

# Poreč Monuments

A GUIDE



Poreč  
Istria, Croatia







Poreč

Poreč Tourist Board

Sniježana Matejčić

# Poreč monuments

a guide

A gift from  
the Poreč  
Tourist Board

## **Dear Traveller,**

Before you lies a town inhabited since prehistoric times, whose urban layout on this 400x200m peninsula was drawn out by ancient surveyors at the very beginning of our era.

They drew the directions of the streets and marked plots for houses, squares and public buildings. The urban design of the Roman settlement that became *Colonia Iulia Parentium* in the 1st century is still recognisable today as the unique remnant of a classical Roman urban structure on the Croatian Adriatic coast. The longest central street, the Roman *Decumanus Maximus*, has remained just as it was when the city was built, and it has even retained its name – Dekumanska street. It continued onto the Roman *Decumanus Agri*, a road that led from town to the surrounding agricultural estates.

The town survived for two millennia, passing through periods of prosperity and decline. The preserved structures from various periods help us to interpret its long past. The first town statute from 1264 has also survived, and what time has hidden with new buildings or accommodations to the modern urban lifestyle is now slowly resurfacing. The last significant detail of historic Poreč was uncovered in early 2005 during the infrastructure and stonework renewal project – a

**Renaissance bridge located at the entrance to the Decumanus | 1 |**. There is no better place to begin our stroll through this 2,000-year-old town, which might look a bit like an art history class. In fact, you will recognise nearly all architectural styles and eras on the façades of the buildings. Little was demolished here, and what time, fires and bombs destroyed was expanded upon or modernised instead. The bridge at the entrance to the historic centre of Poreč was built after the Pentagonal Tower, as the structure of the bridge rests on the tower's wall. Whether or not a bridge existed there in earlier Mediaeval and ancient times, as one might assume from the remains of walls and the town gate, has yet to be determined. Step bravely forward and take a look to your left. Poreč's system of



1



2

**defensive walls | 2 |**, parts of which are still visible, dates back to ancient times and the 12th-16th century, with the new walls mostly built upon the foundations of the older ones. The town long remained within the confines of its ancient walls, mostly still visible today, although buildings were built atop them over time. Potentate Warnerio de Gillago began renovations to the fortress and large construction works in the town in the 13th century. The best-preserved, eastern part of the town walls, alongside which stand the three remaining defensive towers, was built under the threat of Turkish conquests in the 15th century when Poreč was a part of the Venetian Republic. It was damaged only with the construction of houses in the 18th century and larger buildings in the 19th and 20th centuries. During renovations to the

**Pentagonal Tower | 3 |** in the early 1990s, traces of two older towers from Roman and Mediaeval times were discovered. In 1447, city chief Nicolò Lion had a new pentagonal tower built on the foundations of an ancient and later Mediaeval tower. In the 18th century, a residential house was built next to the tower. By the late 20th century, it was mostly inaccessible and filled with earth. Instead of a

3



watchtower, a vegetable garden stood at its top. Thanks to a private initiative, the tower has been rented, and the tenant handed it over to archaeologists and conservators, who transformed it into a unique space that is today a restaurant. You should not miss the opportunity to see the tower from the inside, observe the Decumanus from the terrace, and take in the view of the Mediaeval and modern

4



part of Poreč, which the locals call "fora le porte" (outside the town gate) from the watchtower.

Head down the Decumanus, the central town street. At house number 5, raise your gaze to the richly decorated double three-mullioned windows of the

### **Gothic palace | 4 |** built in 1473 in International Gothic style.

During this period, Poreč was certainly home to wealthy families who spared no expense in building their beautiful houses in the modern style of the time, many of which still stand.

