls and no openings. The curtain wall is even more massive thanks to a series of big arches at the back. The core of the entire construction is the great hypostyle hall in the oldest part of the castle, which is accessed through a room with a low ceiling.

A bartizan and embrasures for defence against land attacks are located on the curtain walls of the upper levels.

There is no decoration throughout the building.

Opposite the fortress overlooking the sea, close to the Isle of Palmaria, you can find the ruins of the so-called Torre Scola (Scola Tower), previously called Torre di San Giovanni Battista (Tower of St. John the Baptist), which was used by the castle's artillery.