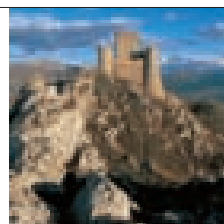






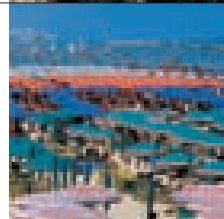
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Abruzzo,
an experience for life



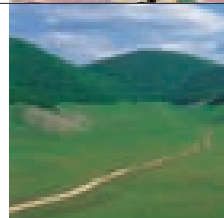
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When the sea is
unforgettable



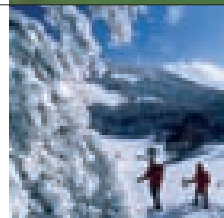
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1001 paths
in the Abruzzo mountains



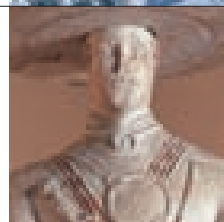
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The Mediterranean
has a snowy heart



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A great
open-air museum



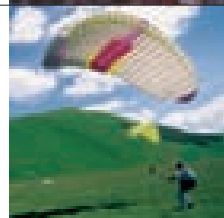
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Treasures
of skills and savours



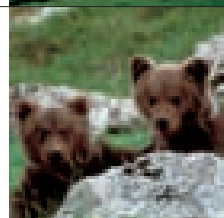
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An ideal scenario
for every passion



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Europe's greenest
region



74

The paths of the faithful



ABRUZZO

a journey



A rich, fertile land lies between the Apennines slopes and the waters of the Adriatic. Its features are countless: a vast range of ski slopes and beaches, nature parks and art towns, medieval churches, castles and museums.

There is a whole universe to be discovered between the Apennines and the sea. Easily reached from most parts of Italy, Abruzzo nonetheless remained at a distance, a little withdrawn, for a long time, but little by little it is very rightly being rediscovered. The beaches and the cliffs line 130 kilometres of the Adriatic coast and they are probably the best known part of the region. Previously, the coast was a favourite with families, but younger people and international visitors have started to discover the area thanks to its marinas, sports facilities and many events. At the same time, thousands of visitors from Italy and Europe have begun to move inwards to the splendid hinterland, seeking out the art towns and old centres, visiting the castles, the churches and the abbeys. They are also venturing onto the hiking



of discovery



paths in the three National Parks, the Regional Park, the dozens of Nature Reserves and sanctuaries that ensure the survival of 75% of all Europe's living species, and which make Abruzzo the "greenest region in Europe". These are not the only reasons to visit Abruzzo: ski enthusiasts from all over Italy enjoy the snow-covered slopes that have now also begun to attract foreign skiers thanks to international connections through Abruzzo Airport. Gourmets can rediscover the authentic flavours of regional produce, wines and olive oils, and those who want to focus on wellness will enjoy the spas at the foot of Mount Majella and in the Val Roveto woods.

For centuries, writers and guidebooks have referred to Abruzzo as "strong and amiable", but local residents would find this definition somewhat limiting. One thing is certain though: the oversimplified description is based on truth.

First of all, the Abruzzo countryside itself is very strong: basic, rugged and memorable.

Undoubtedly the images of Abruzzo are strong, unbelievably strong:

images of medieval villages entrenched on the mountainsides; a chamois, an eagle or a wolf suddenly appearing in the mountain's most solitary nooks; castles that keep watching over today's Apennines roads, just as they did in the past.

The wonder aroused by the magnificent mountain ranges like Majella and Gran Sasso, Sirente and Laga, and the Marsica and Velino peaks, is even stronger; no matter the time of year. In his introduction to the Abruzzo and Molise edition of the 1948 Italian Touring Club guide, celebrated Abruzzese writer Ignazio Silone defined the mountains as "the most dominating characters in Abruzzo life". These rock and snow-covered Apennine giants loom over the hills, the towns and even the beaches of Abruzzo.

Those seeking sports in the region will not be disappointed by the delight of trekking through the snowy canyons of Majella and Sirente; by the soft grassy slopes that provide perfect take-off and landing spots for paragliders and hang gliders; by the sheer rocky faces of Gran Sasso, where Francesco de Marchi wrote one of the





first pages in European mountaineering history, as long ago as 1573. This is where generations of rock climbers, from the end of the 1800s to the present day, have been entranced by the appeal of the “Abruzzo Dolomites”.

For those who prefer culture and history, Abruzzo holds equal appeal in the shape of the Marsican, Samnite and Picene settlements and burial sites strewn throughout the Abruzzo countryside. Over recent years archaeologists have finally begun to excavate and, as is fitting, Abruzzo’s public authorities have begun to valorize these burial grounds. Museums now display vases, sculptures and elegant beds with bone decorations. However, the real spirit of the warlike ancient tribes who peopled Abruzzo can be understood by their swords, their disc-
armour, and their shields.

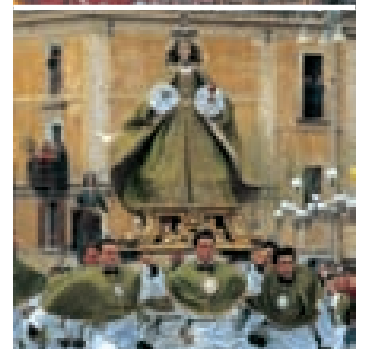
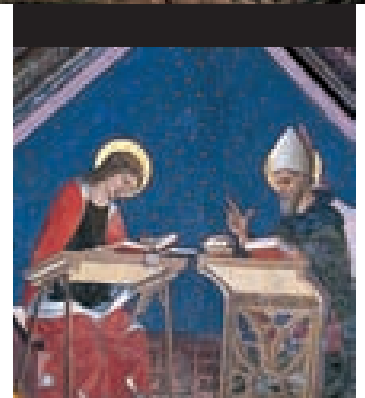
The turreted castle profiles – Santo Stefano di Sessanio, Roccascalegna, Rocca Calascio, Pacentro, and Celano – are also strong: survivors of Abruzzo’s dark Middle Ages and built to protect the borders and the ancient wool and transhumance routes. On the other hand, the undulating slopes of the hills are “amiable” in



comparison, as are the frescoes in the medieval churches, the endless seduction of local food and wine, the beneficial effects of the spa waters, and the long golden ribbon of beach that marks the eastern edge of Abruzzo for over 100 kilometres.

The monuments that embellish Abruzzo could also be considered "amiable", standing as reminders of the only two periods in which the area knew some peace. In ancient Roman times artworks like the magnificent mosaics of Vasto or Teramo were created, alongside enormous works like the tunnels to drain Lake Fucino. In the 17th and 18th centuries, when the Kingdom of Naples brought a new era of peace to the area, noblemen and bishops erected "amiable" monuments like the buildings and churches of Teramo, Penne, Pescocostanzo, Lanciano and Scanno.

The residents of Abruzzo have been famous for centuries for their amiable hospitality to visitors who come from afar. This basic friendliness is the underpinning to carefree, colourful local fairs and festivals that grow annually and whose calendar is continually enriched by new events, exhibitions and museums.



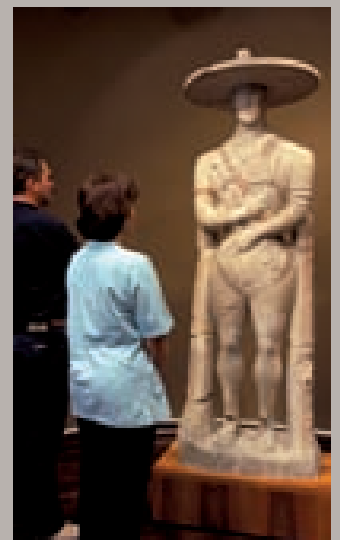
THE CAPESTRANO WARRIOR

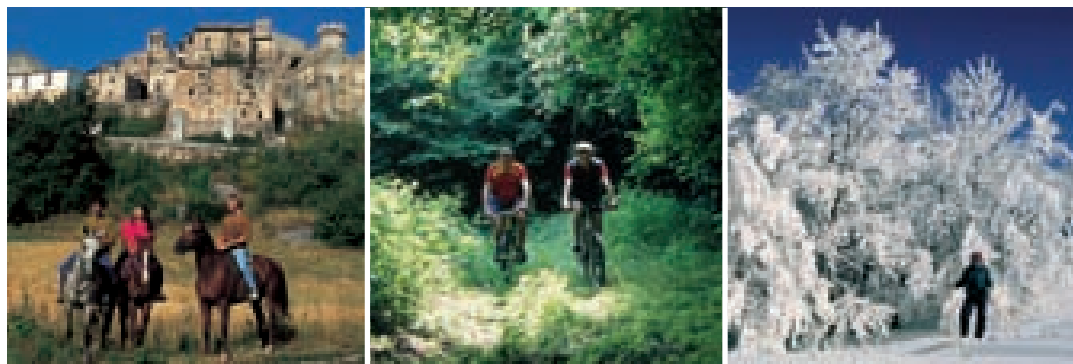


Now the “iconic” symbol of Abruzzo and its identity, this is actually a tomb statue that had been placed on a burial mound over a tomb. Brought to light in 1934 during excavations of the necropolis at the foot of the village of Capestrano (L’Aquila) by a farmer who was ploughing his land to plant vines, the effigy dates to the mid-6th century BC and shows a warrior prince.

The sculpture is carved from a single block of stone and is over two metres high, with a base of almost another 50 centimetres. The sheer height, combined with the very broad shoulders, endows a unique grandeur on an opus that is both realistic and fantastic, and which escapes any mere superficial interpretation. The disc-shaped headgear is remarkably wide and topped by a semispherical crown, inserted with a crest that creates a type of plume. Researchers disagree on the facial features: some of the opinion that it is stylized and others believing it to be a real protective or funerary mask. In real life the neckband would have been both ornamental and protective.

The warrior has impressive weapons: a sword, a small dagger whose hilt is decorated with human figures, an axe that may be a sceptre, and two long spears. The armour worn by the warrior for protection in battle is no less impressive: the back and chest, as far as the heart, are protected by the famous disc-armour known as a “kardiophylakes” (or “paracores”); the abdomen is protected by an apron held in place with straps and crisscrossing belts; the legs are covered with greaves and the feet with sandals. But who was this warrior? On the left pillar that supports the statue there is a one-line inscription, carved vertically and read from bottom to top. This inscription has instigated numerous debates but was recently resolved by a comparison with other inscriptions found in Penna Sant’Andrea, near Teramo. It states: “This wonderful image of me, King Nevio Pompuleidio, was made by Anini”. Thus revealing both the name of the warrior and the artist.





Through April and May the mountain peaks iced with the last of the winter snows make a surprising, amiable backdrop to the vineyards, olive groves, orchards and colourful flowering of the hills.

Nonetheless, the “strong and amiable” label is far too restricting for the Abruzzo of the new millennium. In addition to the strength and amiability of the countryside, history, monuments, flavours, this region is capable of offering a captivating condensation of old and new to residents and visitors alike.

Alongside its unspoilt parks – and what could be more “traditional” than uncontaminated nature? – there are many scientific research and technological excellence centres using cutting-edge expertise, there are sophisticated methods for environmental management of the “Abruzzo of the Parks” – a great “experimental biodiversity laboratory”. Side-by-side with the reassuring, familiar embrace of the beaches are the marinas, swimming pools, aqua parks and the numerous accommodation, sporting and recreational facilities that the Abruzzo coast offers the most active holidaymakers.

Then there are the classic literary references: Gabriele d’Annunzio and his continuous praise of the Pescara coast and other areas; Ignazio Silone’s preference for the mountains and retreats of the hinterland; Dacia Maraini’s descriptions of the woods of Pescasseroli and the Sangro Valley. All to be enjoyed alongside the contributions of

an increasing number of contemporary young writers, musicians and producers in Abruzzo. Together with the painstaking preservation of traditional flavours, research has played a key role in enhancing the fine quality wines, olive oils, cheeses, charcuterie, and the region’s products in general.

A few kilometres from the wildest, most isolated valleys where we can travel in direct contact with nature, walking or skiing downhill or cross-country, we encounter the technology and comfort of the well-equipped winter resorts located on all the region’s massifs.

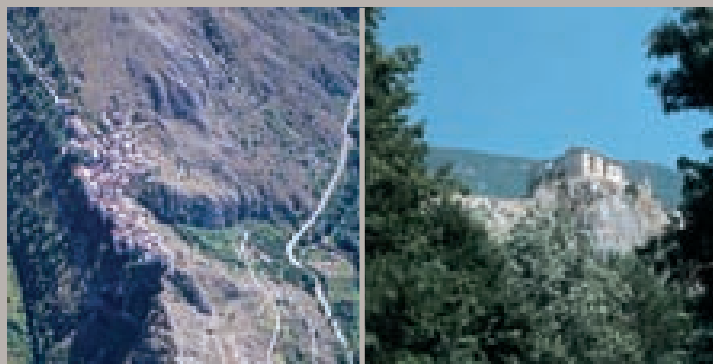
Now the enhanced quality of available publications means that anyone who wants to discover or rediscover Abruzzo can undertake a well-armed approach to the works of art, history, nature, food and wine, and hiking trails.

Most visitors are drawn to Abruzzo for the parks or the beaches, the medieval monuments or the snow, however there are other attractions that are equally valid and increasingly popular: food and wine, crafts, spas, pilgrimage destinations, and locations offering active sports facilities for the young.

Whether you are a first time visitor or an old friend, Abruzzo extends a warm invitation to come and explore the thousand attractions it offers: ancient yet modern, silent yet joyful, and now reached easily by road, rail or air from most parts of Italy.