Further down the Decumanus at number 9, you will find the Baroque palace of the Sinčić family, built in 1719. Today, it houses the

**Poreč Heritage Museum | 5 |**, the oldest town museum in Istria, founded in 1884. The museum collection bears witness to the town's long history. The museum's



5

ground floor and courtyard feature a lapidarium, a collection of stone monuments mostly dating back to ancient times. In the side rooms of the ground floor, there is a collection of archaeological findings from prehistoric times, which bear witness to the existence of the ruins of settlements surrounding the town. There are salons on the first and second floor of the museum, whose holdings include historical documents, a valuable library, and portraits of Poreč's bishops and nobles. One of these is a fascinating portrait of Gian Rinaldo Carli portrayed in Turkish dress, as he was the official Venetian translator at the Great Palace of Constantinople. He was also author

**6**

of two books on the Turkish literary and musical tradition. On the right of the museum, heading down St. Eleutherius street, you will reach the

**early Christian cathedral complex of the Euphrasian Basilica | 6 |.** The metal door and the mosaic in the lunette above it both date from the early 20th century, and the inscription around Christ is a quote from the Gospel of John: "I am the door. If anyone



enters through Me, he shall be saved." When you pass through the door, you will enter an architectural complex whose construction began in the 4th century, and which was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1997. The cathedral complex consists of a church, bishop's palace, baptistry, and the archaeological remains of earlier churches.

Legend has it that there was a secret community of Christians in the Roman municipium of Parentium in the 4th century, led by the town's first bishop, Mavar (in Croatian) or Mauro (in Italian). The tale holds that Christians used to meet and pray in a patrician house until Roman soldiers

**B**

discovered Mavar and the priest Eleutherius. Both were martyred and later proclaimed saints. Today, St. Maurus is the patron saint of Poreč. But how much of the legend is historically accurate? Historical documents attest to the existence of a real person named "Maurus the confessor" in the 4th and 5th century, whose sacred remains were transferred to a new grave inside the cathedral. Which Roman patrician offered shelter to the first Christians of Poreč? Which house did they pray in? This remains a secret.

The corridor leading from the portal of the complex to the church atrium is a former Roman street, the **Cardo III**. Part of the former street before you ended at a gate that was walled over in the Middle Ages. Traces of this gate **| B |**, which led through the northern walls towards Peškera bay, were discovered during research in the past 15 years. This research also uncovered a mosaic floor





II



A

decoration, which the researchers incorporated into other traces, concluding that the northern part of the ancient *Cardo* was converted into the narthex of the first of two churches that preceded the cathedral in the 4th century. To simplify the complex story of the cathedral, it's best to enter the Bishop's Palace **III** from the northern **Cardo** or the pre-Euphrasian narthex. Like the Euphrasian Basilica itself, the Bishop's Palace was built in the mid-6th century, following the floor plan of a three-nave church with three semi-circular apses. From its construction until approximately 15 years ago, it was the seat of the Diocese of Poreč, and later of the Diocese of Poreč and Pula. After fourteen centuries of continuity, an agreement was reached to build a new bishop's palace in the garden of the old building, and the ancient bishop's palace was left to conservators. This turned out to be a very complex task, as the building had been modified and partition walls were built to suit modern living standards throughout the long period it hosted Poreč's bishops. Research and reconstruction lasted about ten years. In the lower part of the building, a lapidarium displays stone monuments retrieved through years of archaeological research, including a stone cathedra from the Carolingian era, as well as parts of the original 4th-5th-century floor mosaics. A fragment of the floor mosaic from the central hall of the first 4th-century basilica has been placed behind the door in the central apse. It portrays a fish, the Greek *ichthys*, which is interpreted as an abbreviation for "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour". The fish was a secret Christian symbol. Aside from this part of the mosaic, the central part of the exhibition also features part of a 6th-century marble altar with a portrayal of a dolphin. Its inscription reads that Bishop Euphrasius built the church in the twelfth year of his service.

From the lapidarium, we enter a small Baroque courtyard with a staircase leading to the first floor, to a portal commissioned by Bishop Alessandro Adelasio in 1694. You are entering the Poreč and Pula Diocese's museum of ecclesiastical art. The most significant exhibit at this unique museum is the room entered from the staircase – the audience hall, which has been restored to its original form dating back to the 6th century **A**, a time when bishops wielded both religious and secular power. Returning this hall to its original state was a difficult task, as it was once horizontally divided into two floors connected by an internal staircase that closed the central apse.

