

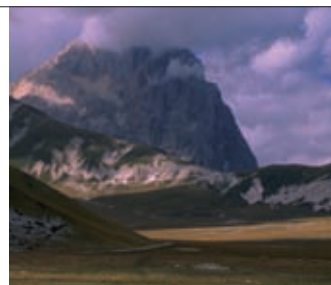


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On the MOUNTAINS

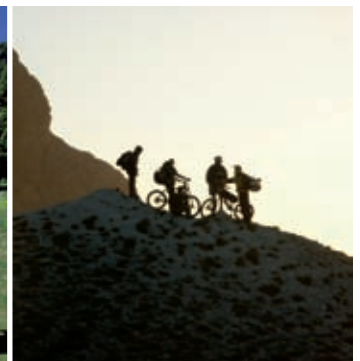


Rugged, noble Gran Sasso, whose gleaming limestone commands the Apennines; just below the north face of the Corno Grande peak we find Calderone, the only Apennine glacier and Europe's southernmost. Campo Imperatore's seemingly endless plateau stretches south of the massif, at a 1,800 metres asl. The Laga Mountains are copiously endowed with springs, watercourses and forests. Mount Majella, bound to the Morrone massif, soars over the lands of Abruzzo, between the sea and the Apennine chain: local people have always called it their "mother mountain". Between the mountains and the seas the hills bear clear signs of their continual evolution, slipping into the clay valley, where badlands etch away the curves of the horizon.



Mountain slopes with a scent of the sea

As summer rolls in and the snows have all melted, the blinding green of the beech forests and endless pastures make Abruzzo's mountains truly irresistible. In summer the luxuriant flourish of nature paints the entire region with ripe splendour: the greenest woods and meadows in the slopes; rolling plateaux dotted with pasturing cattle and sheep; the sweep of a countryside that bears no trace of the steep, brooding mountain slopes; the sparkling fresh air scented with sea breezes (the sea is in the air even on the highest peaks, and is clearly visible just a few kilometres away, as the crow flies); the marvellous state of preservation of settlements, set in timeless landscapes, make the mountains of Abruzzo a very special place, which can really steal a visitor's



of Abruzzo



heart. Proof lies, above all, in the huge number of “aficionados” who return every year to enjoy the beauty spots: once under the spell of the mountains of Abruzzo, it is difficult to break free.

Mountain Abruzzo, the Tibet of Europe

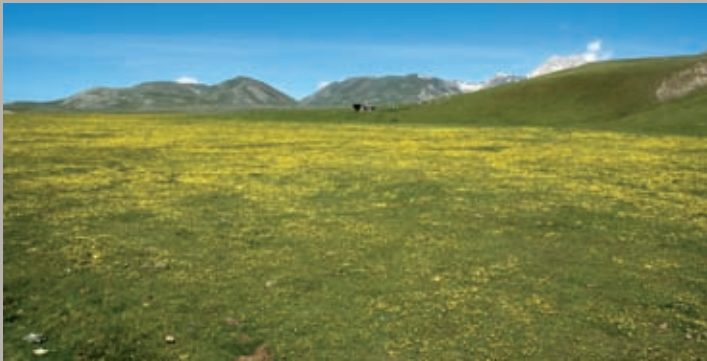
Inland Abruzzo, in other words the mountainous area, considering that 75% of regional territory lies over 700 metres in altitude, is certainly the most extraordinary and best preserved. A great many experts go so far as to say that overall it is a huge, great and extremely original “permanent open-air museum” of the history of local environment and landscape.

In the first place, nature is sovereign here: the mountains of Abruzzo are the home of four Parks and more than 30 Reserves, so almost half of the region is protected nature. There are then thousands of towns and villages, hugging the hilltops, reliefs, mighty spurs: extraordinary and often very ancient old centres, huddled

at the foot of their castle.

Not to mention the boundless stock-rearing territory and its unique landscape.

The seasonal movement of humans and livestock along the tracks from the Apennine summer pastures down to the winter home on the Apulian Tavoliere plain, known as transhumance, has been a feature of Abruzzo’s history since pre-Roman times. The local territory still bears the traces of this coming and going of shepherds and sheep: many sections of the ancient *tratturi* (wide grass tracks where the migrants walked) are still visible, for instance on the Navelli plateau, and they cross ghost towns that once marked the stages of the long trip. The great tableland is famous for the prized and refined saffron it produces and is still crisscrossed with solitary churches along the tracks. The simple architecture of these enigmatic buildings identified layover locations throughout the shepherds’ long and weary journey





down to Apulia. It is along these same sheep tracks that Medieval villages, ancient and compact, cling to the slopes, their bare stone houses huddled one over the other to form a barrier that enclosed the dwellings in a highly efficient fortification system; settlements whose specific wealth, clearly seen in the extraordinary quality of architecture and extensive presence of priceless works of art, came mainly from a flourishing livestock farming.

There is another remarkable part of Abruzzo mountainscape to consider; where the main features are terracing and dry stone huts, and the painstaking constructions of our ancestors, who sought to wrest a few metres of soil and tiny pastures from the mountains. These huts, known as *tholos*, are still quite common, especially on the slopes of Majella, and place Abruzzo quite rightly amongst the areas of the Mediterranean basin bearing most traces of dry stone constructions, which may be a primitive building technique, but is certainly efficient.

This is mountain Abruzzo: a casket whose treasures protecting unique habitats, deep in the heart of central Italy, so a stone's throw from just about any other urban centre on the peninsula; precious, protected environments, but now enhanced and exploited intelligently by many types of tourism; astonishing, fascinating environments, that really do satisfy the desire for adventure, discovery, heartfelt intuition. In short, a journey for discovering nature.

A journey that today is even easier thanks to the professional skills of mid-mountain guides, alpine guides, park warders and forest



Anyone who feels so inclined can stroll through the mountains in the morning, have a swim in the sea during the afternoon, and dine by starlight out in the countryside.





Thanks to its Parks, Abruzzo's nature has been safeguarded and can be enjoyed and visited by all. The commitment to environmental conservation, together with the great area of the territory that is effectively protected, has earned Abruzzo the deserved title of "greenest region in Europe".

rangers, cooperatives offering tourist services, and of course thanks to the countless marked trails make all excursions of all kinds and all complexities possible: on foot, on horseback, on mountain bikes, on skis, anything from a simple stroll to extreme trekking, not to mention paths for the physically challenged.

EUROPE'S GREENEST REGION

Nature is indeed protected in Abruzzo, and has been for a while. Abruzzo National Park, (today named Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise National Park) was founded between the 1922 and 1923, and has become the national symbol of commitment to effective protection of the Apennine environment. In recent years two more large National Parks have flanked it: the Gran Sasso-Laga and Majella. The Regional Council then also founded the vast Sirente-Velino Regional Park and a dense network of Nature Reserves, today numbering over 30, and still growing.

For Abruzzo, safeguarding the territory has become an irreversible commitment process, leading to 30% of the territory now being under protection. From this point of view the Parks have revealed themselves to be not just simple boundaries but tangible instruments, whose intrinsic and inalienable territorial value is acknowledged by the regional community. It is no coincidence that Abruzzo is the Italian leader region for the APE (Apennine Park of Europe) project, a complex and systematic environmental



protection and sustainable development initiative, which networks the entire Apennine protected areas system, implementing the EU directives in the most innovative and strategic manner.

Gran Sasso-Monti della Laga National Park

The protected area, as the name implies, safeguards the two neighbouring mountain massifs.

Gran Sasso extremely popular with trekkers, mountain climbers and skiers. The Laga Mountains are less well-known but very interesting for trekkers. Established in 1995, the Park covers a surface of 148,935 hectares and extends into parts of Latium and the Marche. Gran Sasso culminates in the limestone peaks of Corno Grande, Corno Piccolo, Pizzo d'Intermesoli and Mount Camicia; it is the site of the small Calderone glacier (Europe's southernmost) and is flanked to the south by the Campo Imperatore plateau. The Laga Mountains are less rugged, and are copiously endowed with watercourses and splendid waterfalls. A network of Visitor Centres, nature trails and wildlife areas are available to tourists.

Majella National Park

Rugged, mighty Majella, its western slopes sheer and compact, rolls upwards into the Femmina Morta plateau, and on the east is furrowed by Abruzzo's wildest canyons: Orfento, Selva Romana, Santo Spirito and Val Serviera. The Park also includes Mount

Morrone and Pizi Mountains. This Park too was established in 1995 and its 74,095 hectares are spread over the provinces of L'Aquila, Chieti and Pescara. The range's highest and culminating peak is Mount Amaro, at 2793 metres.

Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise National Park

Opened in 1922, the Park today attracts a million visitors each year. Apart from the fauna and flora, its main appeal is the rugged orography of the mountains, as well as its lovely Medieval villages, necropolises and *tratturi*. A network of Visitor Centres, nature trails and wildlife areas are available to tourists. Its 44,000 hectares spread, as the name implies, over Molise and Latium also. The Park mountains are wild in appearance and characterized by gorges, karstic fields and plateaus, but do not lack beautiful lakes like Vivo, Scanno and Barrea.

Sirente-Velino Regional Park

Although Mount Velino and Mount Sirente are not as tall as Majella and Gran Sasso, they are just as interesting as the greater massifs. Established in 1989, the Regional Park covers 59,140 hectares situated entirely in the province of L'Aquila. The two massifs, both limestone, are separated from the Rocche highland, Piani di Pezzi and Prati del Sirente, by karstic fields and rock faces. Absolutely striking are the wide Celano and San Venanzio gorges, and above all, the spectacular Stiffe grottoes.









What surprises the visitor on his first holiday experience in Abruzzo is the fact that in a short reach of few dozens of kilometres he can pass from sunny beaches to high summits and that often, the unspoilt and absolute beauty of wild nature is at a brief walking distance from the comfortable car parking area.

The fact that the Abruzzo mountains are easy-going and tourist-friendly can also be inferred from the huge number of marked paths and trails, including *ferratas* at high altitudes; there are excursion aids for the physically challenged and tracks for various kinds of sports including horse riding, off-road vehicle and Enduro bike tours. The many and assorted paths are variously challenging and found in every location of Abruzzo mountain districts. There are relatively easy options, designed for relaxing walks through fields and woods, which are suitable for beginners, families, children and the elderly, or more simply anyone who prefers a simple ramble to breathe some fresh air in the country. Then there are more difficult ones leading up to higher altitudes and

which require a minimum of experience, equipment and physical preparation in order to tackle routes that take a few hours. Finally, there are really demanding paths for experienced and athletically-prepared mountain lovers who are able to undertake excursions and treks, using the proper equipment and staying out all day, reaching some really special places. In all of the above, the network of paths, managed by the CAI (Italian Alpine Club), Parks, Reserves or sometimes even local authorities, is generally well-kept with strategically placed colour trail markers where clear indications are needed. Guidebooks and path network maps are available in all the Park Visitor Centres and town Information Points. It is really quite difficult to get lost in the mountains of

Abruzzo

MOUNTAINS

Abruzzo.

Only the sheer rock faces soaring vertically up to the blue are the privilege of mountaineering enthusiasts and expert freeclimbers; the rest of us, on the contrary, can attempt everything else, even the high peaks stretching up to 3,000 metres. Corno Grande, the highest mountain in Gran Sasso, with its four summits varying between 2,800 and 2,900 metres in altitude, may be reached with climbs that are accessible to many, even those who are not really expert mountaineers. The network of excursion trails always starts in the mountain's main visitor rendezvous points, located mostly near villages or towns, and easily reached by car.

There are also Nature Reserves in Majella National Park, with special trails to allow the physically challenged to enjoy the pleasures of nature like everyone else. Whatever your favourite sport may be for enjoying nature, you will find the right place in these mountains. Mountain bikes can transit along most of the existing paths, ranging the length and breadth of Campo Imperatore's 40km-plus plain, on the main Majella highlands, shuttling between the villages of the Rocche highland and Piano di Pezza, to name just the most interesting scenarios. Horseriding fans will find suitable reception facilities for their equine friends, as well as stables for hiring horses; an impressive, marked horse trail that winds along all of the Gran Sasso chain, and of course thousands of hectares of untainted nature – a perfect place for your four-legged riding companion. If you like to slip on your hiking boots, whether to trek or just take calm, relaxed walks, this venue will suit you down to the ground. Off-roaders have kilometres of dirt roads to explore, as do Enduro and trial bike lovers.



And if you feel like just parking the car, spreading out a blanket and relaxing under the sun, with nothing but the murmur of the wind and chirping crickets for company, then any nook of mountain Abruzzo will do the trick. Close your eyes, point to any place on the map and book there!

for all
tastes



summer

Mountain Abruzzo offers a great choice for summer tourists. Although for winter we tend to refer to locations where skiing facilities are provided for snow sports, from spring to the onset of autumn's warm colours, almost all areas of the mountains of Abruzzo can be enjoyed. Any village above 700 metres therefore becomes the right place to partake in the pleasures that the mountain environment offers. From north to south it proves to be a goldmine of places and treasures to be explored and discovered.

Much of the region's most beautiful mountain areas are now under the protection of Parks and Reserves: these institutions can be extremely useful in their guidance for rational exploration of these astonishing places. Visitor Centres, Information Points and museums are the best places for tourists to find qualified assistance. Apart from the numerous official organizations in charge of visitor reception and assistance, we can count on locals for their friendly support: in every village and town you will find many kind, friendly people who will inform and assist you with their advice and experience to help you get the best from the territory.



mountain resorts

Laga Mountains

So we can now begin to discover the countless locations of mountain Abruzzo, starting north, on the Laga Mountains – on the borders of Latium and the Marche – a real excursionist paradise, with its wealth of forests and, above all, water, which generates many splendid spring waterfalls. Laga is crossed by many link roads, well-connected to major road arteries, dotted with myriad little villages and no lack of good paths. In the heart of the massif lie the municipalities of Valle Castellana, Cortino, Crognaleto, Campotosto and Rocca Santa Maria with their hundreds of hamlets, often made up of just a few sandstone houses. Car journeys are also very striking, the scenery is lush with vegetation and at times the view plunges into narrow gorges and then ranges out onto great plains that culminate in breathtaking panoramas across the summits of Laga and the nearby Gran Sasso chain. The most important tourist locations are Ceppo, the starting point for splendid itineraries towards bosco Martese, the summits of the massif and several waterfalls like the Morricana; lake Campotosto, one of Europe's major artificial basins, is a birdwatcher and photo safari paradise, ideal also for canoe, windsurf, kitesurf enthusiasts, as well as horseriding and cycle tourism thanks to the splendid road that encircles it completely; Cesacastina, a tiny, picturesque

village and departure point for excursion routes to the Cento Cascate valley and beyond, up to the Laga peaks. An interesting locality is Piano Roseto, straddling Cortino and Crognaleto: a relaxing green plateau ideal for day trips; nearby, the starting points of some trails including one ascending right to the peak of Mount Gorzano, passing by the refuge of the same name. Cortino also hosts a wildlife area. The Laga valleys are thick with tiny, moving abandoned villages to visit, like Tavolero and Valle Piola; some can be reached by car, others only on foot. The abundance of watercourses, some becoming very lively in spring, are a real challenge for canyoning enthusiasts. Some of them freeze over in winter, as do some of the waterfalls, and are perfect for extreme sport disciplines requiring ice. Eastwards, Mount Campli and Mount Fiori, also called the Gemelli (Twin) Mountains, are the massif's final spurs before the gentle hills that roll down towards the sea; between them lies the hamlet of Macchia da Sole, the departure point for various dirt roads ideal for off-road vehicle





excursions; a short trail on foot leads to the ruins of the Castel Manfrino Medieval fortress. The slopes of the two Twin Mountains are the home of Civitella del Tronto, with its imposing fortress, Campi, a true casket of art treasures, and Ripe di Civitella, starting point for the fascinating, easy excursion to the river Salinello's striking narrow gorge, passing a beautiful waterfall and the Eremiti grottoes, climbing up to Castel Manfrino. Civitella del Tronto has a good practice wall for competition climbing. On the Fiori's north slope we find the San Giacomo-Monte Piselli resort, ideal in summer for countryside walks and excellent excursions. Westwards the massif gradually slopes down to the Aquila side and into the Aterno river valley, where not only the historical villages of Montoreale, Capitignano, Barete, Pizzoli with its castle, can be found, but also Cagnano Amiterno, gateway to spectacular Piano di Cascina.

The Upper Aquila District

Two little-known mountain areas with beautiful scenery and interesting prospects for pleasant summer strolls amidst meadows and slopes can be easily reached from L'Aquila. One is the area around Tornimparte, an ancient land that was inhabited until a few decades ago by famous charcoal-makers, and the route that passes through Lucoli to reach up to the Campo Felice plain,

known for its ski facilities but interesting also in warm weather for walks, excursions and sports.