CASTROVALVA, ESCHER'S HIDEAWAY



Looking south as we travel along the A25 motorway between Pratola Peligna and Cocullo, we catch a glimpse of a village: a few houses clinging tightly to the mountain at the top of a rocky peak. Many travellers wonder if these houses have a name and ask themselves who would ever dream of living up there. The name of the village is Castrovalva, which derives from the name “Castrum de Valva”, a reference to both its association with the ancient diocese of Valva, whose see was in Corfinio’s basilica of San Pelino, and to its clear status as a fortified village, from the Latin “castrum”. The narrow road leading to this village is forced to wind its way up the side of the mountain, looking down on the sheer drop to the river Sagittario below, and then penetrates the ridge through a narrow tunnel. This would explain why Castrovalva is not part of the beaten tourist path, even though it is near the ever-popular Scanno. Basically, Castrovalva is not one of those places we pass through by chance: it is where we go once we have heard about it and want to go there. Only the road, which appears more difficult than it actually is, may discourage less daring visitors, but the “courageous” few who persist will be rewarded with a place

untouched by passing time.

80 years ago, an artistic genius from Holland climbed up to this long narrow village, cut by the winds that mercilessly whip its vulnerable position on the ridge. Maurits Cornelius Escher was the artist, a solitary explorer of the most inaccessible paths of Abruzzo in search of magical places. The impact of discovering Castrovalva probably hit Escher with all the force of an unexpectedly attained goal, and the enigmatic lithograph he dedicated to it, is a successful fusion of realism and metaphysical transposition. The artist’s eye perceives the village not as a privileged perspective, but as a point of arrival, and then ranges birdlike over the surrounding countryside, showing how difficult it is to get there, but also how eagerly anticipated arrival is. The perspective is reckless, as is the Sagittario gorge below, and the village is seen at the top peak of the illustration, enfolded in clouds and offering a foretaste of the dizzy view enjoyed from the belvedere. Anversa degli Abruzzi (of which Castrovalva is a hamlet) appears at the end of the valley below, already in the far distance even though there is still a long climb. After Escher left Italy, disapproving of the Fascist regime, he accomplished the extreme consequences of his investigation of the depiction of reality, and invented those impossible worlds generated by his distortion of perspective which made him famous.

Emblematic of his love for abstraction is the drawing of the double balcony, where a man is shown climbing up from the inside even though he is still on the outside. Perhaps the memory of the difficult climbs to the villages of Abruzzo such as Castrovalva, Opi, Alfedena, and Goriano Sicoli are the inspiration for this enigma. Perhaps the entwined stone houses and the inextricable labyrinths of the mountain villages of Abruzzo inspired the series of metamorphoses, where the law of mathematical constants dictates that an object will continuously generate a new object. Castrovalva is not just the surreal, unsettling place interpreted by Escher, however: there is also stark and totally innate peace there, that of Majella’s solitary retreats and the Benedictine abbeys surrounded by



Along the road that connects Cansano to Pescocostanzo, a thick secluded wood lies on the long plateau that opens westwards at the foot of the Majella mountains. The Sant'Antonio woods are one of the most beautiful beech groves in Abruzzo, rich in atmosphere and appeal, changing with every new season. The beech is the true prince of Abruzzo's mountainscapes and high altitude paths, and is found all over the region. It generally grows between 1,000 and 1,700 metres and the intense yellow of its leaves prior to falling tinge autumn with a special colour. Although the most beautiful Abruzzo beech groves require long hikes to be visited, the Sant'Antonio woods are very near the road. The site was visited by human beings even in prehistoric times and historians write that the ancient consular Roman road, called the Minucia, wound its way through here, connecting Corfinium (nowadays Corfinio) to Isernia. But these areas have always been inhabited by mountain folk and shepherds; people who learned to live in harmony with nature, and use it without abusing it. In 1985 the Sant'Antonio woods came under the protection of a Nature Reserve that safeguards its 550 hectares. Even though the beech is the most common species, there are numerous examples of other age-old trees in these woods: maple, wild pear, turkey oak and cherry. Botany enthusiasts will also enjoy looking for the Italian maple (*Acer opalus*), the sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and the field maple (*Acer campestre*). Summertime blooms with all kinds of flowers such as the yellow gentian and the peony, and with any luck we may also spot the violet helleborine (*Epipactis purpurea*), one of the rarest wild orchids in the country. This is an ideal milieu for many species of animal, especially birds, and it is not uncommon to spot tree-creepers, robins, chaffinches, hawfinches and different varieties of woodpecker. Raptors like the sparrow hawk and the buzzard can be seen circling

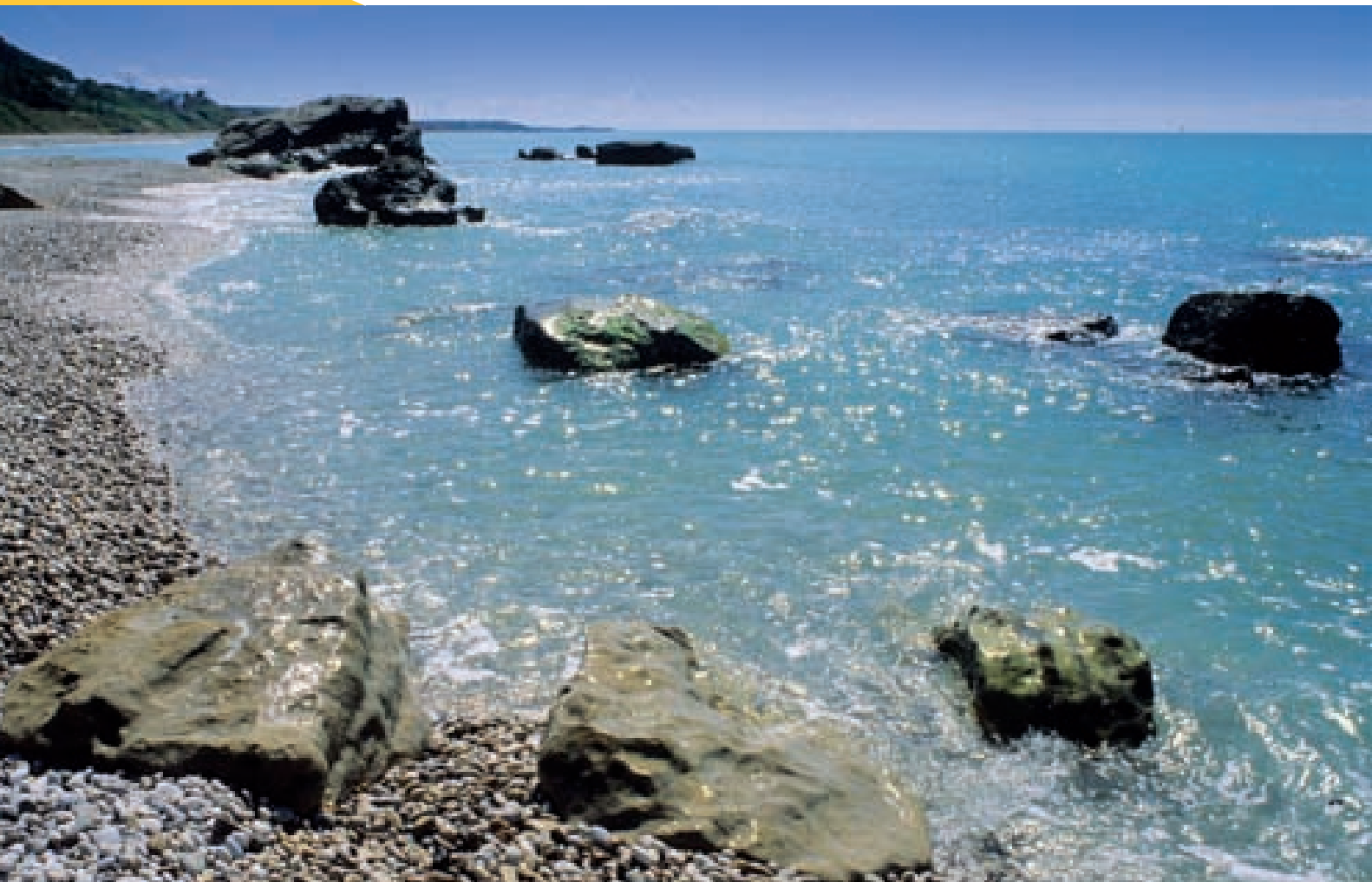
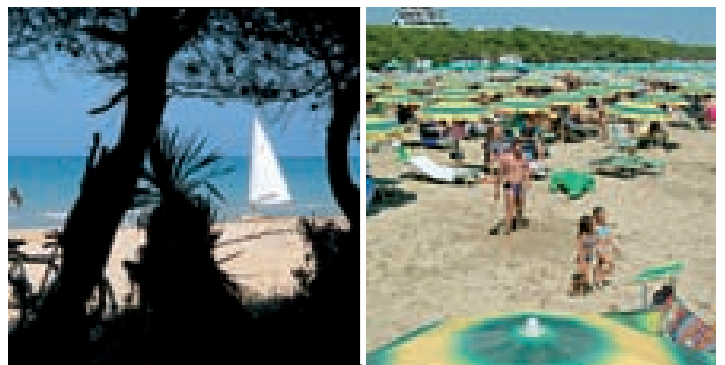
overhead, seeking their prey amongst the trees. The Sant'Antonio woods can be reached by car from Cansano or Pescocostanzo. Some paths start in the car park and penetrate the undergrowth. The paths are all more or less the same and there are no risky spots or problems with orientation, so visitors are free to wander, to walk quietly through these woods and try to find the centuries-old beech trees, scan the sky for birds, examine the ground in search of rare plants and animals. For those seeking a more challenging trek, there are paths that lead towards the top of Mount Pizzalto or Mount Rotella, the two peaks that dominate the area to the east and the west. All times of year are ideal for visiting the woods: each season has its own colours, scents and feel. In fact, every season merits a visit: from the time that spring bursts forth to the arrival of the first white flakes of snow, this place is open to everyone. In winter snow will lie thick on the ground so snow shoes are needed, or anyone who enjoys cross-country skiing can use the circuit through the woods.

The Primo Campo plain starts at the southern edge of the woods and stretches down to Pescocostanzo. Amongst the old farmhouses there is an ancient building with a small bell gable: this is the Sant'Antonio sanctuary, a fascinating country chapel that is still a place of worship and numerous pilgrims visit it each year, especially on 13 June. The chapel has medieval origins and the wooden statue of St Anthony was carved between the end of the 1300s and the early 1400s. This place of retreat is mentioned in a bull dated 1536, and from a date carved into the door it appears to have been restored in 1577. It comprises a small church and some cells which hermits used to live in, including a room, a tiny kitchen, a stable and a storehouse. Since lay hermits finally left it, local farmers manage the structure and their task is to provide lodgings to

ABRUZZO'S

sea is

133 kilometres of coastline that switch from golden sandy shore and cool pine groves, to cliffs, promontories and coves whose pebbles are polished by the undertow. Lively, fun beaches or solitary shores to bask in peace: Abruzzo's coast can offer all this, as well as the charm and proverbial hospitality of local folk.



unforgettable

A coastline stretching 133 kilometres and offering something for everyone. The scenario that greets tourists reaching the Abruzzo coast is quite varied and will satisfy many different needs. Soft, sandy beaches framed by pine groves; high, jagged cliffs; small coves and solitary pebble beaches; large, lively fun beaches. The real added value offered by a holiday on the Abruzzo coast is the human dimension, however: genuine human contact and a real bond with the territory.

The coast is a broad, level strip of fine golden sand as far as the mouth of the river Foro, north of Ortona, with beaches up to 200 metres deep; some areas are dense with typical Mediterranean maquis and sand dunes that separate the beach and from the shady pine groves behind. The heart of Pescara, for example, offers the d'Avalos and Santa Filomena pine groves (the latter is now a Nature Reserve) for some lovely walks. Further north, the splendid, famous wood separates Pineto from its beach. The mighty and enigmatic Torre di Cerrano (once a watchtower and bastion against barbarian pirates, now a Marine Biology Centre and a place for lovely walks on the beach, starting at Silvi Marina or Pineto) lies a little further on, facing the blue Adriatic and surrounded by the

green of thick umbrella and Aleppo pine groves.

Conversely, the southern coast, from Ortona to San Salvo, is jagged with cliffs and small inlets, often with gravel beaches and coves, where a swim with a diving mask is recommended, to be able to gaze through the clear water at an underworld teeming with marine life. The tall sandstone cliffs are cleft by the wide gulfs of Venere and Vasto, opening out into wide, sandy beaches. The gentle, cultivated hills sometimes roll all the way down to the coast, with its ancient *trabocchi* (fishing huts on stilts) that keep watch over this scenic location. The coastal towns here are mainly little ports where small fishing boats come to land their catch in the evening, then sold to the owners of the many family-run restaurants.

From June to September hundreds of hotels, guesthouses, camping facilities, boarding houses and private apartments along the whole coast, but more intensely in the north, are kept busy meeting the vacation demands of the tourists who choose Abruzzo. Apart from resort accommodation amenities, there are numerous sporting facilities, agritourism farms in the coastal hills, riding schools and aqua parks, to enhance the holidaymaker's stay.





During summer the seaside resorts along the Abruzzo coast are both entertaining and relaxing. The wide range of accommodation, excellent food, the thousands of bars and restaurants, the friendly locals and the secure tranquillity of these resorts make Abruzzo the ideal place for an intelligent holiday.



Of course there is evening entertainment too, with plenty of places to while away the night having fun: round terraces set into the sea and chic clubs for the night owls, small candlelit restaurants for those seeking romance, and arcades, pubs and music venues for the young.

Compared to the rest of the Adriatic, the resorts on the Abruzzo coast boast two unique features: quiet, safe towns (the region has one of the lowest crime rates in Italy) and the understated, but frank friendliness of the local folk.