From the ceremonial hall, the first door leads to the Baroque bishop's salons with original stuccoes. From here, you will



**B**



**C**

enter rooms in which some of the most valuable works of church sculpture, painting, goldsmithery, and mass vestments are exhibited. Amongst the most significant of these are Romanesque and Gothic wooden sculptures, a polyptych of Antonio Vivarini **| B |** (1440.), a triptych of Anthony of Padua **| C |** (1529.) and engraved wooden crucifixes.

When you return to the staircase you came up by, peer through the window of the eastern room to see an excellent view of the

**archaeological remains of the church that preceded the Euphrasian Basilica**  
**| III |**. Experts say at least two smaller, earlier churches

preceded it. The first, whose remains are visible north of today's cathedral, dates back to the 4th century. It consisted of three unequal square halls, whose floor mosaics have been partially preserved. The church built on the foundations of earlier Roman secular buildings was entered through the narthex, which was a former Roman street. Researchers from earlier centuries theorised that one of these secular houses was the secret gathering place of Poreč's first Christians, however this has not been proven. In the mid-5th century, the first church was expanded, resulting in the structure researchers refer to as the pre-Euphrasian Basilica. The most recent research provides an entirely new, different interpretation of this church: it was a double basilica. It consisted of two parallel three-nave basilicas divided by a narrow hallway and cistern. This church also used the narthex built on the ancient street, and it too had a floor decorated with a mosaic. Expansions in the 6th century turned the southern part of the double basilica into the Euphrasian Basilica, and the surviving remains of the floor mosaic of the earlier church are visible beneath the floor of today's cathedral. The northern part of the pre-Euphrasian Basilica is only preserved in the archaeological layer, while part of its floor mosaic has



**| III |**

**IV**

survived beneath the present-day sacristy. After you've observed the archaeological remains from the window of the bishop's palace, go back and look at the mosaics up close, and then exit through the glass door into the atrium. Then turn right towards the baptistery **IV**, as this was part of the pre-Euphrasian Basilica. It is octagonal in shape with a hexagonal baptismal font at its centre. Above it, a 35-metre bell tower **A** was built in the 16th century on Romanesque foundations. Before you leave the complex, climb the internal staircase of the bell tower to the lookout point, which offers an unforgettable view of the town. This point also offers a view of the highest external part of the cathedral, featuring partially preserved mosaics that experts claim portray the apocalyptic Christ with the apostles. It is finally time to see the Euphrasian Basilica **V**. Bishop Euphrasius left multiple inscriptions according to which he had the church built atop ruins. However, research has shown that he expanded and adapted the southern pre-Euphrasian church by turning it into a new shrine, decorating its interior richly, and building a memorial chapel, atrium and bishop's palace. The church is dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Poreč's martyr St. Maurus. The mosaics and ciborium before the

**A****V**



A

shrine in the three-nave church will draw your attention the moment you enter, but be patient! The floor you are walking on was created in the 20th century, as the original mosaic floor was destroyed. Fragments of the mosaic are visible only in the southern apse. Parts of the original floor of the 5th-century pre-Euphrasian Basilica and the first, 4th-century basilica are visible through openings in the floor. The church naves are divided by colonnades with richly decorated marble capitals. The altar partition has been reconstructed from parts of the same material. The capital decorations are different and repeat in pairs. Above them, the initials of Bishop Euphrasius are engraved. The interior of the capital arches was decorated

with painted stuccoes, which have survived only on the northern colonnade. The bishop's cathedra in the central apse and the sedilia date back to the period the church was built. Three chapels were added along the southern nave of the church in the 17th, 19th, and early 20th centuries, respectively.