Capannelle

Southwards, the Laga range opens onto the river Vomano's broad valley, crossed by the Capannelle SS 80 A-road, a lovely mountain route connecting Teramo to L'Aquila passing through Montorio al Vomano, and recently upgraded to Gran Sasso-Laga Park tourist route. There are numerous villages here, the most important being Aprati, with restaurants, agritourism facilities and another unusual type of accommodation: the old road worker houses, restored by the Park authority and converted into holiday lodgings. This valley divides the two mountain massifs protected by the Park: Laga, which we have just examined, and Gran Sasso, which is considered Abruzzo's true crown, because of its majestic rocky summits. At the height of the Provvidenza artificial dam, one of two that bar the river Vomano, we find the road leading to Val Chiarino, a highly evocative and isolated spot of unspoilt nature, with a wood of superb colours in early autumn. From the pass, in the vicinity of the power station, an extremely panoramic road starts its descent to Assergi; along this route we meet the start of a fascinating path that climbs the side of the mountain as far as the San Franco hermitage, where legend says that the saint retired



to pray, and here miraculously brought forth a healing spring. Before reaching Assergi, we find the hamlet of San Pietro della lenca, where pope John Paul II celebrated mass on one of his frequent visits to the Abruzzo mountains.

Gran Sasso d'Italia

If the Laga Mountains are a triumph of waters and woodlands, the Gran Sasso massif is the domain of rock and vast highlands. Its morphology, stretching from north-west to south-east, is extremely distinctive, with towering peaks facing the east slope: Prena, Camicia, Brancastello, culminating at Corno Piccolo and majestic Corno Grande, almost 3,000 metres high. The soaring summits are the mountaineer's paradise; rough, harsh, vertical faces of rock similar to that of the Alps, the ideal place to dare the high altitudes of Abruzzo. Obviously this is a sport for highly-trained and skilled enthusiasts, who will find their starting base at Prati di Tivo, on the Teramo side, and Campo Imperatore on L'Aquila side. The faces of Corno Grande and Corno Piccolo, Mounts Prena and Camicia, and Pizzo d'Intermesoli are the most popular. Mountaineers consider Corno Grande's north-east face, with an almost 1,000-metre drop (known as *il pareteone* – the big wall) to be fantastic: there are more than 40 ascents here – some of them extremely difficult. There are also a number of

excellent competition climbing areas at Pietracamela, Prati di Tivo, Forca di Penne and Mount Aquila, with some very popular practice walls like one at Paganica, near Madonna d'Appari, where these fascinating sports can be learnt. Opening south-west of the high peaks, we find what is now commonly known as *piccolo Tibet* or "little Tibet": the extraordinary scenario of the Campo Imperatore plain. An enormous intermountain plateau of glacier origin, which stretches dozens of kilometres, creating a natural environment of unparalleled beauty. Its ancient, heart-wrenching appeal is such that it has become popular over recent years as a natural set for dozens of spots and films, some of which are very famous. Towards L'Aquila, the plain rises and ends in the natural barrier between Mount Scindarella and Mount Portella, with the handy cableway terminus that reaches the Assergi exit of the A24 Roma-Teramo motorway in a few minutes. Almost inaccessible in winter because of snow, the summer frees up a panoramic hard-surfaced road across the plain, well-connected with the valley through numerous points of access (Assergi, Santo Stefano di Sessanio and Castel del Monte towards L'Aquila, Rigopiano towards Teramo and Pescara), so that every area is easily reached. So this becomes an endless source of country itineraries, and cycling, mountain bike and, above all, horseriding excursions. The frequent stiff wind and absence of obstacles offers for kite-fliers a



great venue. Deep in the heart of the highland a catering facility offers, apart from local products and cuisine, fresh meat produced by local farmers that visitors can barbecue nearby on grill facilities: a rare gastronomic opportunity! For trekking and excursion enthusiasts, Campo Imperatore provides a multitude of opportunities and trails, all of them clearly marked and well-kept, flawlessly indicated – as in the rest of Abruzzo – by appropriate CAI and National Park trail markers. The choice here ranges from straightforward family walks in the meadows to beautiful excursions like the one to Fonte Vetica on Mount Camicia, or Sella di Corno, and even long mountaineering excursions for trained trekkers, leading to high-altitude refuges and even down to Val Maone, reaching Prati di Tivo on the Teramo side. This locality in the municipality of Pietracamela, is an important winter skiing resort, but also provides many opportunities to enjoy the mountains in summer with wonderful excursions on foot, on horseback or on mountain bikes. A chairlift reaches the so-called Madonnina from the hotels square and from there trekking enthusiasts can continue to the Franchetti refuge at the Calderone glacier (the only one on the Apennine), then on to the summits of Corno Grande. Nearby Prato Selva is also a winter skiing resort, providing excellent excursion possibilities in warm weather: On the Teramo side, we find towns like Isola del Gran Sasso, with its hamlet of San Pietro, home of an important environmental education centre that organizes many activities that create awareness of and





contact with nature; it is also a starting point for lovely rambles in the woods. Passing Castelli, Abruzzo's majolica capital, we reach Rigopiano, a locality surrounded by greenery, with tourist facilities and a refuge that is a depart point for Val d'Angri and the Voltigno plain, evocative corners of nature enhanced by the hues of autumn, and taking in Farindola and Montebello di Bertona on the way there. The furthest southern point of the massif, the Forca di Penne pass, is ideal for birdwatching and competition climbing. L'Aquila's silhouette is gentler, alternating rotund high grounds with narrow valleys, cultivated with the open field system, and dotted with a great number of villages including Villa Santa Lucia, Castel del Monte, Calascio, Santo Stefano di Sessanio, not to mention Castelvecchio Calvisio and Carapelle Calvisio, which delight visitors with their unspoilt Medieval and Renaissance architecture, and above all, the availability of excursion routes, bike and horseriding itineraries, dirt roads for off-road vehicles.

A wide range of accommodation is available. The most curious and intriguing amenities are found in multi-site hotel in the Medici village of Santo Stefano di Sessanio. The hotel was created by restoring the village's Medieval houses, the historical Campo Imperatore hotel where Mussolini was kept prisoner at the end of WWII, and the small, high-altitude hotel at the foot of the stupendous Calascio fortress, set of the famous film "Ladyhawk". Restaurants, agritourisms and trattorias are everywhere to be found, so there is no risk of going hungry.

The Navelli plain

Westwards, the Gran Sasso reliefs gradually slope down into the striking Navelli plain, one of mountain Abruzzo's most evocative valleys and the region's Medieval heart, dotted with stone villages, castles and ancient churches. Thus we enter one of the lesser-known but more interesting mountain districts, a real stomping ground for motion picture history. The Navelli plain, together with the wilder, steeper Aterno valley nearby, is a unique district for its unspoilt territory and wealth of ancient villages with their precious art masterpieces. This middle-earth of Abruzzo is the connective tissue between the Gran Sasso chain to the east and the Sirente-Velino massif to the west. Poggio Picenze, Barisciano and San Pio delle Camere, with their castles, Prata d'Ansidonia, Caporciano, Civitaretenga, Navelli – the saffron capital – and Collepietro are the main villages of this plain, which is crossed in all its length by one of Abruzzo's principal *tratturi* (wide ancient grass tracks used for seasonal livestock transhumance from high-altitude summer pastures to Apulia, where they stayed for the winter). The *tratturi* are excellent trails for walking, cycling or horseriding, and stopping to admire the many ancient churches along the route, like Santa Maria dei Cintorelli. Accommodation and refreshment are available in practically every village. The restored convent of San

Colombo, at Barisciano, offers very interesting hospitality. San Benedetto in Perillis is an isolated but very evocative village.

Valle dell'Aterno

Compared to the nearby Navelli plain, the territory here is harsher and lower altitude, with a deep valley dotted with villages that cling to the two mountain sides. At the foot of Mount Sirente, we can visit one of the most exciting natural grottoes of Abruzzo, featuring an underground river that generates a great waterfall. These are the Stiffe grottoes, named after the nearby village. The historical villages of Fontecchio and Tione degli Abruzzi provide an interesting opportunity to explore the higher mountain area and visit the ancient shepherd shelters, outright mountain villages called *pagliare*.

Secinaro is the gateway to the heart of the Sirente-Velino massif.