There is a carefree, happy mood in Abruzzo seaside towns, both day and night. The sea front, shaded with palm trees, pines and tamarisks, forms the perfect backdrop to the well-known summer activity of strolling, enjoying an ice cream.

Just a few kilometres inland from the sea, the reward is the view of rolling hills, dotted with farmhouses and villages, not so dissimilar to the more famous countryside of Tuscany and Umbria, with rows of orderly fields and crops. Majestic in the background loom the imposing, yet reassuring mountain ranges. In the background, the impressive, cool outline of the jagged peaks.

The Abruzzo hills can offer many surprises to those who want to add a little something to their seaside holiday. In addition to the beauty of the numerous old towns, the memorable taste of traditional cuisine and the quality of the local products, there is also the role played by nature, protected by a network of Nature Parks including "Lago di Penne", "Serranella" on the river Sangro, and the "Sorgenti del Pescara", all very near the coast.

The Abruzzo coast is not just sea, sand and sun: it is also well-equipped to cater to those seeking some sport, some nature or just some fun – riding the waves on windsurfs or paddling quietly along the coast, diving deep down into the rocks to the south, or with the breezing pushing a sailboat up along the coast.

Vasto is in the far south of Abruzzo, on the “Trabocchi coastline”. It is a seaside resort but equally a town of art and culture, built on the remains of a large Roman *municipium*. The modern buildings and historical palazzos were erected over ancient hidden treasures.

Vasto was known as “Histonium” in Roman times and was the capital of the Frentani tribe, who were one of the Italic peoples. The Romans gave the town over to the Arnensis tribe and after the Social War it became a *municipium* of Rome. Between the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, under Augustus and Claudius, local noblemen became important figures in Rome, such as

P. Paquius Scaeva, who was appointed proconsul of the province of Cyprus. Great public buildings were therefore built, enhanced by the commitment of aristocratic families who wished to show off their wealth. During this time an amphitheatre and spas were constructed and an urban water distribution system was put in place. In 346 AD the



town was buried by a terrible landslide and many buildings were abandoned, while others required radical restoration. From then on, the town suffered alternating fortunes, and decline set in when Histonium had a run of misfortunes in the centuries that followed: another terrible landslide in 1457, and the raid by Piali Pascià, a Saracen Turk who laid the town to waste in 1568.

Medieval and modern Vasto were built over the Roman town, often recuperating areas and structures such as today's Rossetti square, whose shape is simply the outline of the Roman amphitheatre.

Many traces remain of the ancient Roman splendours, notwithstanding the passing of almost 2,000 years and the subsequent urban sprawl which saw the destruction of ancient buildings and construction of modern in their place. Numerous archaeological excavations have uncovered many remains, including a sumptuous spa, decorated with splendid mosaics. Roman Histonium's great spa complex was built in the 2nd century AD, when the town was at the peak of its splendour: the remains were unearthed in 1974 when some precarious buildings were being demolished. The excavation brought to light the ancient *praefurnium* – the ingenious system used to heat the old spa buildings – and a room with a mosaic floor depicting fantastic sea creatures. At the end of the 1990s further excavations uncovered a great room decorated with fabulous mosaics, also with animals and sea gods, but the most amazing section is a mosaic of Neptune. The god of the sea appears with a trident in his right hand and a dolphin resting in his left; all around him young girls ride horses amidst imaginary sea animals. The mastery of the artist is incredible, as he succeeded in giving expressions to the figures and animating them, although they were created only with small black and white tesserae. The mosaic floor that came to light in 1974 is in three colours: black, white and brown; it has no human figures but an extraordinary array of mythological beasts, half horse and half fish, as well as dolphins, fishes, squids, mussels, sea urchins and eels. Almost all of the mosaics have been left *in situ* and the





Sailing enthusiasts in particular will love the uncomplicated Abruzzo coast, with trade ports and marinas installed along the whole shoreline, from north to south. The ports begin at Martinsicuro and Giulianova, with excellent berthing and mooring facilities. Then comes

Roseto with a typical marina, followed further south by the bigger trade ports and marinas of Ortona and Vasto. From here it is also possible to visit the splendid Tremiti islands, a Marine Nature Reserve, even just for the day. However, the biggest marina on the Abruzzo coast is at Pescara, where the location, size and services offered make it one of the most important and modern pleasure craft docks in the Mediterranean. Its strategic geographical position means it is well-placed to provide the widest possible choice of sailing destinations: ex-Yugoslavia, Greece, the Tremiti

islands, the Gargano promontory and the Conero riviera, all of which ensured its success even before it was finished. The marina has 180,000 sqm of water and 72,000 sqm of land and bridges, can berth about 1,000 boats and also has a large shopping area. There is a full calendar of sporting and cultural events, all open to the public: regattas, motorboat competitions, music events, fairs, markets, concerts, charity events, sporting events of all types. The lovely marina, with its excellent amenities, is interesting and enjoyable, and is open to the public: it is a great place to stroll on a summer evening, among the piers, boats (often luxury craft) and an assortment of shops.

There are also two large aqua parks to enhance the tourist's summertime experience: one at Tortoreto and the other at Vasto, the latter now one of the biggest in Italy.

An infinite variety of sports, musical events and shows also spice up life in the towns on the Abruzzo riviera (and not just on the coast, since every local village and town can boast its own busy schedule of events). The extensive calendar also includes some nationally and internationally-acclaimed events, like the Pescara International Jazz Festival, which has been one of the most prestigious jazz events in Europe since 1963; the Premio Ennio Flaiano, also in Pescara, is a renowned film festival; the Estate Musicale Frentana, which is a great musical event in the town of Lanciano; then there is the Spoltore Ensemble theatre festival; last but not least – the Premio Michetti, Francavilla's own painting award.

The ancient art of hospitality is expressed at its best in Abruzzo's hotels. The backbone of the area's accommodation facilities is along the coast, with hundreds of hotels and guesthouses that cater to every need: from the most sophisticated amenities to the

From June to September the Abruzzo coast heats up with all manner of events: music, theatre, dance, concerts, shows, sports and cultural events.

A visitor to Abruzzo is spoiled for choice by the array of top quality events on offer.



Of the many unique, wonderful things to see on the Abruzzo coast, there are the famous and picturesque “fishing machines”, located to the south and called *trabocchi*. These are basically fishing huts built entirely of wood and arranged on platforms (from where the fishermen cast their nets into the sea) supported by stilts; there is a long, hazardous walkway, also set on stilts, which connects the shore to the hut and which may be many metres in length. The best time to admire these spectacular fishing devices is on a stormy day, when their astonishing ability to resist rough seas is most evident, despite their fragile, unstable appearance. The origins of the *trabocchi* are uncertain and it is not easy to establish exactly when they were invented. We might imagine they were built so that fish could be caught without going out to sea, since it is easier to fish from a standing position on a walkway connected to dry land.

There is a unique historical note regarding that concept: the first document to speak of the Abruzzo *trabocchi* dates back to 1400 and is signed by father Stefano Tiraboschi, a Celestine monk. In his “Vita Sanctissimi Petri Celestini”, the monk described the time that Pietro da Morrone spent in the monastery of San Giovanni in Venere, in Fossacesia – almost three years, from 1240 to 1243 – and states that the saint climbed the hills to admire the sea “dotted with *trabocchi*”. From this it can be inferred that in 1240 (or at least at the time the biography was drafted) these fishing machines were already widely used. However, researchers do not all agree with this interpretation and some suggest that the original *trabocchi* were invented centuries later.

The first *trabocchi* come into view after Ortona, when the Abruzzo coastline starts to change from the low, sandy beaches of Teramo and Pescara, to a more rugged and jagged profile. The steep cliffs alternate with small coves and many

great outcrops of rock.

Gabriele d’Annunzio was bewitched by this area – in his tragedy “The Triumph of Death”, written in the quiet of his villa concealed amongst the cliffs on this stretch of coast, he wrote “The chain of promontories and crescent-shaped gulfs rendered an image of a succession of offerings, with each inlet holding a cereal treasure. The broom spread its golden mantle over all the coast. A heavy cloud of fragrance rose from each bush, as from a thurible. The air inhaled was as pleasing as a drop of elixir.” Villa Italia, where the “Vate” (as d’Annunzio was known) wrote his verses, still

exists: an easy path leads from the gate of the villa down towards the sea and reaches almost to the Capo Turchino structure, one of the most important along the entire coast and referred to in “The Triumph of Death” as a “machine [...] that seemed to have a life of its own”. A little further ahead, on the main road, the Dannunziano promontory can be found on the left: the most scenic spot in the area and occupied only by a few houses and a restaurant. A little further south, after the Vallevò hamlet, the Punta del Cavalluccio *trabocco* can be seen, beyond the railway line. The beautiful pebble beach and nearby *trabocco* are iconic symbols of this stretch of coast.





most informal accommodation. Large, modern complexes that can accommodate thousands of tourists, ensuring individual attention to each and every one; small, romantic guesthouses where the clients feel like one of the family. Menus range from the best of Italian cuisine to traditional local recipes, all prepared with care and the utmost attention to the quality and authenticity of the ingredients.

All along the Abruzzo coast the hotel system meets all requirements: from the most prestigious, high-end hotels to cosier, family-run establishments. The range is all-embracing: hotels, guesthouses, campsites, restaurants, trattorias, entertainment structures, sports and recreational facilities to satisfy all tastes.



THE CERRANO TOWER

ABRUZZO ITALY 17

This massive tower is located on a splendid stretch of beach between Silvi and Pineto, and was part of great coastal defence system, designed by the Spanish viceroys of Naples, Alvarez de Toledo and Parafan de Ribera – from the mid-1500s – to contrast the devastating Turkish attacks. Overall the system comprised a network of lookout towers arranged at regular distances along the entire coastline of the Kingdom of Naples, each visible to its neighbours so that danger could be signalled immediately.

The Cerrano tower was built in 1568 and has the typical silhouette of vice realm towers. Despite extensive interventions that have raised its height and extended its size, the original core is still clearly visible (two towers very similar to those that must originally have been found near Alba Adriatica – called the “Torre della Vibrata” – and that guarding the port of Vasto, at the Punta Penna headland). The garrison retained its watchtower functions until the end of the 17th century, and later became the property of the marquises of Cermignano. The original tower was a square-based truncated pyramid, with jettying set on sturdy corbels and three machicolations per side, to which a second storey was added in the early 20th century, comprising a square turret with merlons. This conversion work also modified the interior of the building, to create a staircase with several small rooms as deep as the thickness of the walls, with porthole windows. Further extension operations added an L-shaped wing to southeast; in 1982-83 it was restored and is now the location of a Marine Biology Laboratory.

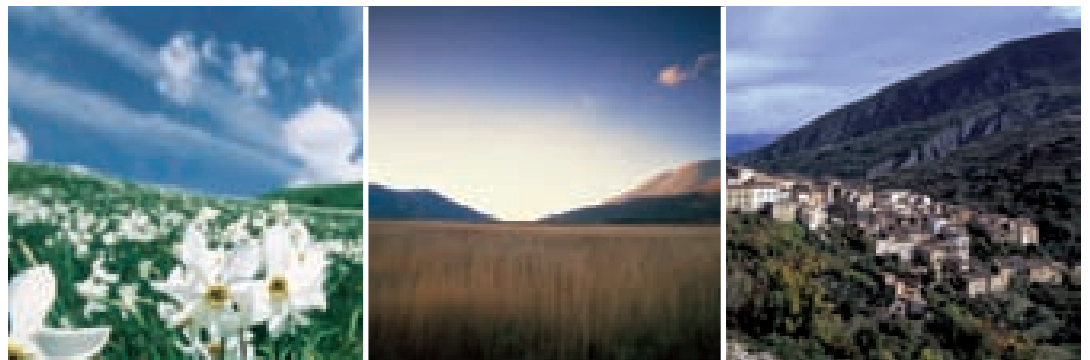






1001 PATHS in the

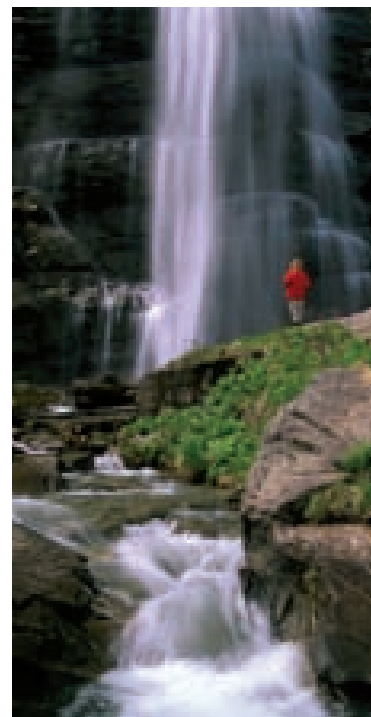
Rugged, noble Gran Sasso, whose gleaming limestone commands the Apennines; just below the north face of the Corno Grande peak we find Calderone, the only Apennine glacier and Europe's southernmost. Campo Imperatore's seemingly endless plateau stretches south of the massif, at a 1,800 metres asl. The Laga mountains are copiously endowed with springs, water courses 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.



Abruzzo mountains

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. Flourishing nature cloaks the entire region with a ripe splendour: the greenest woods and meadows in the slopes; the high-altitude lakes (Campotosto, Scanno, Barrea, Sangro, Casoli, Penne); 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 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.

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.



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 Sangro 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 confluent that take the lake's waters towards the Sagittario valley.

