



## **TodiCastle and its 'Tower of Orlando' – a brief history**

**With a fascinating and turbulent past, this medieval 'survivor' and architectural 'jewel' has a secure future within the exclusive leisure rental market**

TodiCastle is the stunning architectural 'jewel' in the crown of the TodiCastle Estate in Umbria, Italy. Since 1974 it has been under private ownership of the Santoro family, who have restored and conserved this ancient landmark; giving it a new renewed sense of purpose for exclusive leisure rentals within the international luxury market.

Torre d'Orlando, which translated means the Tower of Orlando, is one of the most stunning private homes in Central Italy. Today the Santoro family are proud and delighted to offer guests the chance to experience at first-hand a little of the castle's fascinating history by sleeping under the shadow of the Tower of Orlando.

During the Castle's long history, it has seen many transformations. With each passing century it has performed a valuable and relevant purpose.

The early 1100's A.D. were turbulent times in the district around Todi and Orvieto and the many fortifications in the area bear witness to the need for defence and protection for its people. Built in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, TodiCastle is one of the most beautiful and best-preserved castles in Umbria, thanks in no small part to the sensitive and passionate 10-year-long restoration project undertaken between 1975 and 1984 by Geppi Santoro. Together with his sons, Mario and Flavio, they have created a fascinating and intoxicating blend of rich architectural heritage with contemporary luxury.

Its earliest beginnings date from Roman times, when the first tower was built in a strategic location at the head of an important valley approaching the triangle of the Tiber River, the Arnata and the Via Amerina (an early Roman road). Ancient Roman walls found nearby indicate that the tower, known as the Torre d'Orlando – or *Tower of Orlando* - was most likely built to protect or fortify a Roman military route.

The solitary tower continued to serve this purpose well into the Middle Ages and between the 10th and the 13th century additional towers were added. Thus the original tower was incorporated into a castle 'fort', comprising three corner towers and an expansive bastion wall, which dramatically expanded the territory which could be controlled.

The Comune of Todi flourished during the 13<sup>th</sup> century and maintained a standing army of more than 5,000 men. It built an enormous system of fortifications assuring complete control of the area.

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## **TodiCastle and its 'Tower of Orlando' – a brief history (continued)**

There is evidence that a number of violent battles were fought at the site. The small openings in the walls that can still be seen today were for use by archers and vats of boiling oil were thrown from its battlements. The Castle was under siege at various times and secret passages, which have recently been discovered, were dug beneath the fortress walls to use as escape routes for the soldiers.

Todi's importance was not only due to its military and strategic position. The routes of communication between Germany and central Italy, including Rome, passed through this territory. By controlling the flow of pilgrims and goods travelling from northern Europe to Rome, Todi also commanded commercial power.

By the mid 14th century the great political military system of the Comune of Todi had collapsed as a direct result of the plague of 1348 and the resulting widespread political economic crisis that swept through Italian communes. In the years that followed, the tower stood abandoned and was used by wanderers.

At the beginning of the 15th century the fortress was transformed into a monastery. A roof was constructed over the north courtyard and the vaulted space was adapted to serve as a church. Today, evidence still remains of the capitolo, altar and sacristy.

Approximately two centuries later, the monastery was abandoned and eventually became the object of conflicting claims amongst various local lords, culminating in ownership by the Landi family. Records of a certain Gerolamo Landi are connected with the fortress at the beginning of the 1500's. His wife - who died in 1523 - was buried in the Castle's chapel where there is an engraved stone commemorating her death - some believe that her spirit still has a 'presence' in the Castle.

Records show that the fortress was left abandoned for some three hundred years until acquisition by the Papparini family, the most important landowners in the area in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, who subsequently sold the estate to its present owners.

Now the fortress has been returned to its ancient splendour thanks to substantial investment by the Santoro family. Luckily most of the original external walls of the fortress remained intact over the centuries. The remainder have now been fully restored. In particular, the large corner tower – representing the most ancient part of the complex - has been perfectly conserved. The use of local artisans who still use ancient stone cutting techniques, passed on from generation to generation was fundamental to the restoration process. TodiCastle is an important member of the Union of European Historic Houses Associations.

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