From Sirente to Velino

This district, as implied by the name, is created from the ideal union of two distinct peaks, founding an important and vast Regional Park: Sirente, with its 2,349 metres, and Velino, the higher of the two, at 2,487 metres. Between them we find Ovindoli; Mount Magnola with its renowned skiing facilities; the vast Delle Rocche plain opening northwards with the towns of Rovere, Rocca di Mezzo and Rocca di Cambio. This district has a series of excellent accommodation facilities, guaranteed mainly by the numerous hotels at Ovindoli and Rocca di Mezzo; perfect environmental conservation and a great number of excellent excursion and recreational opportunities for enjoying the mountains in warmer weather. The Rocche highland offers countless trails for walks, excursions on foot, by bike and on horseback too, thanks to various stables that are active on the plain. The road that descends from Rocca di Mezzo to Secinaro leads to the discovery of the evocative Prati del Sirente plateau, a vast green expanse at the foot of Mount Sirente, with a curious round lake in the centre: some time ago it was suggested that it had been created by a falling meteorite, but the assumption was totally disproved scientifically, even though the idea lingers on. Again from Rocca di Mezzo, but also from Rovere and Ovindoli, handy roads lead to the great natural basin of Piani di Pezza, a magical place lost in time. Various itineraries start here, the most interesting among them reaching over 2,000 metres to the Sebastiani refuge. This is a real natural paradise, suitable for quiet family walks; at the end of it, the long narrow valley that leads to Prati di Santa Maria from Ovindoli, covered by woods along both sides, and crossed by a circular road hidden in the green, easy to reach and use. Horses often graze free there and autumn colours make it a really fantastic place. Again, hospitality in this area is ample and wide-ranging, including inns and restaurants. On the





north slope, along the road that winds down to L'Aquila, we find the numerous villages – San Felice, San Panfilo and San Martino – of the widespread municipality of Ocre; there is also Fontavignone, dominated by a large castle and with excellent monuments. Conversely, on the south slope, we move down towards Celano, with its imposing castle dominating the Fucino plain, and we can reach the narrow Celano gorge, ideal for an excursion into the wilds of nature. Nearby, on the slopes of Velino, we find the ruins of the Roman settlement of Alba Fucens and the Medieval church of Santa Maria in Valle Porclaneta.

On the border of the Simbruini Mountains

The Simbruini mountain chain (which are part of a Regional Park in the neighbouring region) marks the border with Latium, offering the tourist great recreation facilities, accommodation and excursions. Piana del Cavaliere is dominated by the villages of Carsoli, the main town and with excellent accommodation and catering amenities; Oricola, Rocca di Botte and Pereto, with its castle and sanctuary of the Madonna dei Bisognosi, perched in an absolutely panoramic position at over 1,000 metres. Heading towards Tagliacozzo, we skirt Pietrasecca, an ancient and picturesque village overlooking a sheer rock face. Choosing the



road to Colli di Montebove on the other hand, we reach a small mountain resort called Marsia surrounded by the thick beech woods on the Carseolani and Simbruini Mountains, which offer excursionists trails in a peaceful atmosphere. Historical Tagliacozzo, with its beautiful old town centre, offers accommodation and restaurants, and is en route to the Beatrice Cenci grottoes at Verrecchie; then there is Cappadocia with the Monte Rotondo ski resort, which offers pleasant summer mountain stays, with excursions in the dense Monti Carseolani woods. Finally we meet Capistrello, the gateway to Valle Roveto, a natural corridor towards Sora and Latium, with an interesting range of pastimes for warmer weather on the Abruzzo mountains. From Civitella Roveto we can climb to the hamlet of Meta to reach the Cerasoli refuge, at over 1,600 metres altitude. At Morino, we must not miss the extraordinary Zompo lo Schioppo waterfall with a drop of nearly 100 metres, and the Reserve of the same name, which offers interesting excursions. Dominated by a massive castle, Balsorano is the last rampart of Abruzzo towards the south.

Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise National Park

North-east of Valle Roveto, we find the region's best-known mountain district, protected by the historical Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise National Park (created in the 1920s), which has rapidly become one of the most popular tourist haunts with Italians and foreigners, in the pursuit of the relaxing diversions offered by the Apennines both in winter and in summer. Pescasseroli is at the heart of the territory and offers excellent tourist facilities; the peaks that surround the town verge on 2,000 metres, with meadows, valleys, watercourses and appealing villages including Bisegna, San Sebastiano, Gioia Vecchio, Opi, Alfedena, Villetta Barrea and Barrea with their lake, Civitella Alfedena, Alfedena of Italic origin, and solitary Scontrone. As the area has been under the Park's protection for almost a century, it is understandable that the territory now has well-established and extremely well-organized tourist amenities. More than 150 excursion itineraries





and about ten nature trails with almost infinite possibilities for foot, horseback and mountain bike excursions. It is worth remembering some places that have now justifiably entered the mountain tourism dictionary – the Camosciara, Val Fondillo, lake Vivo and Forca Resuni, the Diavolo pass with the river Sangro springs, and the Montagna Spaccata lake, to name but a few of the best known. Lake Barrea is excellent for canoeing and windsurfing but equally ideal for birdwatching and other minor activities. Wide connecting roads are an excellent scenario for safe cycle tourism. The Park's teaching facilities include Pescasseroli Museum and Zoo; a birds of prey centre at Barrea; wildlife areas for the chamois at Opi, the wolf and lynx at Civitella Alfedena, the chamois at Bisegna; an insect museum; a roe-deer wildlife area at San Sebastiano.

From Villetta Barrea, we can climb the Godi pass's hairpin bends and stop over at the refuge-hotel, take a delightful stroll along the plateau, then make the descent on the opposite side, down to Scanno, the main village of a small but interesting mountain district. The village is known worldwide because of its splendid old town centre, photographed by important international names including Cartier Bresson and Giacomelli, but also for its lake, which divides the mountains of the Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise National Park from the wild Mount Genzana massif. Scanno has no lack of tourist facilities and interesting catering, with typical foods including *polenta* and wild spring spinach used as a dressing for homemade pasta. Northwards we note the summit of Mount Genzana, protected by a small Nature Reserve, whose appeal lies in some very interesting excursion routes, although access is on





the opposite side, skirting the village of Pettorano sul Gizio. Lake Scanno is ideal for canoes and windsurfers, and the shoreline road is excellent for cycling excursions. Descending down valley your car works its way into the spectacular, narrow Sagittario ravine until you see Villalago perched on its cliff as it gazes at its reflection in its beautiful artificial basin, adorned with an old hermitage built right on the shore. A detour will lead to the remote hamlet of Castrovalva, immortalized by the famous engraver, Cornelius Escher, inventor of impossible worlds. The main road continues along the narrow valley and finally emerges at Anversa degli Abruzzi, made famous by Gabriele d'Annunzio in his "La fiaccola sotto il moggio". We can continue here and reach Cocollo, a small Medieval village, internationally famous for its traditional procession of St. Dominic and the serpents, held every first Thursday in May.

Mount Majella

Majella has always been considered the *mother mountain* by the people of Abruzzo and since time immemorial humans have maintained a constant, intact relationship with this rocky massif, coexisting with discretion and tenacity. Together with nearby Mount Morrone, a balcony overlooking the Sulmona and the Peligna valley, it forms a vast articulated mountainous system, linked to the peripheral Pizi, Secine, Pizzalto and Rotella mountains. Notwithstanding its magnificence and sheer size, Majella is also a very easy mountain for all to enjoy, its interior crisscrossed by through roads, mule tracks and a dense network of paths, surrounded by roads dotted with villages, well-connected to main communication routes. One of the easiest points of access is Caramanico, an important spa town, known for centuries because of the curative properties of its waters and location of a Majella National Park Visitor Centre. It is easily reached from the