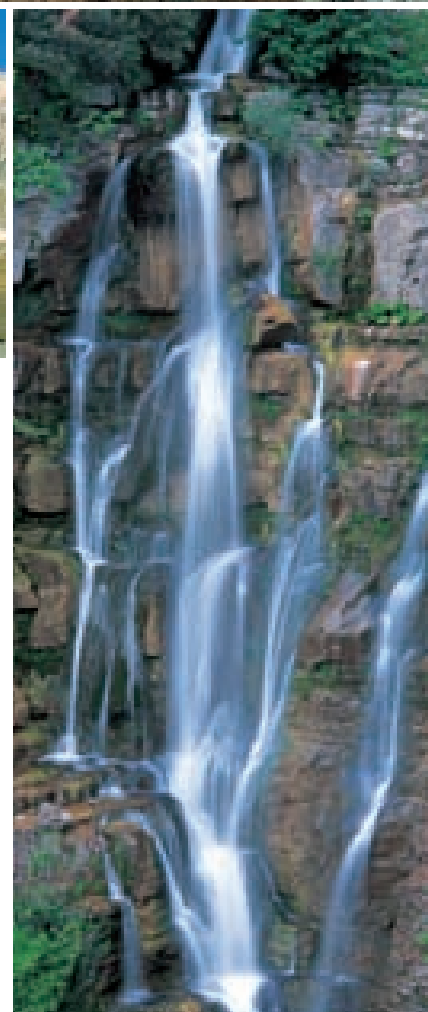
The water height remains stable thanks to the presence of

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.



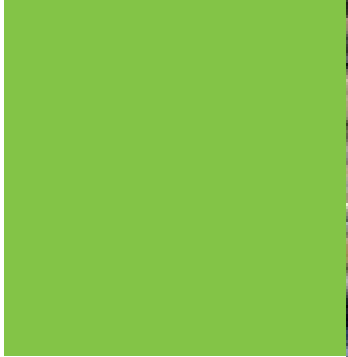


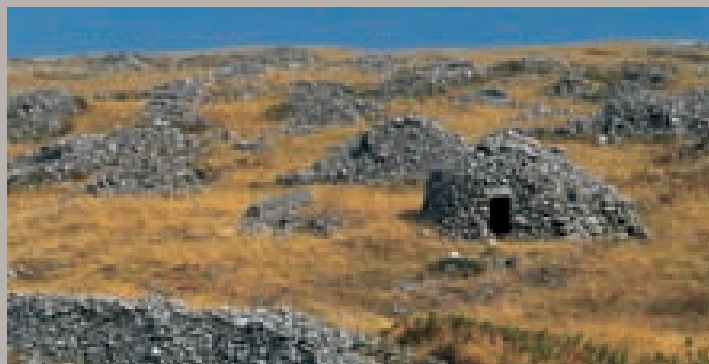
In the first place, nature is sovereign here: the mountains of Abruzzo are the home of four Parks and more than 30 Reserves, so almost half of the region is protected nature. There are then thousands of towns and villages, hugging the hilltops, reliefs, mighty spurs: extraordinary and often very ancient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





In their quest to wring some soil and grazing land from the mountains, the shepherds of Majella wrote a significant chapter of Abruzzo's history in stone, bringing to life a typology of spontaneous architecture that is extremely frequent on local slopes and pastures: the *tholos* huts, known as *pajare* in dialect. A *tholos* is built using an ingenious system of dry stonework that requires no cementing, and is based on a principle of construction that ignores the engineering fundamentals of arches and vaults. In fact, the elevation is achieved by a concentric and tapered overlapping of stone courses: in substance, each new row is simply set on the one below, shifted slightly inwards by a few centimetres. In this way, the final construction is raised as if by magic and at the end only a single stone is set in place to close the pseudo-vault thus realized. The structure does not collapse because each stone is held in place by its neighbours.

A number of clever methods were then invented to create the entrances to the huts: varying from a plain horizontal architrave made from a slab of stone, to various forms of arches or offloading triangles, achieved with a number of stones shored up against one another.

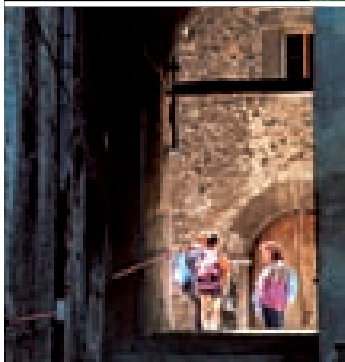
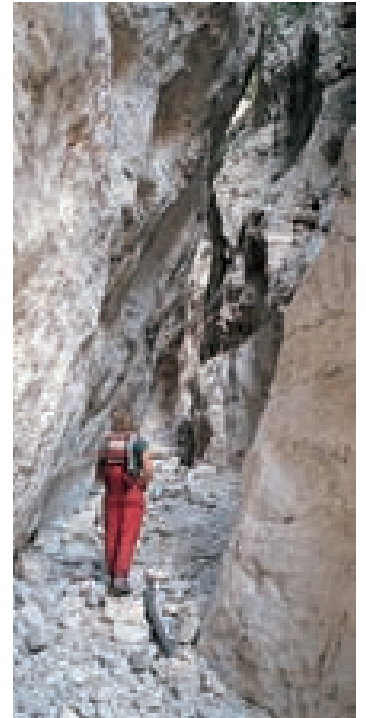
Expert Edoardo Micati undertook lengthy research and identified the huts so that all the *tholos* present on Mount Majella are now catalogued, classified and protected by a special regional law.

Most of those seen today on Majella's slopes were built using the selfsame technique, from the distant past up until the 1950s. In many cases they are still used, mainly by shepherds in summer, but also as barns, stables and stores for farming equipment. A large number have been recovered thanks to recent preservation projects.

To get a closer look, we recommend an easy excursion to the areas where they are most plentiful: Case Pagliari, Fosso Capanna and on Majelletta, around Roccamorice, Cerratina and Fosso Sant'Angelo, near Lettomanoppello, Decontra in the municipality of Caramanico, Valle Giumentina in Abbateggio territory. There are also groups easily visible from the car driving along the road from Roccamorice up towards Majelletta.



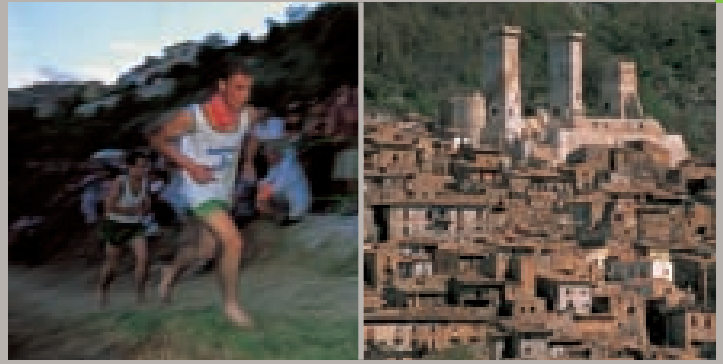
This is mountain Abruzzo: a casket protecting a treasure of unique habitats, deep in the heart of central Italy, so a stone's throw from just about any other urban centre on the peninsula. Precious, protected environments, but now enhanced and exploited intelligently by many types of tourism. Astonishing, fascinating locations, that really do satisfy the desire for adventure, discovery, heartfelt intuition. A real journey of discovery of nature. A journey that today is even easier thanks to the professional skills of mountain and mid-mountain guides, park warders and forest rangers, cooperatives offering tourist services, and of course thanks to the countless marked trails that make excursions of all kinds and all complexities possible: on foot, on horseback, on mountain bikes, a simple stroll, extreme trekking, paths for the physically challenged.



PACENTRO'S BAREFOOT RUNNERS

ABRUZZO ITALY 27

Pacentro has one of the loveliest old centres in Abruzzo: it has survived vital and intact, its charm still expressed in the narrow rippling lanes broken by staircases, houses set one against the other, ancient doorways, sculpted stone. The town is worth visiting at any time of year, but there is one special day in the year, the first Sunday in September, when an age-old barefoot race, called the "Corsa degli Zingari", takes place. In local dialect *zingaro* means someone who is barefoot, and those who will race barefoot down the mountain slopes are the town's young bachelors. No amount of description can render the awesome passion of this race: the expression of bravery and command of pain that these young men achieve, in honour of the Madonna of Loreto, commemorating the flight of Her house, is totally admirable as they hurtle barefoot down, the so-called Pietra Spaccata slope in a crazy dash. These *zingari* run down the steep Colle Ardinghi hillside, covered in trees and bushes, then they take the path that crosses the Vella torrent valley; next, the stony trail that leads back up into the town; finally, they run the last few metres of the race, across the polished stones of the street that leads to the church. The exhaustion, the pain, the suffering that these young men offer up to tradition, are truly terrible: the silent and yet eloquent witness is the marble flooring in the church of Santa Maria di Loreto, which is stained red from the



bloodied feet when all the *zingari* enter. Then the doors are shut behind them, as ritual dictates, with the doctors beginning their task of alleviating the suffering of the young runners. A few minutes pass and the doors are flung open: now the runners are carried in triumph, with the winner at the head of the procession, clutching the role of cloth that is the prize for his efforts. Behind him every other runner, no one is excluded. The town band opens the cortege with a marching tune and spectators mingle in the streets, following the victor as far as his home, where his family awaits him and good wine is offered to everyone, ladled from copper urns. The custom is said to bring good luck for the coming grape harvest.

THE "BRIGANDS' STONE"

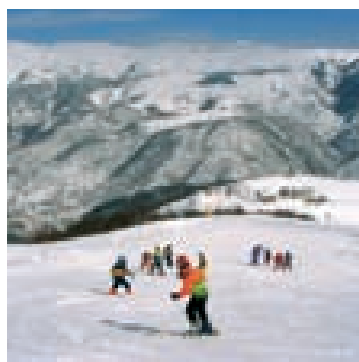
One of the most original and touching historical testimonies to be found on Mount Majella is the so-called "Tavola dei Briganti", a group of limestone slabs that have come to light at high altitude, not far from Selletta Acquaviva, and where many shepherds as well as several brigands have scratched their names and stories, and the symbols of their lives. The "Tavola dei Briganti" is found on Majelletta, just beyond the area called the Blockhaus, which is closely connected with our history. The Blockhaus, of which several sections survive, was actually a fortified outpost, built in 1866 by the troops of the royal house of Savoia to combat the band of brigands in the heart of the territory that they controlled. Beaten and pushed out of their own lands, the brigands would return to mock the Piedmontese soldiers, etching their names under cover of night, leaving their rebellious messages under the very noses of the men stationed in the fortress. Of course not all the inscriptions on the slabs were left by brigands: most were left by shepherds who had always grazed flocks on the slopes and high-altitude mountain pastures. In the long hours of inactivity, spent guarding their sheep, the men would often etch that lovely flat rock, as big as blackboards, with their names and place of birth, and date of their passing. The brigands mingled with this solitary humanity, homesick in their mountain refuges, adding their own messages to prove their mocking proximity to the military.

One fine inscription reads:

READ OF MY MEMORY
DEAR READERS

IN 1820 VITTORIO EMANUELE II, FIRST KING OF ITALY, WAS BORN
IN 1860 WE HAD A KINGDOM OF FLOWERS
NOW WE HAVE THE KINGDOM OF DESPAIR





The biggest ski resorts in the Apennines, hundreds of kilometres of ski runs, excellent standards of snow, well-designed state-of-the-art facilities, a complete, efficient network of accessory structures and services. Abruzzo has no limits if you are a snow aficionado.

The mountains of Abruzzo: the **Mediterranean**

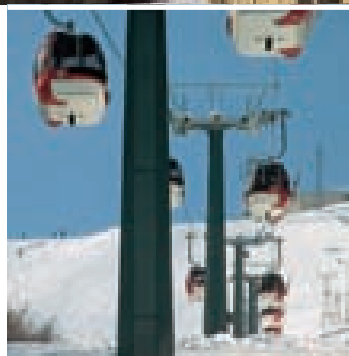
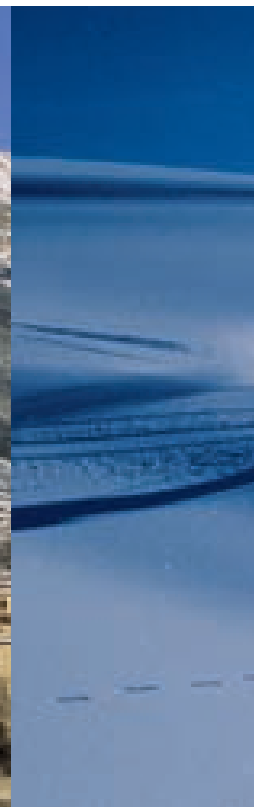


It comes as no surprise to discover that the biggest ski resorts in the Apennines are located in Abruzzo. Hundreds of kilometres of ski runs are available to snow aficionados, with well-designed state-of-the-art facilities and a complete, efficient network of accessory services that has had an enormous impact on the survival of many of the surrounding towns, which have turned themselves around to valorize the snow and make a living from it. Thanks to the modern, efficient inland road network, and extensive upgrading of snowplough equipment (by Italian road maintenance authorities, local authorities and ski facility management consortia), all resorts are now always easy to reach. Then the excellence of the snow on the slopes, often lasting well into spring, makes Abruzzo ski resorts attractive destinations for the classic skiing holiday, where beginners can take lessons from qualified instructors, found in all the towns. Most facilities are in the province of L'Aquila, with good amenities also found on the

Teramo side of Gran Sasso and on Majella. The most important resort is at the Alto Sangro-Altipiani Maggiori d'Abruzzo ski district: it is the biggest on the Apennines and ranks seventh at national level for overall quality.

