

Architecture

While many of the Ionian Islands suffered great damage during the devastating earthquakes of 1953, Corfu was left virtually unscathed. Testament to the fact that the island has managed to retain its architectural tradition can be seen in the recognition of the Old Town as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the official protected status of 46 of its traditional villages.

Corfu Town

The historical role of Corfu until the nineteenth century, as a strong fortress on the one hand, and an important commercial port in the Eastern Mediterranean on the other, decisively shaped the development of its built environment. The various fortification works are the major characteristic of the Old Town, and it was within the limits set by these that the town evolved as a unified whole. Charged with history, the maze of densely erected buildings between the two fortresses exhibits a number of architectural styles, but the total always appears smooth and harmonious.

The oldest and largest quarters of the town developed along the morphological limitations of the hills of Campiello, Agioi Pateres and Agios Athanasios, and the major streets followed the same lines. Each small neighborhood has one or more tiny squares, a church, and cisterns, some of them still extant, to ensure the inhabitants' water supply. Michail Theotoki square is the largest in the Old Town. Other openings between buildings that may be seen today have been caused by bombing in the Second World War.

The old San Giacomo theatre, bearing characteristic baroque reliefs, the long Liston building with its barrelled vaults and Parisian airs, the neoclassical Palace of the Saints Michael and George, the buildings designed by the Corfiot architect Ioannis Chronis, and the continuous frontages with recurring designs compose a singular whole, concentrating elements from all the historical periods the island has experienced.

Villages

Villages have been built on hills or high terrain as a rule, for protection from pirates. Building is dense, with continuous fronts and no passageways between houses. The roofs are sloping, with ochre-colored tiles, curved doorways and gates at ground level lead into cellars, and exterior stone stairways give onto upper-floor covered balconies.

Each village would have an open space as its square and place for social interaction, while the church would have an extensive courtyard. In many cases the largest house by far would be the mansion of the local family of nobles, the richest landowners in the area. On their gateways one may still see the family's coat of arms engraved in stone.