All three apses were decorated with mosaics, however only the decoration in the central apse has remained intact. Let us begin from the top, where the figure of Christ is placed at the centre, holding a book in one hand and giving a blessing with the other. Christ is surrounded by the figures of the twelve apostles. The Lamb of God is portrayed in the centre of the triumphal arch, while a series of medallions with the figures of twelve Christian martyrs run to the left and right. In the apex of the apse, there is a magnificent votive image of the Madonna on a throne with the Christ Child in her lap. Above them, a hand holds a crown. Angels and holy martyrs are located to the side along with St. Maurus, while Bishop Euphrasius is portrayed with a model of the basilica in his hand. The inscription beneath the mosaic describes how Bishop Euphrasius **A** contributed to the construction of the cathedral. Beneath this painting, a portrayal of the Annunciation is found on the left, and of the Visitation on the right. Figures of saints are portrayed between the windows, while the decoration of the apse in the lower layer ends with geometric encrustations made of multi-coloured marble and seashells. The surviving mosaics in Poreč are almost completely original; only a few have been restored throughout their fifteen centuries of existence. In the side apses, only fragments of the mosaics have survived with two nearly identical compositions: a young Christ is placing a crown of thorns on Cosmas and Damian in one, and Ursus and Severus in the other.

The ciborium in front of the shrine dates back to 1277. It was commissioned by Bishop Otto, and built on marble columns whose capitals are imitations of those from the 6th century. The central mosaic repeats the story of the Annunciation from the early-Christian mosaics, while the Lamb of God is portrayed in the arch of the ciborium. One inscription on the mosaics reads that the ciborium was commissioned by Bishop Otto, while the remaining inscriptions are religious messages, invocations connected to portrayals of the figures of Poreč's martyrs Maurus and Eleutherius, Akolouthos and Praejectus, Demetrius and Julian. In front of the ciborium, there are two gravestones with figures of bishops, one of whom is John of Poreč (Johannes de Parentio) from the mid-15th century. The front face of the altar also features



VI

a silver and gilded antependium, originally an altarpiece commissioned by Bishop John of Poreč in Venice in 1451. Figures of saints from the monumental Renaissance relief were stolen in the 17th century.

North of the ciborium, there is an entrance to a trefoil memorial chapel **VI**, which holds the sarcophagus of St. Maurus **B**. The structure was converted into a defensive tower in the Middle Ages. Renovations and expansions between the 13th and 15th century turned part of the chapel into a sacristy. Remains of 14th-century frescoes are visible on the interior wall next to the door at the exit of the Euphrasian Basilica.

Our stroll around the cathedral will end in the atrium **VII**, built in the same period as the church and the bishop's palace. It was renovated in the 19th century with money donated by Austro-Hungarian Emperor Franz Joseph, as witnessed by a stone inscription displayed in the corner. The walls of the atrium feature the coats of arms and gravestones of Poreč's bishops.

The **rectory 7** located next to the Euphrasian Basilica is still the residence of Poreč's vicar. It is decorated with a beautiful



B



VII



7

8



stone portal and a series of double-arched windows on the first floor. Opposite the entrance to the Euphrasian Basilica is the

**Vergottini Palace | 8 |**, built in the 18th century. There are a number of Gothic palaces in the Decumanus, equally as lavish as the Venetian palaces from the same period.

These are private houses at numbers 34 | **9 |**, 15 | **10 |**,

12



20



13

10 | **11 |**, the Zuccato Palace | **12 |** which today houses the Open University Gallery, and 12 | **13 |** at the corner of the Decumanus and Cardo, both of which streets feature a series of palaces from the same period.

**The Istrian Parliament Hall | 14 |** was once the early 14th-century Church of St. Francis, alongside which a monastery was located. The ceiling of the church was decorated with stuccoes and paintings in the late 18th century. The monastery was closed under Napoleon's rule in 1806, and eventually fell into ruin. In 1861, when Poreč was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the abandoned church was renovated and horizontally divided into a hall used for sessions of the Provincial Parliament. The ground floor was turned into a wine cellar with glass-tiled barrels, all of which have survived. In the late 1990s, after the nearby building was renovated and converted into the Italian school, archaeological research uncovered a part of the foundations of the earlier 5th-century Church of St. Thomas, and remains of its floor mosaic. These findings



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were left in place and presented to the public beneath a transparent staircase construction leading to the Istrian Parliament hall. This hall is today an exhibition space and the venue for official sessions of the County Assembly.