This district includes the municipalities of Roccaraso, with its elegant boutiques and the largest sports facilities; Rivisondoli, famous for a celebrated Nativity Tableau; and Pescocostanzo whose historical centre is an extraordinary treasure of Renaissance and Baroque monuments. The district is managed completely by the Ski-Pass Alto Sangro consortium, which operates brand new installations, one of the most modern in Europe, thanks to which numerous ski runs are served for all types of needs, including beginners and international competitions. Abruzzo's extensive and varied panorama of skiing territories offers resorts that are ideal for the skier with sporting inclinations, and others that are more suited to beginners and family groups.

has a snowy heart



Downhill skiing resorts in Abruzzo

San Giacomo - Monte Piselli

Prati di Tivo

Prato Selva

Campo Imperatore - Monte Cristo

Campo Felice

Ovindoli - La Magnola

Marsia

Campo Rotondo

Pescasseroli

Scanno

Roccaraso

Rivisondoli

Pescocostanzo

Pizzoferrato and Gamberale

Passolanciano - La Majelletta

Campo di Giove

Pacentro - Passo San Leonardo

Moreover, on Abruzzo's "white" panorama, winter sports include a lot more than just downhill skiing: cross-country, snowboarding, ski touring, snowrafting, sledging, telemark skiing, are all to be found in the region's winter programme, and all can be enjoyed in total safety.

For instance there are an infinity of trails for fascinating and suggestive cross-country skiing.

The circuits in the ancient Sant'Antonio woods at Pescocostanzo, or those that wind their way through the beech woods in Abruzzo National Park, offer a memorable spectacle to the keen skier.

Those who prefer their cross-country off the beaten track, on immaculate snow, will be spoiled for choice. Splendid itineraries are found more or less everywhere on Abruzzo's mountains and in its valleys: worthy of note are the Campo Imperatore plateau, the shores of lake Campotosto, or the boundless slopes that cross the thick beech groves in the Chiarano valley.

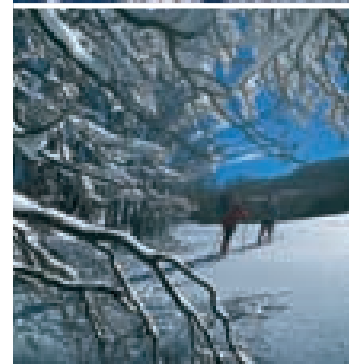
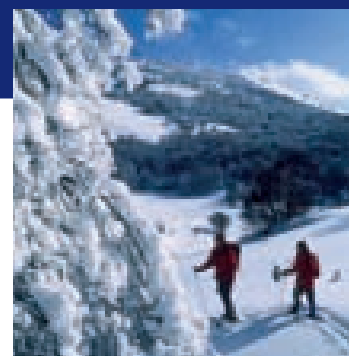
Even fans of dog-sledging will find it easy to practise their favourite sport in this area: the energy of a team of huskies can be unleashed across a landscape that conjures up the Great North, but in the warm Mediterranean sunlight of Abruzzo's plateaux. The dog-team driver who travels across this flat vastness cannot fail to be enchanted by the view of Corno Grande's snow-capped spires at Campo Imperatore, or the gentle slopes that frame the Cinque Miglia plain.

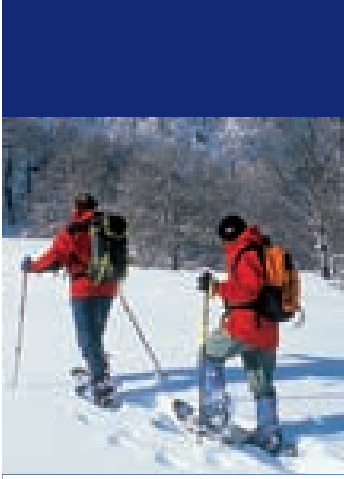


The underpinning to winter tourism in Abruzzo is the combination of excellent local resorts, the quality of the environment and sheer human warmth.

Then there is ski touring to be had on the faces of Gran Sasso or Majella's vast terrace overlooking the sea, or gazing on to other peaks; snowboarding can be practised on the Aremogna slopes at Roccaraso, at Ovindoli on Mount Velino, Passo Lanciano, Prati di Tivo, or any of the other countless ski resorts. All over Abruzzo lovers of snow will be able to gratify their passion or learn new problem-free ways of doing so, thanks to the numerous schools and well-trained ski instructors, the excellent mountain and mid-mountain guides, the many dynamic associations of aficionados who are keen to try out the latest trend, and last but not least, an efficient mountain rescue service whose reliability has been proven in all sorts of emergencies. Even those without ski equipment, who want to "sample" winter sports before investing, can find everything they need here, in the widespread network of equipment for hire, so every visitor can enjoy the Abruzzo snow properly kitted out, whilst cafeterias and restaurants located alongside the ski runs will ensure no one goes hungry and with the bonus of a hint of a mountain tan.

Winter has a special feel in Abruzzo and even the most distracted tourist will not fail to notice: the region's mountain towns and villages, none very far from the ski slopes, take on a fairytale atmosphere as the snowy mantle falls and casts its spell on those who are staying there.





Local traditions are alive and intact here, and will engage and charm visitors. For instance, every 5 January for the last 50 years, the mystery of the Nativity has been re-enacted against a unique backdrop on the plain below Rivisondoli, the town that has become famous worldwide for its Nativity Tableau. Not only local townsfolk take part in the event, as hundreds of tourists flock to the evening, dressed in historical costumes of shepherds, Roman soldiers and artisans, thus entering into the spirit of the life and traditions of the community that welcomes them.

Then there is the sturdy and genuine culinary tradition of the Abruzzo mountains: a triumph of lamb and of pork charcuterie, preserved and transformed in endless ways, like the tasty Campotosto *mortadella* (known as “mule’s balls” for the unusual





shape and size); or *ventricina* from the Upper Vasto district (whose origin is disputed by Guilmi and Palmoli), a red shoulder pork product scented with pistachio, wild fennel, mild and hot red pepper. The ski resorts of the Upper Sangro, on the other hand, are close to Pettorano sul Gizio, just a few kilometres down valley, where steaming slices of *polenta rognosa* will soon deal with the cold.

On the last Sunday of each year a festival is dedicated to this simple but fantastic dish (traditionally eaten by the town's woodcutters and charcoal burners, requiring not only skill, but also strength to cook, so generally entrusted to the men folk). A strong and very personal cuisine, charming traditional celebrations, snowy slopes and state-of-the-art facilities make Abruzzo the perfect place for an unforgettable winter holiday.



THE RIVISONDOLI NATIVITY TABLEAU



Rivisondoli's Nativity Tableau is the most famous in Abruzzo and was established immediately after WWII, set against the backdrop of the recently-bombed town, and expressing the desire for rebirth that hallmarked the 1940s. This was the scenario in which the local authorities of the time, meeting to develop a project that might drive the economic recovery of their town, welcomed with open arms the idea put forward by journalist Renato Caniglia, a Rivisondoli man. The town is located on the slopes of Mount Calvario, the perfect setting for a "crèche". Why not bring life to this scenario with a "living" Nativity scene? Unfortunately the execution of the idea was fraught with difficulty and required a heavy financial commitment, especially for that particular historical moment. Finally, however, the scheme overcame the hurdles and on 6 January 1951, Rivisondoli's first Nativity Tableau was staged.

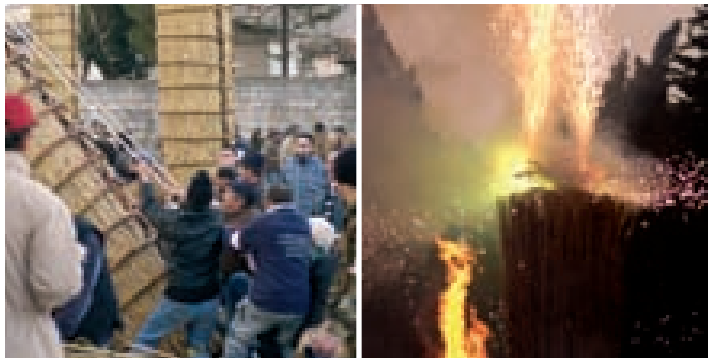
The first religious performance took place on the parvis of the parish church, in a tiny space that held few spectators, yet the intimate atmospheres and evocation of the Nativity through its salient episodes aroused deep sentiment in the souls of those in attendance. For over half a century this same emotion can be experienced every year.

Over the years the performance was extended and new figures were added, more actors, more settings, moving down to the foot of the town so that its architecture served as a backdrop to the scenes. Each year, on the eve of the event, preparations reached fever pitch. The women making costumes for the occasion, the children dressed as shepherd boys, the old shepherds seeking out traditional decorations, the young folk who took the roles of Roman soldiers, the Three Kings or angels, rehearsed with serious dignity. The entire town was a stage on which the actors rehearsed their roles, with a disinterested, sensitive commitment that is possible only if the most genuine spirit and sentiment are concerned.

Many years have passed since that remote 1951: various directors have enhanced the setting and modern technology is used to achieved light and sound effects, the costumes and garb have been improved, the number of participants (including actors not from Rivisondoli) has grown. The young woman who plays the Virgin Mary is chosen in a special competition held on 8 December, whilst the role of the Baby Jesus is still "reserved" for the smallest baby in the town, at least in this not cutting the cord that indissolubly binds Rivisondoli to its Nativity Tableau.

THE FARCHIE OF FARA FILIORUM PETRI

ABRUZZO ITALY 35



Fara Filiorum Petri, an old town of Longobard origins, with many of its ancient buildings still intact, owes its fame to the traditional festival called *Le Farchie*, held each January in honour of St. Anthony Abbot, who is much worshipped in the towns of Abruzzo for his intercession in protecting the good health of livestock.

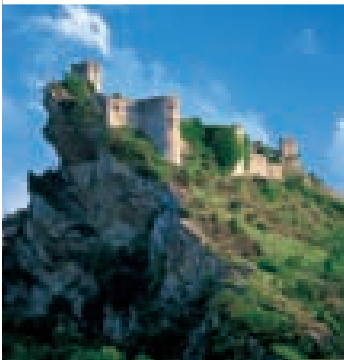
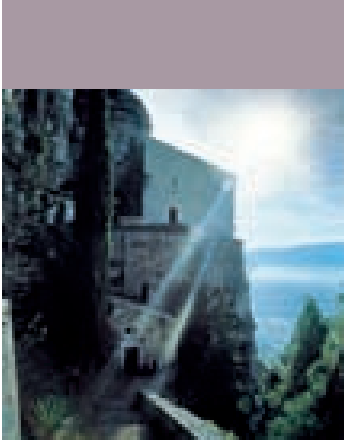
Thus, the inhabitants of Fara celebrate the feast day of St. Anthony by burning the *farchie*, enormous bundles of canes with a circumference in excess of a metre and often more than ten metres in height. Their name comes from an Arabic word, *afaca*, which means torch. Fire is used as a symbolic element in rites linked to the worship of St Anthony Abbot, common throughout the Mediterranean, but the *farchie* of Fara are distinctive for their size, for their number – 12 in total, one for each town district – and for the huge number of people who take part in the event. The roots of this tradition lie in pre-Christian agricultural rites and probably originate in the cult of sacred fire, a ritual of purification and rebirth celebrated by the rural populations of ancient Abruzzo, which was then recovered through a historic event adopted into popular tradition.

This occurred between 1798 and 1799: the French armies that had arrived in Italy, in the wake of the Revolution, advanced swiftly along the peninsula. In about mid-December 1798 the

military were about to enter Abruzzo, and more specifically Civitella del Tronto, in Teramo territory. The French were in no way intimidated by the Bourbon army attempting a resistance, and they proceeded south without great difficulty. On Christmas eve of that year they entered Chieti. The inland area of the province organized resistance that ended in a massacre at Guardiagrele. It is on the Guardiagrele road that Fara Filiorum Petri lies, and the inhabitants, barricaded into their homes, awaited the enemy invasion. On the night of 16 January 1799, the miracle occurred: the woods that surround the town of Fara, at that time a feud of the Colonna princes, caught fire and the trees burning at sunset looked like enormous warriors. Confronted with this sight, the French preferred to bypass the town and headed off towards other locations; the people of Fara attributed this prodigy to the intercession of St. Anthony Abbot. From that moment on, every 16 January, the miraculous fire has been symbolically re-enacted during the *farchie* by the inhabitants of the 12 districts that make up the town. A few days before the event each district begins to build its own torch or *farchia*. Traditionally the canes must be procured in secret, so from early January the young men of the town begin to gather material, first from the countryside surrounding Pretoro, Roccamontepiano, Casacanditella, San Martino sulla Marrucina, Buccianico, whilst others undertake to keep guard over it. During the cold January evenings, townsfolk gather to build the giant torches. Early in the afternoon of 16 January, each district begins to carry its torch to the small church dedicated to St. Anthony. In the past they would be transported on carts and even though tractors now are used, this in no way detracts from the festive atmosphere that engages adults and children alike. The event's various stages of preparation are accompanied by countless accordion players, who sing the orations of St. Anthony. Once the torches have reached the church, they are hoisted into place with the help of ropes, and then they are set alight, causing the firecrackers inside to explode. As night falls, the towering cane torches are a memorable sight and the rest of the evening is spent singing and dancing, amidst general merriment, with the traditional consumption of wine and biscuits. When the fire has destroyed most of the torches, festivities continue in each district, where the inhabitants

Abruzzo

A GREAT



Known worldwide for its nature, Abruzzo's peculiar and intact landscape is nonetheless a scenario with works of art and monuments, like some great open-air museum, open all hours. Alongside the legendary sites of Rocca Calascio, the extraordinary old town of Pescocostanzo, Chieti's Museo Archeologico Nazionale, L'Aquila's mighty 1500s castle, the traveller will be struck by the dozens and dozens of less famous marvels, scattered throughout the region.