A25 Pescara-Roma motorway. Skirting San Valentino in Abruzzo Citeriore we can detour to Roccamorice, continuing towards the heart of the mountain; at the fork, the road on the left leads up to the Majelletta skiing resort; on the right, Majella's two most famous and striking hermitages. A short and easy walk leads to the extraordinary scenario of the San Bartolomeo in Legio hermitage: a fantastic place with the atmosphere of history, built in a rock crevice on the wall of a narrow gorge. The road, however, continues past one of the region's most beautiful practice faces and, travelling through a dense beech wood, reaches the hermitage of Santo Spirito a Majella, a large religious complex that clings to the sheer rock where it was built by Celestine V. Returning towards Caramanico we encounter the junction for the Giumentina valley, ideal for walks and whose allure depends to some extent on the large dry-stone *tholos* huts built by shepherds. Paleolithic settlements have been found here. Before Caramanico we find San Tommaso, where an easy path starts its descent to the amazing valle dei Luchi, a valley of natural rock towers; beyond, the so-called *marmitte*, striking rock loops hewn by the river. Caramanico hosts an interesting Park Visitor Centre, with a nature and archaeology museum annex; the town is the starting point for a number of the most beautiful itineraries in this area, some easy, like those leading into the lower part of the lovely Orfento valley, others long and demanding, like those leading to Majella's summits. A charming trail starts in the Majella and reaches the San Giovanni hermitage. Apart from being the homeland of dairy products, nearby Sant'Eufemia a Majella is the gateway to the Lama Bianca Reserve, a wonderful place to stroll in nature, with special trails also for the physically challenged. The abandoned village of Roccacaramanico appears on the right and, proceeding beyond the San Leonardo pass a few kilometres after, we reach Fonte Romana, with its ample green expanses and



dense woods, ideal for picnics, relaxing in nature or starting off along the many marked paths that clamber upwards to the peaks. Neighbouring Campo di Giove is a charming mountain resort, with numerous hotels and restaurants, very lively in the summer. In the vicinity there is also Cansano, location of an important Italic and Roman archaeological area, but above all, entrance to the fabulous Sant'Antonio wood, a real natural paradise, ideal for excursions and walks, cycling tourism and country horseriding. Then we find the vast Altopiani Maggiori plains, one of the most renowned and popular mountain districts of Abruzzo, with Pescocostanzo, Rivisondoli and Roccaraso, gems in its crown and offering an extensive range of tourist amenities. There really are many ways to enjoy the mountains here. The flowering plains are an invitation to walks and relaxation, the paths are suitable excursions for any kind of walker, the wide roads and the tracks are ideal for cycle tourism and horseriding. Nearby Piano delle Cinquemiglia has breathtaking scenery with enormous spaces and lovely excursion possibilities, for instance one that departs from the little Medieval church of Madonna del Carmine and ends at Montagna Spaccata. The other itineraries are a great deal more demanding and should only be undertaken if we wish to continue to Serra Sparvera, lake Pantaniello and Mount Greco. Palena is the starting point for itineraries to Mount Secine and Porrara; the scenery here changes radically and the great highlands are replaced by sheer wooded slopes as the descent of Majella's eastern slope begins.

You may decide to make your way to the nearby Pizi Mountains and Secine, with picturesque Gamberale and Pizzoferrato, bursting with options for a peaceful mid-mountain stay, offering relaxing walks in the cool green surroundings. Or why not get on down to Palena, a pretty town on *mother mountain's* slopes, with its fascinating fossil museum. A detour will take you to the ancient





ruins of Roman Juvanum, with a fabulous view across to Majella. The entrance to the spectacular and easy-to-visit Cavallone grotto, celebrated by d'Annunzio in "La figlia di Iorio", is on the high road that connects Palena to Lama dei Peligni. Lama dei Peligni has an interesting nature museum, Park Visitor Centre, chamois wildlife area, sumptuous botanical gardens and there are delightful excursions like the Fonte Tarì trail. Fara San Martino, famous as the pasta capital of Abruzzo, is the starting point for the longest and most exciting trek of the Abruzzo mountains, with a 2,300-metre climb in height. This occurs in a real canyon with 14 kilometres of narrow ravine and sheer walls, leading up to the summit of Mount Amaro. Then the d'Ugni Mountain excursion circuit begins at the hamlet of Cantagufò, in nearby Palombaro. Pennapiedimonte, famed for its stonemasons, is the gateway to massif's most stunning gorge, the Avello, which can be explored by an enjoyable excursion departing from Balzolo panoramic point. The sheer faces are the theatre of bold rock-climbing adventures.





Bocca di Valle, not far away from Medieval Guardiagrele and its craft industry, houses the Andrea Bafile memorial, and offers a stimulating walk up to the San Giovanni waterfalls. Pretoro, known for its wood crafting, is the entrance to the heart of Majella, represented by the Majelletta and Passo Lanciano resorts, with their hotels, refuges and restaurants.

Fun and excursions are plentiful here, with paths and meadows that are suitable for walks. The Blockhaus offers a boundless panorama, ranging 360 degrees from the sea to the Gran Sasso mountains, and is the starting point for the area's best itineraries, including one to the *Tavole dei Briganti*, evocative inscriptions left on stones by 19th-century rebels. Accommodation is guaranteed in practically every town on Majella, even though the greatest concentration of hotels is in the Roccaraso-Rivisondoli-Pescocostanzo triangle, then at Caramanico and at Campo di Giove. Eating, as always in mountain Abruzzo, encounters only one problem: being spoiled for choice.



LAKE BOMBA



Like most of Abruzzo's lakes, the Bomba is an artificial basin. Not that this makes it any less charming, immersed in its valley surrounded by tall peaks and tiny, striking hamlets. The lake is in the mid river Sangro valley and was created by damming of that river near the unusually-named town of Bomba. The basin is closed off valleywards by a compact clay dam and stretches upstream for about seven kilometres, as far as Pietraferrazzana, almost lapping the outskirts of Villa Santa Maria. Lake Bomba offers a range of interesting options for fun and relaxation, thanks to a high number of accommodation facilities (campsites and hotel), not only along the lake but also in the neighbouring area. It is also a great location for mountain-biking or walks along its shores, perhaps renting a boat.

The surrounding area offers some picturesque and interesting towns. On the southern slope, first there is Bomba, an ancient centre gripping the western side of Mount Pallano (on whose peak there is an important

archaeological site with marvellous megalithic walls, easy to reach and to visit); Colledimezzo, a lovely village that hugs the Castellano hill, in a panoramic position, dominating the lake beneath; Pietraferrazzana, an even lovelier huddle of houses gathered under a breathtaking cliff, in a panoramic setting; lastly, Villa Santa Maria, squeezed up at the foot of the massive rock spur that dominates the "town of the cooks", famous worldwide as the Alma Mater of great chefs. From a steep crest on the northern slope the valley and lake are dominated by the ghost village of Buonanotte ("good night" in Italian, changed from its ancient name of Malanotte, meaning "night of evil", but nonetheless the victim of a landslide that forced its population to flee their homes, which were rebuilt nearby on more solid ground, with the new name of Montebello sul Sangro); then there is Pennadomo, which is set in enchanting countryside, clinging to the base of an impressive dark rock tower, overlooking the valley and with the lake in the background.

LAKE SCANNO

It was a gigantic landslide from Mount Genzana that blocked the Sagittario valley and created lake Scanno, the most attractive and popular of the Abruzzo lakes.

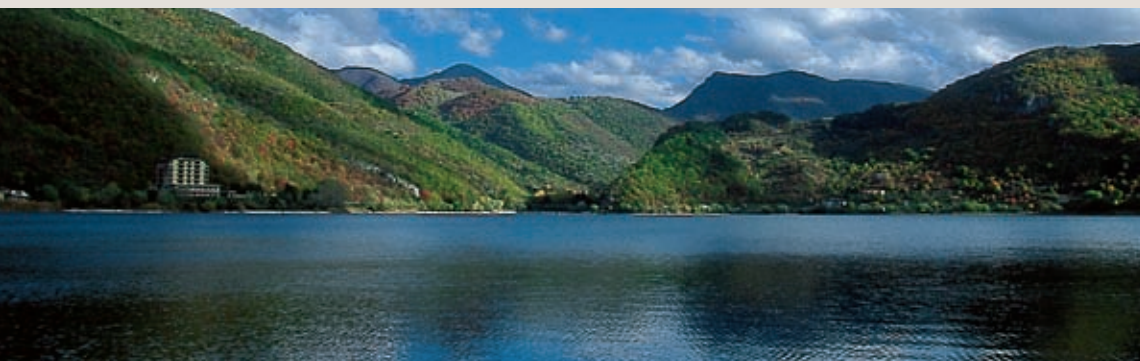
The vast basin lies at 922 metres asl, between two interesting old towns, Villalago and Scanno, at the foot of Montagna Grande's dense woods, on the boundary of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park. The steep rocky slopes of the Mount Genzana Reserve loom over the lake to the east.

When the water level is at its maximum, lake Scanno reaches 36 metres in depth. The lake's only tributary above ground level is the River Tasso, which flows down from Mount Marsicano and the Ferroio di Scanno pasturelands; there are no surface confluents that take the lake's waters towards the Sagittario valley. The water height remains stable thanks to the presence of underwater tributaries, since evaporation

caused by the climate is minimal.

Together with the nearby historical town centre of Scanno, the lake is the Sagittario valley main tourist attraction. For decades it has drawn tourists who enjoy its environment and its climate, attracted by the beauty spots and the weather. The lake is excellent for swimming, surfing and canoeing, or even just renting a pedal boat.

