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Historic L'Aquila reels from quake

The city of L'Aquila - 'Eagle' in Italian - nestles in the mountainous Abruzzo region, overlooked by the highest mountain on the Italian peninsula.

Lying in a valley surrounded by the Apennine mountains, the medieval walled city looks up at Corno Grande's peak.

L'Aquila, 95km north-east of Rome, is the main historical and artistic centre of Abruzzo, with a university and the National Museum of the Abruzzi.

It is also home to about 70,000 citizens who live among its winding narrow streets and more modern apartments on the outskirts of the administrative capital.

The original L'Aquila walled town was originally built in the 13th Century.

But much of it, including San Massimo cathedral, was destroyed in an earthquake in 1703.

The unpredictable earthquake-prone landscape caused destruction again with another deadly earthquake on 7 April 2009.

Dozens of residents in L'Aquila died, as did people in surrounding towns where ancient and modern buildings cracked and crumbled.

Quake's toll

L'Aquila was built as a mountain stronghold during the Middle Ages and has many prized Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance buildings.

Alongside the human cost, the quake has taken severe toll on this architectural heritage.

Parts of many of the ancient churches and castles in and around the city have collapsed while in outlying, isolated villages there has been damage to centuries-old buildings and monuments.

L'Aquila's San Massimo cathedral, rebuilt after the 1703 earthquake and whose present facade dates from 1851, has been damaged.

At least four Romanesque and Renaissance churches and a 16th Century castle were also part-destroyed, the Culture Ministry said.

Part of the nave of the Basilica of Santa Maria di Collemaggio, one of the area's most famous churches, collapsed.

And the belltower of the Renaissance Basilica of San Bernardino also crumbled. Meanwhile a dormitory in the city's university was also damaged.

With thousands left homeless by the quake, a variety of modern buildings left standing - including barracks, stadiums and gyms - have now become makeshift mess halls and dormitories.



Churches in L'Aquila were damaged

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L'AQUILA

- Medieval city, founded in the 13th Century
- Capital of the mountainous Abruzzo region
- Population 70,000, with many thousands more tourists and foreign students
- Walled city with narrow streets, lined by Baroque and Renaissance buildings

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