Restorations of churches and castles, the reorganization and valorization of archaeological sites and sanctuaries, the creation of large and small museums, the new Visitor Centres in the Parks, have all contributed to the list of things to see, growing lengthier each passing year. This is also part of the great charm of the Italy's "green region".



open-air museum

Ancient Abruzzo

The stately *Warrior of Capestrano* is probably the most famous and iconic symbol of Abruzzo. This statue, dated 6th century BC, was found by chance in 1934, close to a major road across the Apennines. It is one of the best-known works of ancient Abruzzo, whose indomitable Italic peoples were the most fearful thorn in the side of the Romans for many centuries, and who coined and used the word "Italia" for the first time, describing their confederation. Their necropolises and their settlements continue to bring forth astonishing discoveries for archaeologists, often revealing absolute masterpieces like an ivory funeral bed, weapons and their unmistakable disc-armour. Equally rich is the prehistoric picture of Abruzzo, whose traces emerge mainly on Mount Majella and the Fucino plain, testifying to a unique aspect of the region: that it has been uninterruptedly settled by human beings for more than 700,000 years! The remains of Roman Abruzzo – the ruins of *Alba Fucens*, *Peltuinum*, *Amiternum*, *Juvanum* – are rendered even more suggestive by their spectacular surroundings.



THE FOSSA NECROPOLIS

Second in size only to the necropolis of Campovalano, the Fossa site is considered the most important Italic burial ground in the region, simply because it was used continuously by the inhabitants of the nearby – and now vanished – town of Aveia for almost a millennium. At the dawn of its history, between the 10th and 11th centuries BC, when the tombs were covered by great tumuli with stone encirclements, Fossa was the site of a phenomenon that has no equivalent in Abruzzo. Around the outer edge of the tumulus rows of great stones, resembling Celtic menhirs, were arranged in heights that decreased as the distance from the tomb increased. It was when a plough hit upon one of these great stones that they were discovered. To-date over 500 tombs have been revealed and many are tumulus burials, covered by a barrow of earth delimited with stones. Fossa, however, became famous most of all for the chamber tombs, outright stone houses, and the discovery there of the spectacular bone funeral beds: a triclinium design decorated with precious sculpted bone lamina.





Medieval and Renaissance Abruzzo

Splendid medieval churches at the centre of lonely highlands, sanctuaries concealed in mountain grottoes, mighty abbeys and massive castles: these are the most original elements that typify the landscape of Abruzzo. The Middle Ages, in fact, were the period that left the most evident and suggestive traces, and which are impressed forever in the eyes and hearts of visitors. Abruzzo's mountains played a fundamental military and economic role in the Middle Ages, thus explaining the extraordinary flourishing of works of art here. All along the Apennine crest and in its towns and villages, there was an explosion of Abruzzo Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance castles and churches, often embellished by the works of talented artists: the vast capital produced in the region during the era of stock rearing was actually invested in these lavish and enduring results.

Abruzzo from the 1500s to the present

Thanks to its central position on the peninsula and the hinging role it played for centuries between north and south, Europe and the Mediterranean, Abruzzo's art history condenses the Lombard and Neapolitan, Tuscan and Apulian, Franco-German and Spanish, Balkan and Oriental influences that arrived here, with utterly original and cosmopolitan results.

Nonetheless, despite transhumant sheep farming exercising strong influence on the region's economy up until the Unification of Italy, the evidence of buildings and figurative arts that was left on the mountains and hills of Abruzzo gradually declined as the centuries passed. In fact, by the time the 1800s arrived and Italy was a united



country, art had ground to a halt and a new generation of artists, musicians and writers launched the region's cultural and artistic contributions with renewed impact: Francesco Paolo Michetti, Gabriele d'Annunzio, Basilio Cascella, Francesco Paolo Tosti, Antonio De Nino, Teofilo Patini and, in the 1900s, Ignazio Silone and Ennio Flaiano, made a decisive contribution to the culture of the newly-born Italian state. An encounter with their works is crucial for understanding the landscapes, the nature and the peoples of this land.

Museums in Abruzzo

A successful and spectacular overview of Abruzzo's historical and art heritage is to be found in its extensive network of varied and admirable museums. There are great collections dedicated to archaeology, museums of classical art, those dedicated to folklore and the lives of local farmers and shepherds, not to mention numerous exhibition centres for modern and contemporary art. Abruzzo's regional museum system boasts some excellent locations: the great Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo in L'Aquila, or Chieti's Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Pescara's Museo delle Genti d'Abruzzo, as well as two splendid museums dedicated to Castelli's precious pottery: one in Castelli itself and the other in Loreto Aprutino (the famous Acerbo collection). Above all,



however, it is the huge number of local museums, often of unexpected beauty and abundance, that enhance the entire territory and make it an outright "multisite museum". The Museo Capitolare of Atri, the Museo Archeologico of Teramo, Chieti's Museo della Civitella, the Museo dello Splendore in Giulianova, the Museo della Civiltà Contadina in Picciano, the Museo Civico in Sulmona, the castle-museum of Crecchio, are just a selection of the marvels that this territory can offer.

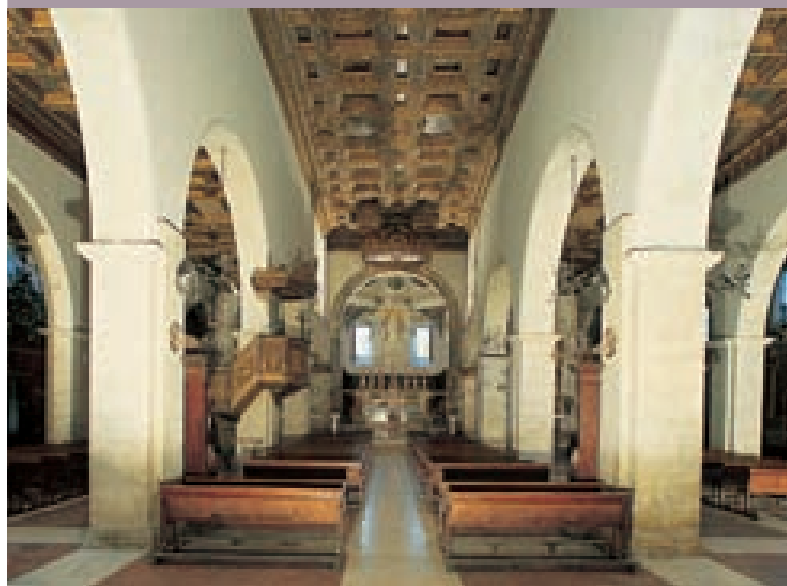
Folklore

In all seasons of every year, in every town and village of Abruzzo, in every one of the 12 months, folklore traditions and festivals are ongoing, involving the entire community. Often of very ancient origin, Christian beliefs and pagan cults have coexisted since time immemorial. For the visitor these are not simply occasions for some fun (brass bands, funfairs, fireworks that often go on well into the night), but also a deeply fascinating moment for "discovering" ancestral rites like *Le Farchie* at Fara Filiorum Petri or *I Serpari* of Cocullo.

The cycle of popular traditions begins in spring with the religious plays for Holy Week. On Easter Sunday, in Sulmona, the famous "Madonna che scappa" pageant is held: a religious

THE COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF PESCOCOSTANZO

Pescocostanzo is one of the loveliest towns in Abruzzo and this is because of its ancient architecture: the Renaissance mansions, the lavish and splendid churches, of which the museum-church of Santa Maria del Colle is especially deserving of note. The first ascertained data about the church are found in the 15th century, but it reached the peak of its splendour in the 1700s, with the embellishment of its interiors. The work was carried out by countless craftsmen, mainly from Pescocostanzo, showing a lively community of artists to have been present in the town, essentially in the wake of the great Baroque architect Cosimo Fanzago. The magnificence of the decoration and the number of works of art – of all types, including numerous masterpieces – found here is astonishing.





PALAZZO DE POMPEIS, TORRE DE' PASSERI

A stately residence, at number 10 of piazza Plebiscito, owned by the de Pompeis family, and whose interior has preserved the furnishings and atmosphere of a provincial noble mansion of the Neoclassical period.

event whose culminating moment is at midday, in the vast and exquisite piazza Garibaldi, when the Virgin Mary “dashes” forward to meeting her resurrected Son.

The fil rouge that connects Abruzzo's folklore and popular traditions to the history and culture of its people is even more evident in the events organized throughout the month of May, especially those linked to the worship of St. Dominic, held in Villalago, Pretoro, Palombaro, Villamagna, Lama dei Peligni, Pizzoferrato. The most spectacular, however, is the Cocullo event, on the first Thursday of the month, now broadcast on television worldwide, during which the statue of the saint is carried in procession, literally draped in snakes. Also in May, on Whit Monday, the town of Loreto Aprutino celebrates a centuries-old ritual of a genuflecting ox, of pagan origin but associated with the patron saint of the town, Zopito, since the 1700s.

Through the summer there are endless patron saint feast days, culinary galas, enchanting sea processions (held in almost every coastal town). The most important summer event is held on 28-29 August, in L'Aquila: the “Perdonanza Celestiniana”, which attracts pilgrims from every part of the world.

The common denominator of winter festivals is fire, for its magical,

propitiatory significance. Huge bonfires are lit during the winter solstice, to warm “Mother Earth” and light up the long, icy nights in the towns of Abruzzo. The effect is spellbinding since the atmosphere that it creates carries those present into a dreamlike dimension, where time stands still. Precisely what happens in Scanno, for the feast day of St. Martin, on 11 November, when the *Glorie* are lit; in Pescasseroli on Christmas night, when the *Tomba* is lit in the square in front of the church; in Alfedena and Ateleta, on 17 January, the feast day of St. Anthony Abbot, when huge bonfires are lit in the piazza; or in Fara Filiorum Petri, on 16 January, again in honour of St. Anthony Abbot, protector of the home and of livestock, when huge cane torches called *farchie* are prepared and burned.

Applied arts

Like all of the regions that crossed the threshold of modernity barely half a century ago, Abruzzo has also retained an extensive and varied craft tradition, which includes wrought iron and copper, textiles and lace, wood and stone carving, goldsmithery and pottery. The finest quality and the most original of the craft items are certainly gold jewellery, lace and pottery. Extremely refined pillow lace and splendid gold and silver jewellery are produced in Pescocostanzo and Scanno, modelled on ancient designs and often using filigree. One well-known item is the *presentosa*, the brooch that symbolises love for all Abruzzo women.

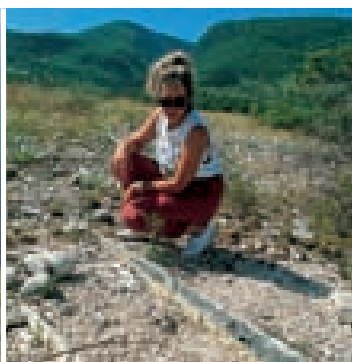
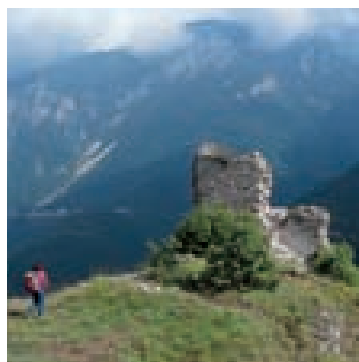
Pottery, which has been a typical product in Abruzzo since the





THE GROTTA-SANCTUARY OF LISCIA

The grotto-sanctuary of Liscia is one of the most evocative of all those found all along the Apennines, dedicated to the worship of St. Michael the Archangel. This grotto is the destination of many worshippers, who come from all over Abruzzo and also from neighbouring Molise; the ancient rite of drinking water said to be miraculous, that springs from inside the grotto, takes place twice a year. The site is documented as being a place of popular devotion since the 1600s, when the d'Avalos family – the feudal lords of Monteodorisio – ordered a chapel to be built in front of the entrance, so a statue of the saint could be housed there. On 8 May and 29 September, believers will carry out a series of touching rituals, including rubbing against the rock walls, dabbing handkerchiefs or religious items against them; then they drink the spring water that drips from the stalactites, believed to be an excellent remedy against various ailments. The pilgrims trust in the saint's healing powers and invoke his grace, as can be seen from the many ex voto that have been left in the grotto.





Middle Ages, has its capital in Castelli, which is one of the most important production centres in Europe; its Renaissance and Baroque pieces, once coveted and sought after by many of Europe's princely courts, are now included in collections in some of the most prestigious museums worldwide.

The castles

Another of Abruzzo's peculiarities, one which catches the eye simply by driving along the region's motorways, is the large number of castles that can be seen everywhere. We might even say that every town, dominant peak, pass or promontory seems to have its own tower, castle, or fortified boundary walls. The historical reasons are easy to guess: a lengthy period of danger, local and foreign, forced every community to plan its defence. What interests us most now, however, is that this makes Abruzzo the biggest and most complete open-air museum of military

architecture in Italy. In point of fact, it boasts at least one, good quality, example of all types of known fortification. Moreover, many of them also preserved intact their surrounding territory, hence their original context.

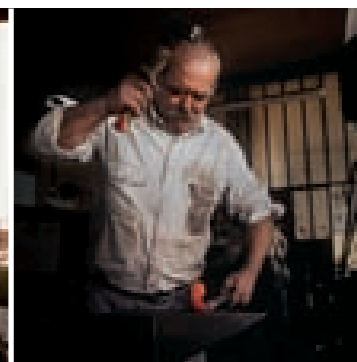
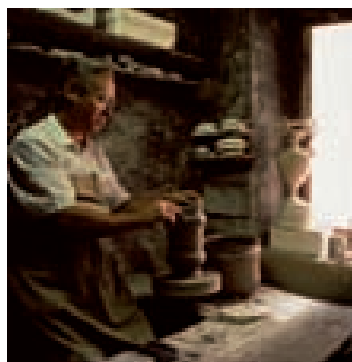
The most striking example is certainly the extraordinary 13th-century fortress of Rocca Calascio: its perfectly symmetrical, unadorned shape and its rational architectural layout, speak not only of confident design, but equally of a conscious aspiration for expression, making this one of Europe's most beautiful and enchanting castles. It was built at 1,500 m above sea level, in a position that commands the entire underlying valley, with a panorama over the mountains that is absolutely breathtaking, timeless and intact. It is difficult to imagine a more majestic castle than this, the distant horizon defining its furthest boundary. The magical location truly expresses the concept of being lost in time, a feeling that more than any other characterizes inland Abruzzo, and enchants visitors.