After a stroll, a pause to do some birdwatching or a canoe or pedal boat excursion, why not continue up to Scanno, the splendid medieval town and one of the most famous and distinctive in Abruzzo. The old centre's magnificent ancient houses lean close to one another, flanked by mansions, staircases, narrow lanes, and many women still wear a traditional costume decorated with examples of the fine goldsmithery and pillow lace made here.



LAKE CAMPOTOSTO



ABRUZZO ITALY 27

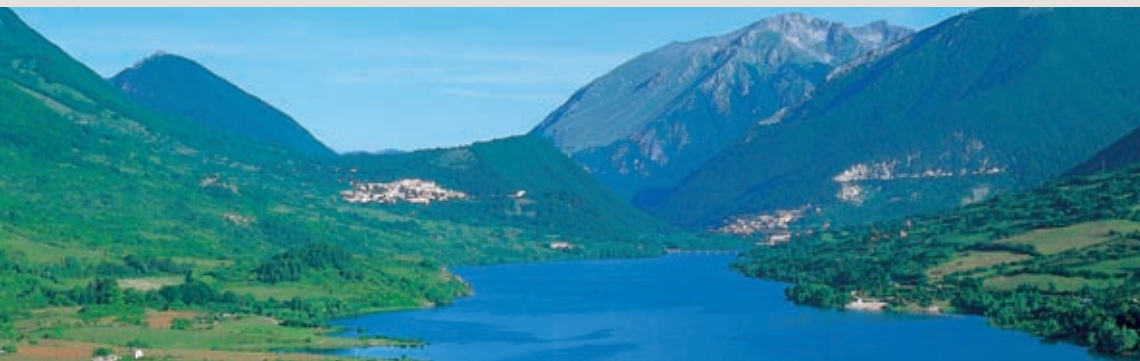
Lake Campotosto, in the province of L'Aquila, is the largest of the lakes in Abruzzo. In very cold winters, the surface will freeze over completely. The 40km perimeter of the lake is a firm favourite in fine weather for hiking and trekking, for cycling or even just for a romantic sunset stroll, where a visitor might stumble on badgers, hares, pheasant or foxes.

LAKE PENNE



Lake Penne is the site of a nature oasis of enormous environmental significance and one of the most important in Abruzzo. The lake is home to a centre for environmental awareness, botanical gardens, trails and itineraries, with a natural history museum that describe the lake and its habitat. One of the most fascinating features is the otter centre, where visitors can observe this animal, which risked extinction in the 1980s. The lake is in the hills and is the habitat for extensive wildlife, both in the water and on the shores.

LAKE BARREA



Lake Barrea was created in the Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo following damming of the River Sangro. The three towns that overlook the lake – Barrea, Civitella Alfedena and Villetta Barrea – have lost none of the spirit of ancient Apennine settlements. Numerous excursions start at Lake Barrea, including some accompanied by guides, walking up into the mountains to discover the Park's extensive fauna and flora.

LAKE CASOLI



Lake Casoli is also known as Lake Sant'Angelo and was created by damming of the River Aventino, which flows into it. It is this river that carries the trout and other types of fish, including chub, carp, tench and perch.

BILLBOARD



The main mountain towns provide a wide choice of evening entertainment, including pubs, trendy clubs, cafés, wine bars, disco bars and discotheques, many of them outdoors. In any case, all the main Abruzzo mountain tourist resorts are only a few kilometres away from cities including Teramo, L'Aquila, Chieti and Sulmona, where opportunities for amusement are never lacking. Important cultural events include excellent performing arts, held throughout the summer season. Many big mountain hotels organize their own entertainment and events. During the summer months every town has its own patron saint festival, which are always spectacular and first-rate opportunities to enter into the heart of the cultural traditions in these communities. Dancing in the town squares, folk shows, fireworks, brass bands and small groups, fetes and food stalls enliven evenings that are simple, sincere and... delicious!



June

St. Dominic's miracle is celebrated on the first Sunday of the month at Palombaro, right under Majella's eastern slope. On the 12 June a pilgrimage starts in nearby Serramonacesca and reaches the Sant'Onofrio hermitage, set in one of this mountain's most suggestive valleys. There follow the feasts of St. Anthony of the Lily (Scanno - 13), St. John the Baptist at Civitella Roveto and St. John's Witnesses at Bisegna, in the heart of the Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise National Park (both on 24). Festivals and patron saint feasts, which are one of the region's most authentic and picturesque features, begin in June.

July

The Sulmona jousting tournament or *Giostra Cavalleresca* takes place on the last two Sundays. Tornimparte organizes a cheerful festival of new mountain songs. Festivals are widespread over all the mountain area and are usually themed with typical local products or traditional rural dishes: *pecorino* cheese, chicklings, tasty fried cheese, the festival of the *mazzarella*, a kind of pan-fried lamb entrails parcel, typical of Teramo gastronomy. An interesting appointment is the sheep farming fair which is held on Laga against the suggestive backdrop of Piano Roseto, between Cortino and Crognaleto. Dozens of sheep farmers converge on the plain with their flocks and remain there a few days, for the joy of children and visitors, who can observe the shepherd's real world and sample the

a great show every day!



typical cheeses. Patron saint festivals, on the other hand, are very folkloristic and traditional events, exceptionally interesting and full of country cheer; animated by brass bands, local groups, typical food booths, stalls selling objects of all kinds: what better occasion to partake in the local life? The most important moment of the feast is the procession, when the statue of the patron saint is carried along the length and breadth of the village, and the evening ends noisily with fireworks and fire crackers.

August

Like July, it has a full calendar of fetes and patron saint festivals. There are so many, in fact, that neighbouring villages often overlap, leading to an embarrassingly wide choice indeed. The sumptuous and enchanting backdrop of Pescocostanzo's old Renaissance town centre is the scenario of processions in honour of St. Felix (8 August) and Madonna del Colle (Our Lady of the Hill - 15 August). On the same day, Scanno has its *Catenaccio* festival and Castel Castagna, at the foot of Gran Sasso, its Assumption Day fair. The next day, Castelvecchio Subequo celebrates St. Roche; then there is a pilgrimage from Fornelli to Villalago (19-21). On 25 August Roccamorice has its procession for St. Bartholomew, climbing up to the amazing hermitage set in one of Majella's most stunning gorges. Rocca di Mezzo's feast of the "Straight Furrow" (*Solco Dritto*) is held on the last Sunday in August, when Castel di Ieri pays homage to St. Donatus. The month's calendar ends with

L'Aquila's famous *Perdonanza Celestiniana* (Celestine's Pardon, 28-29), initiated by Celestine V, who designated this recurrence by donating a Papal Bull to the city, establishing that whomsoever entered the Holy Door of the basilica of Collemaggio in the 24 hours from the vespers of 28 August to those of the following day, "with a sincerely contrite and penitent soul", would be totally pardoned for his sins. Even though 700 years have passed, thousands of believers still perform this rite. Another interesting event is the sheep farming fair held in early August on the superb Campo Imperatore highland, in the territory of Castel del Monte, which attracts the participation of dozens of sheep farmers and thousands of sheep: a real sight of bygone times. In the Laga Mountains, Padula organizes a lovely event re-enacting the presence of brigands in these valleys.

September

The first of the month is the day of a procession winds from Isola del Gran Sasso to the Santa Colomba hermitage. The sensational barefoot *Corsa degli Zingari* race is held at Pacentro on the first Sunday in September. Young men from the village compete with each other in an exciting race of speed and, above all, endurance, running shoeless down the mountainside and back up to the village church. It is also the month of the Serramonacesca *Omaggi* event. Early in the month, Santo Stefano di Sessanio holds its traditional lentil festival, and this is the last of the season's events.

A summer holiday in the Abruzzo mountains offers an endless choice of places to stay. There really is something for all tastes and all budgets: great luxury hotels, family-run boarding houses, Bed & Breakfasts, agritourism holiday farms on the hills, with a sea view, an extensive circuit of houses for rent, campsites, holiday villages and aparthotels.