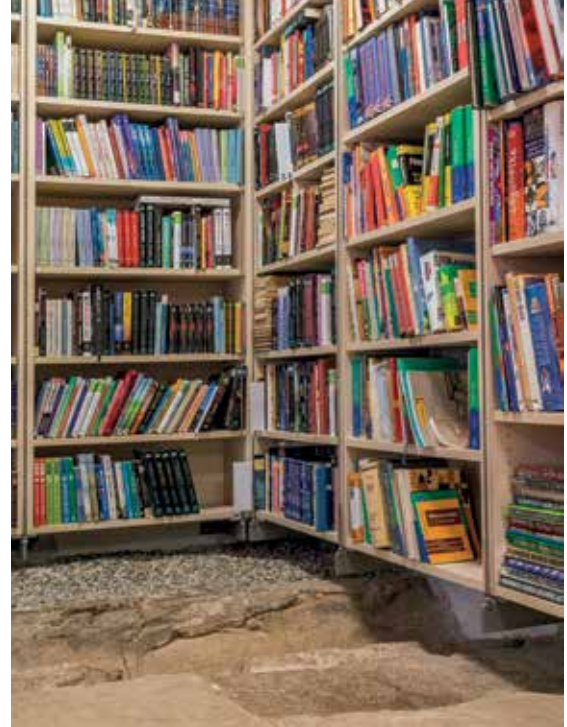
A part of ancient Poreč is located beneath today's **Marafor Square | 15 |**. Archaeological research is being prepared to present the original, ancient square, which is largely preserved about one metre beneath the present square. This can partially be seen at the Town Library **| a |**, the Library's



15



a



b

playroom **| b |**, a business space, and in the ground floor of a private house, currently undergoing reconstruction. The forum is located at the western end of the Decumanus.

**Ancient temples | 16 |** were located at its edge. To the right, the columns of the smaller temple are preserved. Some researchers believe it was dedicated to Roman sea god Neptune. Of the larger temple, likely dedicated



16



**c**

to the god Mars **| c |**, three monumental walls and parts of the pediment have survived, joined together in a walled construction, bearing vivid witness to the town's ancient history in the place where they were discovered. Documents note that Titus Abudius Verus, vice admiral of the Ravenna fleet, had Poreč's ancient harbour built and the temple renovated in the 1st century.

A **Romanesque house | 17 |** from the mid-13th century now houses an art gallery in its ground floor,



**17**



**18**

while the first and second floor house the ethnographic collection of the Poreč Heritage Museum.

**Matija Gubec Square | 18 |**, once the *Piazza dei signori*, has retained only one row of its former houses, including one beautiful Gothic and Baroque palace.

**Franjo Supilo Square | 19 |** seems uninteresting, aside from its small Gothic house. That is because the interesting part is hidden behind the stone pavement. During renovations to communal infrastructure in 1998, archaeological remains of a Mediaeval monastery were discovered in this place, which Poreč's residents once called Predol. It was built on the foundations of an earlier, ancient house, traces of which were also discovered as fragments of a monochrome and polychrome floor mosaic.



**19**





20

**The House of Two Saints | 20** was named after the reliefs on its façade. It is a simple, rustic 15th-century Renaissance house; however, the reliefs of the saints that have adorned it since it was built are Romanesque. It is possible they once stood at the nearby monastery at Frano Supilo Square. Today, the building houses the Conservator's Office.

**The round southern tower | 21** was built in 1475 next to an earlier one, commissioned by town chief Pietro de Mula. The small central space today houses a bar, while the tower's steep original staircase has survived completely. It leads to a watchtower, now the terrace



21



22

of the bar with a view of nearby Sveti Nikola Island and Poreč's promenade.

