

Site 750

The Leaning Tower of Pisa

Also known as the Campile or the Bell Tower of a cathedral of Pisa in Tuscany, Italy. It is part of a fine architectural complex that includes the cathedral, a baptistery and an enclosed composanto or cemetery, all sheathed in white marble and archaded in Pisan-Romanesque style. The tower near the east end of the church is unusual for both its beauty and for its mechanics of equilibrium. A freestanding cylinder, it consists of 8 tiers of round arched archades. A spiral staircase ascends to the interior. From the top of the tower Galileo is said to have conducted his experiments in physics with falling objects.

The tower was begun in 1174 by an unknown architect. The bell tower at the top was completed about 1350. During construction, an uneven settling of ground caused the building which had a foundation too shallow to support its weight, to lean toward the south. Its deviation was accidental rather than intentional as some scholars thought. Other towers in the city are similarly though less strikingly affected.

Through the years there has been much controversy over the height of the tower and the amount of its tilt. It is now generally agreed that the tower is 179 feet high on the northern side and it deviates nearly 17 ft from the vertical.