Where to sleep

The accommodation on offer is really quite extensive and varied, with a high overall standard. Generally all ski resorts become mountain tourism resorts from spring to autumn. The hotels are mainly 3-stars, although there is no lack of 4-stars and luxury venues. They are mainly located in the larger mountain districts like the Altopiani Maggiori, with Roccaraso, Rivisondoli and Pescocostanzo, which is certainly one of the most famous and popular; but there is also the Altopiano delle Rocche, between Sirente and Velino, in the heart of the Regional Park of the same name, with Ovindoli, Rocca di Mezzo, Rovere and Rocca di Cambio; the Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise National Park with tourist towns like Scanno, Pescasseroli, Villetta Barrea and others; Pretoro-Passo Lanciano-Majelletta. Smaller districts are those of Campo di Giove, Caramanico Terme, Pizzoferrato-Gamberale, Passo San Leonardo, Marsia, Prati di Tivo-Prato Selva, with the towns of Pietracamela and Fano Adriano, and that of Fonte Cerreto, the base camp for the Campo Imperatore cableway. These are all summer mountain tourist localities with an abundance of

amenities that are open all year round. Almost all Abruzzo mountain villages offer some sort of facility for visitors. Over the last 10-15 years B&Bs and agritourism farms have grown in number and have achieved a truly admirable level of quality. These are generally old stone dwellings located in historical centres, farmsteads that gaze out over unspoiled landscapes, often even original Medieval and Renaissance buildings, all finely refurbished to preserve their historical identity and initial architecture, but introducing the elements of comfort and liveability that are crucial for ensuring a successful holiday. Despite the attention to detail, the price list is a pleasant surprise. Compared to other solutions, the circuit of rental houses offers very good value for money, especially if you are on a tight budget, but more than this it is a chance to experience the lifestyle and pace of the place. Staying in a rented house will let you synchronize with the rhythm of the locality, use your time patiently, forge human contacts and make some charming acquaintances. A nice escape from the increasingly overwhelming big city.



The proverbial HOSPITALITY



Anyone who wants to spend a few nights in a very special place might like to consider the various solutions in Abruzzo offered by historical homes and convents, converted to tourist accommodation. And if you think a night on the roof of Abruzzo is your thing, Campo Imperatore offers a historical hotel, where Mussolini was imprisoned at the end of the war, and from which he was freed by a daring German pilot raid. Even nowadays the room where "Il Duce" slept retains its original furnishings and can be reserved like any other room in the hotel.

One very unusual – especially for the experience – and top-quality type of hospitality comes from the village of Santo Stefano di Sessanio, at the foot of Campo Imperatore and the departure point for any number of excursions towards this plain. The Medieval hamlet, once owned by the Medici family, has been recovered and converted to tourist amenities thanks to a joint venture between foreign entrepreneurs and local owners, who have transformed the place into a splendid multi-site hotel. The ancient stone houses have been rebuilt with a

meticulous attention to detail and to preserve historical memory, resembling restoration of a monument, and creating countless restful, cosy lodgings, fragrant with wood and wax, able to offer the utmost comfort combined with all the charm of tradition.

At table

Every village and town is bursting with a vast range of local traditional dishes, varying surprisingly often from place to place, and closely tied to seasonal produce. Just a short journey to another valley, crossing a crest or passing a high-altitude col is enough to discover different recipes and products. This is precisely the peculiarity of Abruzzo mountain cuisine: local diversification of recipes. Anyone who is a frequent visitor to mountain Abruzzo learns to distinguish the subtle and yet significant differences in flavour and aroma that exist even in the same recipes (and decide which they prefer) prepared in different kitchens. Sometimes the differences are the root of funny diatribes that animate an evening around a table on long summer nights.

of the mountains of Abruzzo





On the mountains of ABRUZZO

treasures of



The mountains of Abruzzo are the cradle of many gastronomic specialities and fruits of the land, which can be purchased directly from local producers or in the many specialist delicatessens. If you care to exploit a trip to the Abruzzo mountains to stock up your larder, you will find excellent value for money and top quality when purchasing oil, cheeses, pasta, wine, charcuterie, honey, liqueurs and many other specialities.

GASTRONOMY

The flavours of Abruzzo cuisine are deep-rooted in the region's history, in centuries of experience in farming the land, rearing livestock and processing raw materials.



skills and savours



Cured meats

Pork processing here produces some excellent hams and a wide range of charcuterie, beginning with the classic sausage, including a tasty liver variety, often preserved in oil or in lard. The most typical cured meat products include L'Aquila salami (an aged lean and fine-grained flat product); smoked ham made at Introdacqua and Cansano; delicious Campotosto *mortadella*, also called "mule's balls"; a soft *ventricina* for spreading on bread, produced in the mountains around Teramo; another *ventricina* – this time from the Vasto area – that is a unique, coarse-grained product flavoured with chopped mild and hot red chilli pepper and fennel seed.

Cheeses

A region whose economy was underpinned by stock farming for millennia must, of course, be expected to have an excellent cheese-making tradition. The most common stock is still sheep, and this explains the significant role played by fresh and ripe *pecorino* cheese, as well as ewe's milk *ricotta* (which can be purchased directly from the shepherds themselves), in Abruzzo's typical gastronomy. One local variety of these cheeses worth sampling is fresh, aromatic Teramo mountain *giuncata*. At the foot of Gran Sasso we can sample *cacio* (or *pecorino*) *marcetto*. Farindola is the production centre for a *pecorino* named after the town. A combination of cow's milk and ewe's milk is used to produce *caciotta*, sometimes flavoured with hot chilli pepper. Cow's milk (which may be mixed with goat's milk) is used to make traditional *scamorza*, eaten raw, grilled or baked. On Mount

Majella's main highlands, especially at Rivisondoli and Pescocostanzo, wonderful *caciocavallo* is made from raw milk.

Fruit

Soft berry fruits are excellent and widespread in the entire mountain area: strawberries, redcurrants, blackberries, raspberries, bilberries, gooseberries. At lower altitude there are apples and, in particular, a variety of quince that is used to make excellent jams, but there are also cherries, sour cherries and almonds.

Vegetables

The stony fields of L'Aquila's mountains still produce ancient cereals and legumes like spelt and *solina* wheat, fantastic Santo Stefano di Sessanio lentils and Navelli chickling peas. Sulmona's red garlic has been famous for centuries for its curative properties. Of the many wild greens that grow here, it is worth mentioning a wild spinach from Marsica and the Scanno area: known locally as *drapi*, this tasty wild green is used to flavour pasta and frittata. Then there are excellent mushrooms, especially ceps, gathered mainly in the woods on the Laga slopes, and autumn chestnuts from Laga and the Valle Roveto. Vegetable bottled in olive oil are a typical product here.

Truffles

Abruzzo is a leading Italian truffle producer: for years it was overshadowed by the historically more established markets of Alba and Norcia, but the region is now coming into its own with







prime crops. Marsica, Teramo, upper L'Aquila and the mid-Sangro Valley are the main production areas. Apart from being a recipe ingredient, the precious tuber is also used to aromatize sausages, oils and cheeses.

Saffron

The heart of one of Abruzzo's most interesting traditional products is on the Navelli plateau, between the Gran Sasso and Sirente massifs. L'Aquila PDO saffron is made from the stigma of *crocus sativus*, left whole and dried, and taken from flowers grown in the municipalities of Navelli, Civitaretenga, Caporciano, San Pio delle Camere and Prata d'Ansidonia: it is said to be the best in the world.

Honey

Excellent and aromatic honey is produced almost everywhere in Abruzzo, a leading manufacturer. The tastiest varieties include those made from thyme, chestnut or acacia blossom.

Patisserie

Traditional patisserie in Abruzzo includes *mostaccioli*, *caggiunitt*, *ferratelle* or *nèole*, *boconotti*, *cicerchiata*, *zèppole* and *taralli*. Once upon a time they were all made by hand at home, but nowadays they can be purchased from bakers and patisseries in mountain villages.

Liqueurs

The most famous of the distillates produced with Abruzzo mountain herbs is the very strong (72 proof) *Centerbe*, from Tocco da Casauria, a locality at the foot of Majella; *genziana* and *ratafia* are another two liqueurs.

Olive oil

In the provinces of Teramo, Pescara and Chieti, the olive tree is a familiar figure across the gentle rolling hillsides. The PDO extra virgin olive oil produced in these areas is on a par with any of the best Italian oils. A traditional home-made condiment that is now extremely popular in restaurants, called *olio santo* may have some

surprises in store for unwary diners who sample the first pressing olive oil in which hot chilli pepper has been soaked.

Wines

Abruzzo's traditional vines are Trebbiano d'Abruzzo for white wine and Montepulciano d'Abruzzo for red, although there has been a recent recovery of minor cultivars that include Passerina, Pecorino and Cococciola. The most important production district is at the foot of the mountain chains, for instance in the Pescara valley, between Popoli and the capital, the foothills of Teramo, Pescara and Chieti, the Peligna and Ofena basins. The list of DOC wines produced in the region includes Montepulciano d'Abruzzo (including the rosé known as Cerasuolo), an aromatic and sturdy red that is dry to the palate; Trebbiano d'Abruzzo, a dry and delicately scented white; Controguerra, both the red and white, specific to a precise district of Teramo.