The old towns

Almost every town in Abruzzo, especially those inland (which is where most are located), share a characteristic trait: they are located on a hilltop, huddled beneath a castle, and with a church, a town square, and the houses sloping down towards the valley, grouped together for protection. Their origin is mainly medieval, for it was in the Middle Ages that Abruzzo began to take on this unique and distinctive appearance, that it has successfully preserved, almost unaltered, to the present day, creating the sensation of a landscape frozen in time. A visit to Abruzzo's ancient mountain hamlets is like knocking on the door of a different world, where we feel the passing of time is marked by the chiming of a clock tower; where families still leave the front door keys on the outside, where we are immediately greeted as old friends, and the people are down-to-earth with little time to waste, and the pace of local life leads us to rediscover pleasures we thought forever lost, where the recipes and typical local products very often are memorable surprises.



CASTELLI, A MAJOLICA CAPITAL

Castelli is a small and colourful village on the slopes of Gran Sasso, known for centuries as one of the Italian capitals of pottery production. Through the late Middle Ages, the Renaissance and Baroque periods, its kilns produced absolute masterpieces of hand-painted majolica, now found in collections and museums worldwide. The artists of Castelli were outright dynasties, families like the Pompei, Grue, Gentili, Cappelletti and Fuina, whose names went down in art history.

Nowadays, the art of pottery is alive as never before in Castelli, constantly innovating its production without ever betraying its roots. Furthermore, an important craft school has been established for potters, alongside a huge museum, whilst nearby the "cona" or country church of San Donato has a ceiling decorated in priceless and lovely ceramic tiles, dating back to 1615, defined by some as the "Sistine Chapel of Italian majolica"



The hermitages

We can only say that we have visited Abruzzo completely and, above all, say that we have “understood” this region, after we come into contact with the most representative aspect of its culture, seamlessly interwoven with its territory: the hermitages. The most primeval, instinctive and immediate manner for comprehending the great role that nature has played in developing the region’s spiritual profile, precisely and especially because of its “divinity”, is to seek out at least one of the countless retreats that are found throughout the Abruzzo mountains.

Even the most distracted or inattentive visitor will be astonished by the sense of true Christian faith rooted almost tangibly in the most ancestral paganism: an inextricable fusion of the adoration of God and the adoration of nature. It is no coincidence that

archaeologists have shown that many of the retreats in Abruzzo have been used as religious sites uninterrupted tens of thousands of years, and in fact the various religions have simply “succeeded” one another, like the tenants of a house. These sanctuaries are concentrated mainly on Majella, the “mother mountain” of the Abruzzo people. The region has more than 100 hermitages and rock churches, partly concealed by woods and rocks, or actually built into caves that are redolent with mystery. The overall effect is one of striking loveliness and charisma: splendid, delicate as the wild orchids that bloom all around them. Abruzzo’s hermitages appear unexpectedly to the visitor; perfect images of ascetic serenity, bathed in the silence of purest nature.

A trip out to these retreats is also the perfect opportunity for



SANTO STEFANO DI SESSANIO

This is one of Italy’s best-preserved medieval villages, but more than this, it is also to be found in a timeless and dazzling panorama of intact Apennine mountains. The effect, all in all, is breathtaking.

Santo Stefano is built amidst gentle foothills on the western edge of the Campo Imperatore plateau, at 1,250 metres asl; the noble stone houses cling together as protection against the cold and attacks. This village was a Medici feud, for one source of the family’s wealth came from the wool produced on the Abruzzo mountains. Nowadays the old centre has been converted into a cutting-edge European multi annexe hotel experience, where the houses and the mansions have been perfectly refurbished to create a high-end hotel hospitality system.



lovely, not overly tiring, walks around the Abruzzo landscape, to explore its nature: in fact, although they are quite isolated, they are nonetheless quite easy to reach (regular pilgrimages to these destinations are often groups of senior citizens, some quite elderly). Perfect examples are the Serramonacesca sanctuary of Sant'Onofrio, under the enormous rock deep in the woods, with narrow tunnels penetrating the mountain; that of Celestine V, on Mount Morrone, set like an eagle's nest on a massive rock face, dominating Val Peligna; the sanctuary of San Bartolomeo di Legio, camouflaged in the wall of a wild ravine near Roccamorice; the San Franco hermitage on Gran Sasso, with its miraculous waters, or that of San Venzio, near the Aterno gorge, with its miraculous stones; or even Balsorano's enormous, startling Sant'Angelo grotto, burning bright with thousands and thousands of candles.



CIVITELLA DEL TRONTO

The great fortress that stood guard over the northern boundary of the Kingdom of Naples soars majestic on the tall hill dominating the mid-Tronto valley.

As early as the 12th century, Civitella had proved the strategic significance of its position, and Angevin and Aragonese rule had reinforced its system of walls and towers. In the 15th century a castle was added and this was the basis for the fortress that later developed. The last episode to demonstrate the impregnability of Civitella was the famous 1557 siege, during which French troops were beaten back. Well aware of the fact that the bastion was the vice realm's most important stronghold, the Spanish king Philip II of Hapsburg, decided to reinforce its potential further, turning it into a proper fortress. During its history it enjoyed many moments of glory, making a heroic resistance to the 1806 siege that occurred during the Napoleonic invasion, and again against the Piedmontese army, who besieged it at length in 1860-61. Nevertheless, it was at the end of this assault that the fortress finally capitulated and was dismantled. In the years that followed, the people of Civitella pillaged the ruins for building materials, and it was then abandoned for many years, until the 1970s when it was radically restored and is now open to the public.



Mediterranean ingredients and aromas, creative ranges, original recipes and typical produce, rooted deep in agricultural life: the secret of Abruzzo fare lies in an ability to evolve sumptuous simplicity from the dignified poverty of the original ingredients. Abruzzo offers not only its rich menu of recipes but also an extensive range of typical products, as refined as they are unique, just like its wines and oils: enjoyed by connoisseurs all over the world. Nor could there be a better way of taking home the best of this region.

SKILLS AND SAVOURS



A holiday in Abruzzo not only reveals a territory that is mostly unspoilt, it will also explore the bounty of a solid ancient culinary tradition, mainly based on the most typical food resources in each area, and now fondly restored to the menus of many of the region's restaurants.

There are pasta dishes that include not only the renowned *maccheroni alla chitarra*, but also the laudable *scrippelle 'mbusse* – slim crêpes filled with grated pecorino cheese and sprinkled with cinnamon, served in boiling broth – and the famous *timballo*, also made with crêpes. Last but not least, the unique dish called *le virtù*, a typical Teramo recipe of very ancient origin, prepared with legumes and cereals left over from winter provisions, cooked with fresh spring vegetables.

Abruzzo confectionery includes: *pizza di Pasqua*, a leavened cake that is blessed in church on Easter night; *ferratelle* (also called *neole* or *pizzelle*), waffles made using a rectangular iron heated over a flame; Sulmona sugared almonds; *calgiunitti*, cushions of fried pasta filled with jam, chickpeas, candied fruit, chopped pine nuts and



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.

of Abruzzo



walnuts, made on Christmas Eve; *cicerchiata*, rounds of fried pasta balls then mixed with candied fruit and honey, eaten at Carnival time with the equally delicious *frappe*.

Nor should we overlook the excellent extra virgin olive oils and DOC wines, red Montepulciano d'Abruzzo and white Trebbiano d'Abruzzo, whose quality is now acknowledged worldwide.

To finish off a meal, we might be tempted by herbal distillates and liqueurs like the renowned *Centerbe*, *nocino* and *genziana*. Less famous but extremely popular is *ratafia*, a liqueur made from sour cherries fermented in the sun.

The sheer number of cooks and chefs from Abruzzo who now work throughout Italy and abroad proves the culinary importance of this region that extends from the Apennines to the Adriatic.

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.

Extra virgin 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 (especially in Loreto Aprutino, Campli, Moscufo, Lanciano, Fossacesia and Guardiagrele) 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.

Pasta

Abruzzo is the home to one of the world's pasta-making capitals: Fara San Martino, a village at the bottom of Majella's eastern



slope, where the purest mountain water fostered the installation of a flourishing specialist industry in historical times, and which has now become an international market leader with its famous and popular products.

The top-quality durum wheat from the hills and Abruzzo's clear mountain waters have made pasta the sovereign of regional cuisine. The home-made pasta also includes the famous *maccheroni alla chitarra*, whose name comes from the wooden framed threaded with steel wire, found in every regional kitchen, called *chitarra* or "guitar", which is used to cut the dough.

Typical cured meats

Pork processing here produces some excellent mountain 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.

Typical 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 noteworthy version of such cheese 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 *caprino*, to be eaten freshly made. A combination of cow's milk and ewe's milk is used to produce *caciotta*, sometimes flavoured with local 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.

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 Navelli plateau, surrounded by the Gran Sasso and Sirente massifs, is the core production area for one of Abruzzo's most fascinating traditional products. PDO L'Aquila saffron, deemed to be the world's best, is made from the whole dried stigmas of *Crocus sativus*, grown in the municipalities of Navelli, Civitaretenga, Caporciano, San Pio delle Camere and Prata d'Ansidonia.



In Villa Santa Maria culinary skills are a refined art, handed down from one generation to the next. An age-old tradition that began in the 1600s, when prince Ferrante Caracciolo founded an academy here to train professional chefs to serve at court and in the homes of the great noble families. The creation of what was to become a world-famous hotel management school was the start of the extraordinary rapport that the people of Villa Santa Maria share with cookery. Dynasties were born of sophisticated local *Monsieurs* and *Maîtres*, who ventured forth in Italy and in the world, with their skill and expertise: the Stanzianis, Spaventas, the Saccones, Di Lellos and Caniglias, to mention but a few, were illustrious ambassadors of a little town now universally acknowledged as the “Homeland of Chefs”, and of St. Francesco Caracciolo, their patron.



The prestigious Istituto Professionale Alberghiero of Villa Santa Maria is entrusted with the task of preserving and handing down unique wisdom and recipes, and the famous “Rassegna Internazionale dei Cuochi del Sangro” is called upon to celebrate them. Each year, on the second Sunday in October, cooks from all over Italy arrive to honour St. Francesco Caracciolo, born here, by offering the oil that through the year will keep alight the votive lamp. Great delicacies are prepared after the celebrations, and are then exhibited on a long buffet table, to be consumed on the closing evening of the event. The Museo dei Cuochi was founded to house testimonies of the culture and tradition that has evolved over time, and the museum displays documents and awards connected to the major and minor figures of these proud dynasties of Villa Santa Maria.



Meat

As in all other stock-farming communities, meat in Abruzzo is a crucial element in any menu. Lamb and mutton (from adult male sheep) are served barbecued or oven-roasted. Particularly popular in the past with country folk and shepherds was the *arrosticino*, tiny cubes of mutton cooked on a skewer over a charcoal grill, and now a widespread delicacy at every table. Other lamb-based dishes are *agnello incaporchiato* served with roast potatoes, lamb *trippette* and *matassine* (or *torcinelli*), made from lamb plucks and belly wrapped in offal fat, which is called *rizza*. Typical of the Abruzzo mountains there is a savoury leg dish called *capra laureata* and an excellent stew, called *pecora alla cottora* in L'Aquila, or *pecora alla callara* in Teramo. The excellent quality of the local pastures ensures equally fine beef, veal, rabbit and pork. Specialities worth mentioning are pork *'ndocca 'ndocca* (made from muzzle, trotters, ribs and pork rind), *tacchino alla canzanese* (turkey) and *coniglio 'mbriache* – an excellent rabbit and white wine stew. A traditional dish in the south of the region is *fegato alla lancianese*, liver cooked in a terracotta pot and seasoned with sage and chilli pepper.

