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Cities of San Marino

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Introduction

The Republic of San Marino stands as a remarkable curiosity on the European continent—a landlocked microstate surrounded entirely by Italy, yet fiercely independent and remarkably rich in history, culture, and tradition. Often overlooked by travelers in favor of its more famous neighbor, San Marino offers a treasure trove of experiences, boasting unique cities, picturesque landscapes, and a heritage that stretches back over 1,700 years. This book, "Cities of San Marino," seeks to unveil the stories, significance, and hidden gems of the Republic's urban centers—known locally as *castelli*—and to provide both historical insight and practical guidance for visitors.

San Marino is unique not only in its age and geopolitical resilience but in the very structure of its society. It is divided into nine *castelli*, ancient municipalities whose boundaries have shaped the lives and identities of their residents for centuries. Each *castello* features a capital, or *capoluogo*, and often a constellation of smaller villages and hamlets called *curazie*. Governed by local councils with deeply rooted traditions, these cities present an intricate tapestry of local governance, civic life, and community spirit, all nestled within a territory barely over sixty square kilometers in total.

The story of San Marino's cities is, in many respects, the story of survival and adaptation. From their medieval roots to the present day, the *castelli* have weathered centuries of upheaval, from wars and shifting borders to the challenges of modernity. Yet, the local pride and tenacity that led Saint Marinus to found the Republic atop Mount Titano in the year 301 A.D. persist undiminished in the winding streets, storied towers, and vibrant marketplaces of these urban centers. Their architecture, museums, and annual festivals tell a collective tale of liberty, faith, and resilience.

But San Marino is not just a nation frozen in time—it is a living society steeped in both tradition and progress. Here, visitors can walk ancient fortress walls, shop bustling markets in Borgo Maggiore, explore artisan ceramics in Faetano, or marvel at the panoramic vistas from Domagnano's hills. The capital city's fortified heart is a UNESCO World Heritage site, while every *castello* offers its own flavor, customs, and stories. The rhythm of daily life, shaped by proud civic traditions and democratic participation, reveals a society deeply engaged with both its past and its future.

For the traveler, San Marino offers an experience distinct from any other European destination. Its compact size belies a remarkable diversity—both in its natural landscapes, ranging from limestone peaks to fertile valleys, and in its urban tapestry, where every *castello* and *curazia* has something unique to share. Whether you are a history enthusiast, a culture seeker, or a curious adventurer, the cities of San Marino provide inviting streets, architectural marvels, and the warm hospitality of a

community proud to share its heritage.

This book offers a detailed journey through the Republic's great cities—their origins and evolution, sites and attractions, people and traditions. Through its pages, you'll discover practical tips, untold stories, and a deeper appreciation for San Marino's extraordinary cities. Whether you dream of visiting in person, or wish to explore from afar, we invite you to walk with us through the cities of San Marino—a hidden jewel at the heart of Europe.

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Chapter One: The Enigma of San Marino: Microstate in the Mountains

Perched majestically atop Mount Titano, a limestone outcrop rising from the Apennine Mountains, lies the Republic of San Marino, a sovereign state that defies easy categorization. This tiny nation, completely surrounded by Italy, is not merely a historical curiosity but a vibrant, living entity with a story spanning over 1,700 years. Its very existence as an independent republic, nestled within a larger country, makes it an enigma, a testament to enduring liberty and resilience.

San Marino holds the distinguished title of being the world's oldest surviving sovereign state and the oldest constitutional republic. Its origins are traditionally traced back to 301 A.D., when Saint Marinus, a stonemason fleeing Roman persecution, sought refuge on Mount Titano and established a monastic community. From these humble beginnings, a unique political entity blossomed, one that would steadfastly maintain its independence through centuries of European power struggles, including the Napoleonic Wars and the unification of Italy.

Geographically, San Marino is a landlocked microstate in Southern Europe, bordering Italy for 39 kilometers. Its total area is a mere 61 square kilometers, making it the fifth-smallest country in the world and the third-smallest in Europe, after Vatican City and Monaco. Despite its diminutive size, the landscape is predominantly mountainous, with Mount Titano reaching a peak elevation of 755 meters, offering breathtaking panoramic views of the surrounding Italian countryside and, on a clear day, even the Adriatic coast. This rugged terrain, characterized by hilly ground and limited flat areas, is part of the Apennine mountain range.

The political structure of San Marino is as unique as its history. It operates as a parliamentary representative democratic republic. A distinctive feature is its diarchic head of state system, where two Captains Regent are elected every six months by the Grand and General Council, the nation's unicameral legislature. These Captains Regent, chosen from opposing political parties, serve concurrently with equal powers, a practice derived directly from the customs of the Roman Republic. This ancient tradition of shared leadership ensures a balance of power and reciprocal control.

The Grand and General Council, comprising 60 members elected every five years by proportional representation, holds legislative power and approves the national budget. Executive power is vested in the Congress of State, composed of ten Secretaries of State with specific administrative responsibilities. This intricate system of governance, in place since the 13th century, has contributed to San Marino's remarkable stability

and its enduring democratic model, which has been recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Economically, San Marino boasts a developed free-market economy, with a strong focus on tourism, banking, and manufacturing. It ranks among the wealthiest countries in the world by GDP per capita. Tourism is a particularly vital sector, attracting over two million visitors annually, with a significant portion being Italian. These visitors are drawn to San Marino's historical fortifications, picturesque markets, and the pleasant Mediterranean climate. The sale of collectible postage stamps and coins also contributes a notable portion to the republic's revenue, making them popular worldwide.

Beyond tourism, San Marino's industries include the manufacture of ceramics, clothing, fabrics, furniture, paints, spirits, tiles, and wine. The manufacturing and financial sectors together account for more than half of the national GDP. While agriculture's contribution to GDP is marginal today, traditional activities included food crops, sheep farming, and stone quarrying. Modern farming focuses on grain, vines, orchards, and animal husbandry.

Despite its small size, San Marino maintains its own military corps, which primarily perform ceremonial duties, patrol borders, and assist police in specific cases. National defense, by arrangement, is the responsibility of Italy's armed forces. The country's commitment to peace and its historical generosity in offering asylum are noteworthy, exemplified by its sheltering of 100,000 evacuees from Italy during World War II, despite its own population being only 15,000 at the time.

The official language of San Marino is Italian, and the euro serves as its official currency, though it is not a member of the European Union. San Marino's commitment to fiscal responsibility has also earned it a unique status as a nation with no national debt. This prudent financial management is a testament to the country's dedication to its long-term stability and independence.

San Marino's enigmatic charm is further highlighted by some delightful peculiarities. For instance, the entire country is famously said to have only one traffic light, located in the capital city, a testament to its peaceful and unhurried atmosphere. While it lacks an airport, its convenient accessibility by road through neighboring Italy ensures that visitors can easily reach this historic microstate and begin their exploration of its captivating cities. This unique blend of ancient history, democratic resilience, and modern prosperity truly makes San Marino an intriguing destination for any traveler.

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