No other Italian region has equalled the leaps and bounds made by Abruzzo to improve its wines in recent years. The proof lies in the growing interest being encountered in all European markets for the region's DOC products (whites, reds and rosés): Abruzzo's best wineries have collected numerous awards and recognition in the last few years.



CRAFTS

One of the most intriguing elements that make Abruzzo's mountain villages so fascinating is certainly the number of craft workshops that are found in their streets and lanes. Depending on what is produced there, these workshops are either spotlessly clean and tidy, or dusty and chaotic, but they are always full of life and mirror the personality and creativity of those who work there. Abruzzo crafts are the offspring of age-old mastery, which developed by mixing manual ability in producing useful objects with the taste for decoration and rudimental design, typical of an uncomplicated population close to its land. In fact *genius loci* is the inestimable added value that renders the craft product intrinsically different from the mass-produced item, raising the former to a spiritual plane and leaving the latter on one of sheer materiality. In the hands of the Abruzzo craftsman, clay and iron, gold and lace, copper and stone, wood and wool, all come to life. In many parts of Italy the tradition of manual crafting and applied arts was forsaken during the period of industrial development. Fortunately here in Abruzzo it has survived and lives on, side-by-side with the future. Potters, stonemasons, goldsmiths, carvers, blacksmith, weavers, luthiers, tanners and coppersmiths: Abruzzo's craftsmen live and work in every corner of the region, ensuring their creations are easily found everywhere. Tourists might like to remember that typical Abruzzo craft products are available in most local towns and at very competitive prices.

Pottery

Castelli is a colourful village on the slopes of Gran Sasso, known for over four centuries as one of the Italian capitals of the potter's art. It became famous thanks to 1600s and 1700s dynasties of master potters, families like the Pompei, Grue, Gentili, Cappelletti and Fuina; nowadays, the art of Castelli pottery is kept alive by dozens of workshops where excellent products can be purchased and visitors can see the potters at work. This "capital" of Abruzzo pottery has a first-rate ceramics museum, whilst nearby the splendid little church of San Donato boasts a magnificent ceiling decorated in 1600s painted ceramic tiles. Craft pottery is also widespread around Rapino, at the foot of Mount Majella.



Gold and silver

Also at the foot of Mount Majella, along the road taking to the Passo Lanciano-Majelletta ski district, we find the Medieval town of Guardiagrele, famous for the splendid goldsmithery produced by descendants of the Renaissance school of the great goldsmith, Nicola da Guardiagrele. In Abruzzo today production of gold and silver jewellery is still extremely important, especially in the old mountain settlements where the traditions are well-preserved in places like Pescocostanzo and Scanno. Here the tourist can purchase traditional jewellery and filigree, including the most popular piece with local ladies: the traditional *presentosa*, a love token pendant with two entwined hearts at its centre, surrounded by a crown of tiny gold hearts.

The heart symbology is precise and alluring: one heart means the woman is unattached; two hearts linked by a ribbon mean she is spoken for.

Wrought iron and copper

Production of embossed copper and wrought iron is a truly ancient process in all of Abruzzo. Wrought iron is popular mainly for bedsteads, chandeliers, fences, candelabras, braziers; the copper is used for pots and pans, and the distinctive urns used for centuries by women to take water home from the fountain. Guardiagrele is still considered the "capital" of Abruzzo copper

and iron crafting, but good quality objects are also made in Pescocostanzo, Tossicia and Scanno.

Stone

Majella limestone, known for its warm hues, is the absolute star of Abruzzo's fine Medieval buildings. Even nowadays stone carvers and sculptors play an important role in the economy of several towns at the foot of Abruzzo's "mother mountain", in particular Lettomanoppello, Pretoro, Pennapiedimonte and Pacentro. Softer and easier to model is Laga sandstone, which has also evolved some interesting applied art.

Textiles

The abundant production of wool in Abruzzo caused the development of an important regional textile industry, in particular in the mountain areas where flocks pastured in summer. One famous item is the *taranta*, brightly coloured blankets in heavy wool patterned with ancient designs, made in Taranta Peligna, at the foot of Mount Majella. One of the most famous Abruzzo textile products is the elegant bolster lace from Scanno, L'Aquila, Canzano and Pescocostanzo.

Leather

Abruzzo has been the homeland of livestock farmers since the dawn of history and the region has retained significant leather crafting industries. The skilled hands of Abruzzese craftsmen transform raw material into bags, belts and other objects, produced in many local regional towns. The saddles made in L'Aquila are famous worldwide and are used by riding enthusiasts throughout Europe.





TOURIST INFORMATION OFFICES

LOCALITY	TELEPHONE	EMAIL	LOCALITY	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
ALBA ADRIATICA (TE)	+39.0861.712426-711871	iat.albaadriatica@abruzzoturismo.it	PESCARA AEROPORTO	+39.085.4322120	iat.aeroporto@abruzzoturismo.it
ALBA FUCENS (AQ)	+39.0863.449642	iat.albafucens@abruzzoturismo.it	PESCASSEROLI (AQ)	+39.0863.910461-910097	presidio.pescasseroli@abruzzoturismo.it
CARAMANICO TERME (PE)	+39.085.922202-9290209	iat.caramanico@abruzzoturismo.it	PESCOCOSTANZO (AQ)	+39.0864.641440	iat.pescocostanzo@abruzzoturismo.it
CHIETI	+39.0871.63640	presidio.chieti@abruzzoturismo.it	PINETO (TE)	+39.085.9491745-9491341	iat.pinet@abruzzoturismo.it
FRANCAVILLA AL MARE (CH)	+39.085.817169-816649	iat.francavilla@abruzzoturismo.it	RIVISONDOLI (AQ)	+39.0864.69351	iat.rivisondoli@abruzzoturismo.it
GIULIANOVA (TE)	+39.085.8003013	iat.giulianova@abruzzoturismo.it	ROCCAMORICE (PE)	+39.085.8572614	iat.roccamorice@abruzzoturismo.it
LANCIANO (CH)	+39.0872.717810	iat.lanciano@abruzzoturismo.it	ROCCARASO (AQ)	+39.0864.62210	iat.roccaraso@abruzzoturismo.it
L'AQUILA	+39.0862.410808-410340	presidio.aquila@abruzzoturismo.it	ROSETO DEGLI ABRUZZI (TE)	+39.085.8991157	iat.roseto@abruzzoturismo.it
L'AQUILA	+39.0862.22306	iat.aquila@abruzzoturismo.it	SAN SALVO (CH)	+39.0873.345550	iat.sansalvo@abruzzoturismo.it
MARTINSICURO (TE)	+39.0861.762336	iat.martinsicuro@abruzzoturismo.it	SCANNO (AQ)	+39.0864.74317	iat.scanno@abruzzoturismo.it
MEDIO VASTESE (CH)	+39.0873.944072	iat.gissi@abruzzoturismo.it	SILVI MARINA (TE)	+39.085.930343	iat.silvi@abruzzoturismo.it
MONTESILVANO (PE)	+39.085.4458859	iat.montesilvano@abruzzoturismo.it	SULMONA (AQ)	+39.0864.53276	iat.sulmona@abruzzoturismo.it
NAVELLI (AQ)	+39.0862.959158	iat.navelli@abruzzoturismo.it	TAGLIACOZZO (AQ)	+39.0863.610318	iat.tagliacozzo@abruzzoturismo.it
ORTONA (CH)	+39.085.9063841	iat.ortona@abruzzoturismo.it	TERAMO	+39.0861.244222	presidio.teramo@abruzzoturismo.it
OVINDOLI (AQ)	+39.0863.706079	iat.ovindoli@abruzzoturismo.it	TORTORETO (TE)	+39.0861.787726	iat.tortoreto@abruzzoturismo.it
PESCARA	+39.085.4219981	presidio.pescara@abruzzoturismo.it	VASTO (CH)	+39.0873.367312	iat.vasto@abruzzoturismo.it
PESCARA CENTRO	+39.085.4225462	iat.pescaracentro@abruzzoturismo.it			

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Info line
+39.085.4482301



Abruzzo Promozione Turismo
 Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, 301 65122 Pescara Italy
 tel. +39.085.429.001 - fax +39.085.298.246
 e-mail info@abruzzoturismo.it

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