

JEWISH CEMETERY

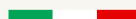
*Finale Emilia
(MO) - Italy*

guided tours

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Finale Emilia, a small town in the Bassa Modenese area, was formerly known as Finale di Modena and had a glorious past as a “city of water” that characterized it until the last decade of the 19th century.

Thanks to the Panaro della Lunga (an ancient canal) that flowed, until just over a hundred years ago, at the foot of the medieval porticoes and the large fluvial port where barges and boats loaded with goods and passengers stopped, Finale di Modena earned the nickname “Venice of the Este family,” with its enchanting appearance and particularly flourishing trade thanks to the important river artery that connected it to Modena and Ferrara. This economic vitality attracted Jews, who began to settle there in 1541, leaving substantial traces in the archives. From the moment they arrived, they were the subject of conflict, harassment, inquisition, and ghettoization in the 18th century.

The polygonal-shaped cemetery, located on the outskirts of Finale Emilia, is one of the oldest in the Emilia-Romagna region and is among the most evocative thanks to the trees that adorn it. The area is divided into two parts, the larger of which is enclosed by a 2.80 m high wall and contains the graves, while the smaller part is now cultivated as a vegetable garden and includes an ancient cottage, once used for funerals.

In Hebrew, the cemetery is called beyt ha-hayyim, “House of Life”. It is the place where eternal life reigns supreme, for the body, which in ancient times was lowered into the grave wrapped in a sheet to facilitate its rapid decomposition, must remain forever in the earth where it was buried until the Day of Judgment, when the shofar will call everyone to gather for the resurrection in the Valley of Jehoshaphat.



The fifty-seven tombstones that remain standing today tell a story spanning over four hundred years. The Horto degli Ebrei preserves the bodies of almost the entire community—about a thousand people—who lived in Finale Emilia from 1541 (the first substantial traces of their settlement) until the second half of the twentieth century.

The entrance is through a wrought iron gate, dating back to the early 1900s, bearing the Star of David on top, inside which the word Shalom is engraved. Inside, the arrangement of the tombstones, all facing southeast towards Jerusalem, ideally divides the space into two parts: to the west are the twenty-two oldest graves, characterized by inscriptions in Hebrew; to the east are the more recent ones (thirty-five in total), with inscriptions in Italian or bilingual, i.e., in Italian and Hebrew. In the center is the tombstone of the cemetery's founder, the banker Donato Donati, who in 1600 obtained a license from Duke Cesare d'Este to bury Jewish dead on land he had purchased.

Thanks to a major restoration project carried out in 2015 and promoted by the Alma Finalis APS Association, the tombstones have regained their original color; the inscriptions, finally visible, tell the stories of those who lie underground through poetic compositions and verses taken from the Bible.

Five plaques hung on trees commemorate the victims of racial laws and the Shoah in Finale, as well as two Righteous Among the Nations who saved Jews in Nonantola and Finale (Don Arrigo Beccari and Don Benedetto Richeldi). The cemetery is owned by the Jewish Community of Modena and Reggio Emilia. It is no longer used for burials, but can be visited on public holidays and every Sunday from March to November (it is closed on Saturdays in observance of Shabbat).



Discover Modena Lowlands

The lower Modena area is a region waiting to be discovered, rich in nature, history, traditions, and delicious flavors.

It is a transit area enclosed between two important cycling routes, Eurovelo 7 and the Ciclovía del Sole.

It will be pleasant to travel by bicycle, without effort, to discover the many natural areas, rural landscapes, historical monuments, extraordinary sunsets, and good living. It will be nice to take a break, far from the cities, to devote time to the quiet of the Modena countryside, enjoying warm hospitality and excellent food.