**The theatre | 22** was built in 1885 as the Teatro Verdi, whose hall has largely retained its original appearance.

**The town hall | 23** dates back to 1910 and was built according to designs by Trieste architect Arduino Berlam.



23

24



### The Church of Our Lady of Angels

**| 24 |** was built in 1770 on the ruins of an earlier, Romanesque church. It is decorated with Baroque altars, statues of saints, and two valuable altarpieces by Italian masters.

### The northern tower of Peškera **| 25 |**

is in ruins, and has been filled with earth. It was commissioned by town chief Francesco Bondulmier in 1473. The arched entrance to the town, once the town gate, is located beside the tower. Arrow slits and embrasures for cannons are

25



26

visible on the exterior façade of the tower.

Mass is held at the Mediaeval

### Church of St. Eleutherius **| 26 |** once a year.

In the very centre of town, Sveti Nikola Island stands before Poreč with the oldest

### lighthouse **| 27 |** on the Croatian Adriatic coast, built in 1403, and a



27

Valamar Collection Isabella Island Resort  
© Valamar Riviera d.d.

28



Valamar Collection Isabella Island Resort  
© Valamar Riviera d.d.

**small castle | 28 |** commissioned in 1886 by Marquis Benedetto Polesini.

There is also an interesting building complex at the entrance to Poreč, built in 1907 to house the Austrian government's **regional wine institute**, today the Institute for Agriculture and Tourism, with a tradition dating from the late 19th century.

Those who love prehistoric scenes will want to take the drive and short walk to **Picuga** and **Sveti Anđel peak / Monte St. Angelo**, prehistoric structures of which only a few large stone blocks and the foundations of one smaller cult structure have remained. However, the site offers a beautiful view of Poreč and the sea.

Those who prefer ancient sites will also find their place here. Next to the parking lot at Sorna promontory, near the Zorna Hotel at Zelena Laguna, you will find the **ruins of an ancient villa** uncovered during renovations to the resort. In nearby Červar Porat, the **remains of another ancient villa** are also displayed, while Lorun peninsula opposite the resort (which you can reach by boat or walking path around Červar Porat bay) features **archaeological remains of a Roman villa and amphora production site**, which

is still being researched by an international team of archaeologists. It has been discovered that Lorun was one of the largest ancient "factories" of amphorae used to transport olive oil, likely produced mostly in the region. It operated for more than 300 years. On the road from Poreč to Pazin, six kilometres away, you will find

**Žbandaj | A |**, a village settled by emigrant families from the Dalmatian hinterland around 1570. The village features the Parish Church of Saints John and Paul, built in 1595. Approximately ten kilometres on towards



B

Pazin, you will find the village of **Baderna | B |**, in which the 16th-century Parish Church of the Nativity of Mary is located. The church was expanded in the 19th century and 10,000-year-old human remains have been discovered near the village. The villages of

**Nova Vas, Gedići** and **Fuškulin | C |** feature beautifully preserved examples of old rural architecture.



A

30



C

31

**Photographs**

Poreč Tourist Board  
Istria Tourist Board  
Istria County  
Poreč Heritage Museum  
Studio Sonda  
Poreč Open University  
Valamar Riviera d.d.

**Design**

Studio Sonda

**Proofreading and translation**

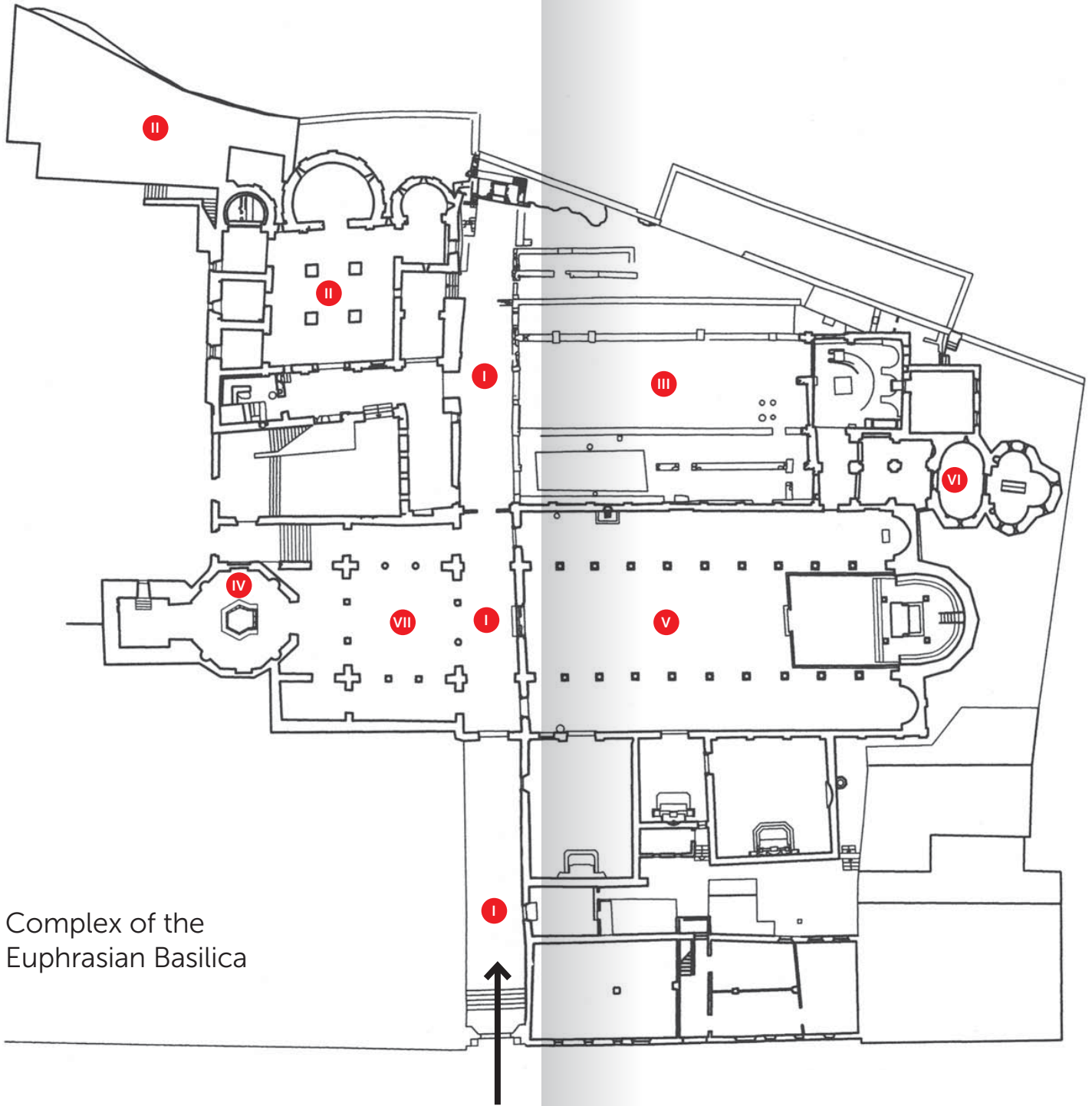
Studio Bocca

**Publisher**

Poreč Tourist Board

**For the publisher**

Nenad Velenik



Complex of the  
Euphrasian Basilica



UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,  
SCIENTIFIC AND  
CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

CONVENTION CONCERNING  
THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD  
CULTURAL AND NATURAL  
HERITAGE

*The World Heritage Committee  
has inscribed*

*the Episcopal Complex of the Euphrasian Basilica  
in the Historic Centre of Porec  
on the World Heritage List*

*Inscription on this List confirms the exceptional  
and universal value of a cultural or  
natural site which requires protection for the benefit  
of all humanity*

DATE OF INSCRIPTION

*6 December 1997*

DIRECTOR-GENERAL  
OF UNESCO



# Poreč

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Zagrebačka 9, 52440 Poreč, Croatia

Tel: +385 52 451 293

e-mail: [info@myporec.com](mailto:info@myporec.com)