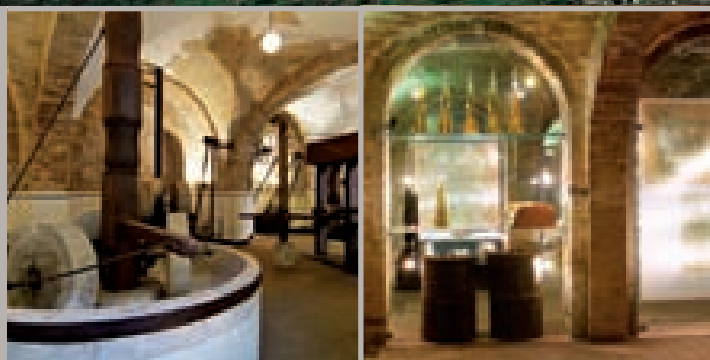
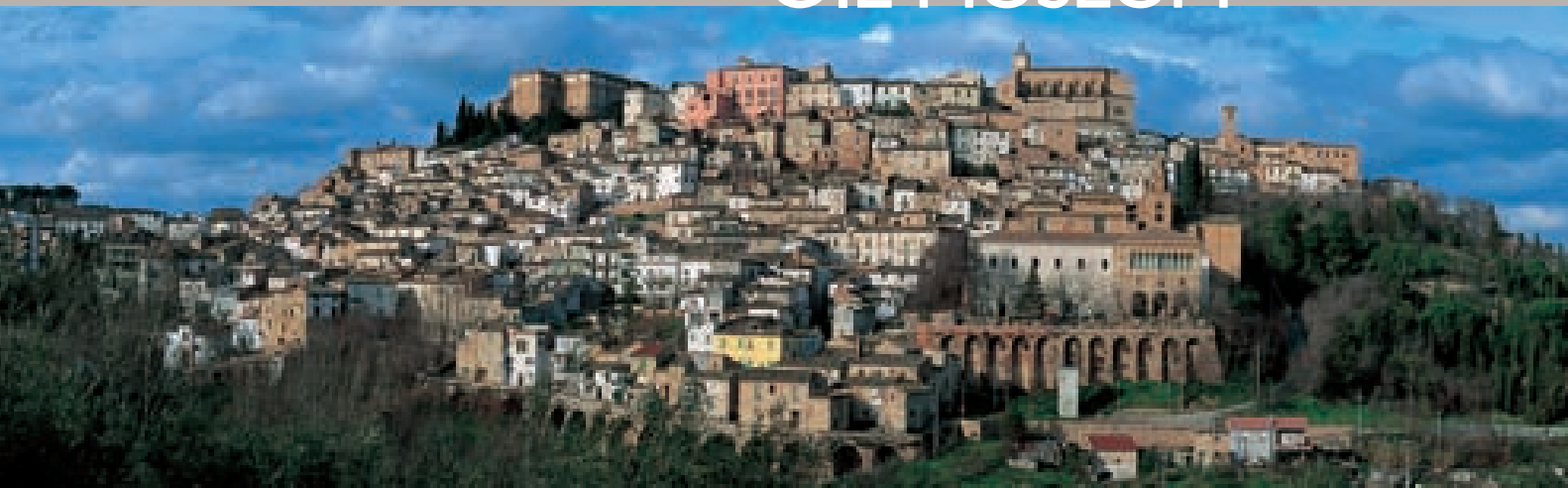
Fish

Adriatic fish is not only always fresh, but of excellent quality and, of course, is the core ingredient of cuisine all along the Abruzzo shores. The rustic dishes prepared along the coast use sardines and anchovies to make pasta sauces and *timballo*, or are served pan-fried. The restaurants by the sea prepare all types of fish, baked or boiled. The region's most typical recipe is actually called *brodetto*, a delicious chowder that can include shellfish (mussels, clams and others), scampi, cuttlefish, cod, red mullet, scorpion fish, grey mullet, sole and smooth dogfish; the recipe differs from north to south of the coast. To the north of Abruzzo, the *brodetto alla pescarese* is prepared by adding fish at different times: the last to be put in the pot are the red mullet and the cod. *Brodetto alla vastese*, on the other hand, puts all the ingredients in the terracotta pot together to cook. Nonetheless, in both recipes the key ingredients are olive oil, tomato, garlic and chilli pepper. On the Chieti coast, it is still possible to sample the ancient *scapece* recipe of fried fish marinated in vinegar after being sprinkled with Navelli saffron.



LORETO APRUTINO'S OIL MUSEUM

ABRUZZO ITALY 53



The history of this lovely little town, in the heart of the Pescara hills, has been closely linked with olive trees and olive oil for over two millennia: the most ancient local testimonies of oil production actually date back to Roman times. In the “Antonio Casamarte” Municipal Antiquities Museum the precious Vestini period (Italic-Roman) relics on show include an eye-catching *torcularium*, or a Roman *trapetum oleario*, precisely as described by Cato the Censor and Pliny the Elder. A common theme that connects this antique *trapetum* to the 14 oil presses now operating in the town, is the Loreto population’s steady commitment to farming, especially to the skilled art of producing excellent extra virgin olive oil. Loreto’s ancient *Statuti* and *Capitula* highlight the value of oil production over the centuries for the town, recording information of the tax waiver for exported oil. It is no coincidence that the emblem of the Università di Loreto (as the local authorities were called in the past) depicts two doves holding an olive branch in their beaks. Moreover, the people of Loreto are known amongst themselves and locally as *culiunde*, in other words “oily backsides”, underscoring how important and widespread oil production and specialization is in this community, but with the self-deprecating irony so typical of Abruzzo. The Museo dell’Olio is installed in the former Baldini-Palladini oil press, whose shrewd conversion has made it simultaneously a museum and a museum container. The reassembly of the 19th-century production plant was guided by the company’s own historic logo, which proudly depicted the interior of the olive mill in an elegant oil-painted metal tondo. The huge millstone, which has miraculously preserved all its elements, has therefore been set at the centre of the ground floor chamber, whilst the wooden press is in a secondary position, as its original

location is now occupied by the more modern hydraulic press from the early 20th century.

A reduction gear stands alongside the press, which was used to ensure a final turn that optimized pressing. The museum tour is organized on two floors and tracks the oil production cycle, starting on the upper storey where olives were collected. Exhibits are arranged in the *spanditoio*, classified by function, form, materials, including tins, jars, bottles and the filter mats known as *friscoli*. There is then a display of posters and other advertising materials, produced during the Paris Expo by a guest designer, who also created the oil containers and showcases: Francesco Paolo Michetti, a friend of Raffaele Baldini-Palladini.

Down on the lower level, passing through the so-called “inferno”, we enter the production machine, the actual press, where two production cycles of two different eras coexist: in the centre the older, animal-drawn system, composed of the millwheel rebuilt using the original stone elements, and the monumental, triple-screw wooden press. Around the sides, arranged in the original sequence, the machinery from the 20th-century hydraulic press, made by the Mari foundries in Lanciano.

At the end of the tour there is a final room, converted from the building’s stables, housing a bookshop, oil store and tasting area. The exhibition rooms in this museum are part of the community’s history and underscore the intrinsic value of each single object.

The showcases, in fact, have been made from lights and crystal glass that convert the deep arches in this ancient vaulted chamber into display units, with a design that has opted to respect the precious expression of the original architecture.

ABRUZZO

an ideal scenario



The ongoing development of active, sports and adventure tourism is a challenge that **Abruzzo** has met by playing its trump cards of compelling nature, unspoiled territories, with countless trails through gullies, torrents, castles, retreats, peaks, highlands, woods, ancient villages: a thrilling mix for holidays that are very much out-of-the-ordinary.

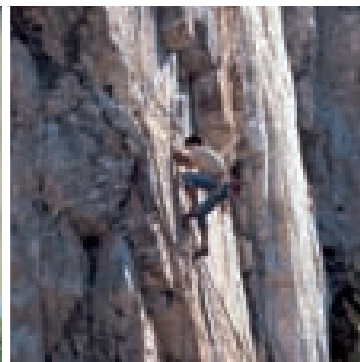


for every passion

Anyone who wants its contact with the environment to be really hands-on should definitely investigate the exciting options to be found in Abruzzo: there is no doubt that the region's hardy nature offers the most complete range of changing environments, both in summer and in winter. Mountaineering is the main sport famous in this region: the first documented ascent of Gran Sasso was actually in 1573! The stunning tall peaks mean that the region offers itineraries of all levels of expertise: Himalayan trekking, ascents or free climbing on massive rock faces; or more simply excursions on foot, on horseback, with skis or on mountain bikes, along countless paths that wind through gorges, torrents, castles, sanctuaries and ancient villages. Free flight fans will find Abruzzo to be a perfect setting: the countless natural terraces are excellent launch pads, the swift upsweep of the mountains from sea level (the tallest peaks in the Apennines are less than 45 km from the coast!), with the excellent "currents" this kind of orography produces, all making the region ideal for hang gliding and

paragliding. Then, of course, sport and adventure can be combined, descending many of the rivers here in a canoe or a kayak. One of the most interesting route makes its way along the upper branch of the river Vomano, in the province of Teramo. This certainly is not the Colorado river, but equally certainly it is very popular with Italian canoeists; the upper branch, in particular, is a real "black run", and should only be attempted by someone with plenty of experience. Canoeing can also be enjoyed along the Sangro, Aventino, Orta, Alento and Tirino rivers, in the lovely Celano gorge and on the river Aterno, across the wilds of the San Venzio ravine. For trekking or mountain climbing there are authorised, officially registered mountain and middle mountain guides; for deltaplanning and hang gliding, Pescara and L'Aquila have aeroclubs, and in Sulmona there is the Blue Wind Association, all recognized by the Aeroclub d'Italia; however, the National Federation is always the best official point of reference for canoeing and kayaking.





Anyone who scales a peak in Abruzzo and takes the time to gaze around the horizon, will perceive the truth of the words uttered by the famous Orientalist, Giuseppe Tucci, who was convinced that the region's mountains resembled Tibet more than any other landscape in the world.



The mountains of Abruzzo – a Tibetan experience in Europe

Aficionados will certainly be guaranteed thrilling moments in the mountains of Abruzzo – especially in winter:

Peaks, crests and frozen waterfalls are the fascinating itineraries for experts with an ice axe and crampons; gullies shooting down more than 1,000 metres from the taller pinnacles are amazing challenges for ski touring, on a par with Scandinavia or the Alps; and Abruzzo's top-notch mountain guides are always on hand to accompany, suggest and teach.

Of all the mountains present, Gran Sasso is the quintessential realm of adventure. Here skiers, trekkers and mountaineers are sure to find surroundings that withstand any comparison with the Alps, both in summer and in winter. For instance the snowy expanse of Campo Imperatore offers the perfect environment for cross-country skiers, who can choose between the handy circuits that have been traced out near Fonte Vetica and the long, off-track crossings in the heart of the plain. During the summer the steep faces of Corno Grande and Corno Piccolo offer a challenging climb for mountaineers of different levels of expertise. The panorama is breathtaking for those who complete the climb, taking in all of Abruzzo: from the Adriatic to the mountains that mark the boundary with Latium. In winter these same rock faces are perfect for the more skilled off-track skiers who want some added thrills,



Both in summer and winter fans of even the most demanding mountain sports will find Abruzzo's massifs are not only a worthy challenge, but are also marvellous surroundings. Classic mountaineering, free climbing, ski touring, are all catered for in Abruzzo, whose scenarios require different levels of expertise.

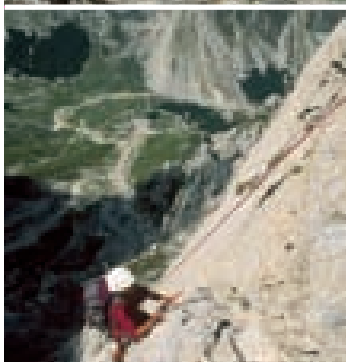
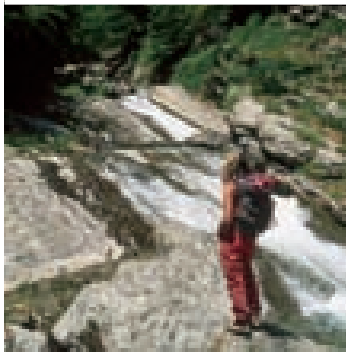


after their crampons have pierced the snow that cloaks the grass where flocks will graze a few months later.

If Campo Imperatore conjures up images of the central Asian steppe and Corno Grande has a look of the Dolomites to it, then Majella's rocks and enormous stone pits are a far more typically Mediterranean landscape, although no less stirring for those who climb its slopes both in summer and in winter. Trekkings to its peaks and, in general, to the upper areas of the massif, are always long and tiring, testing even the fittest climber. Cool, feathery, untouched: the beech woods on this "mother mountain" embrace the boundaries, suddenly opening upwards, on crests scented with mugho pine, rugged gorges at high altitude and vast stone-pits on the Cannella, delle Mandrelle, Taranta valleys. Higher still, between Tavola Rotonda and Mount Amaro, the Femmina Morta plateau: a balcony floating in the sky of Abruzzo. At our fingertips, the backdrop of sea.

Abruzzo by mountain bike

The most successful and popular method for approaching an active holiday in Abruzzo is the mountain bike. A success story rooted in the often wild loveliness of the surroundings; the remote and ancient villages; the timeless landscapes; the great variety of nature, so irregular and often tormented by the orography; and lastly the



infinity of old tracks, mountain and country roads, dirt roads, mule tracks, farm and forestry paths, lanes and all types of secondary connections that cover Abruzzo's limitless hills and mountains like a massive and intense spider's web.

The mountain bike then becomes the most direct way for discovering – or rediscovering – this legacy, without disturbing its silence and its dignity.

Peddalling along the many itineraries offered by the coast, the rugged mountains, rolling hills and edges of the stunning badlands, around the lakes or along the flourishing torrent banks, through solemn beech woods or the heaths of infinite highlands, emotions will run high and memorable, not only for the neophyte but also for the more skilled and "tough" cyclist.

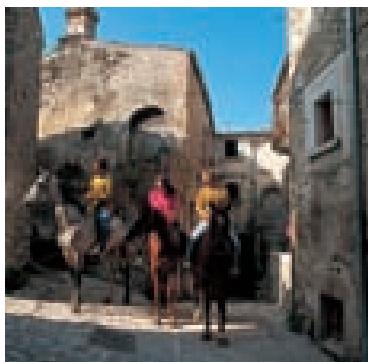
Abruzzo on Horseback

Over at least a decade Abruzzo has become established at national level as one of the best scenarios for equestrian tourism, attracting riders and aficionados from all over Italy. Certainly this can be defined a niche sport, whose success is yet again a confirmation of the valid environmental choice made by Abruzzo, whose Parks now classify it as the greenest region in Europe. A success sustained and made possible not only by the increasing





number of local regional fans, but also by practise and stabling facilities scattered throughout the territory. This has been a spontaneous process of "equestrian infrastructuring", which has become essential for enjoying and practising in safety a noble discipline that brings us into close and complete contact with nature and the territory. The fact that each site and each itinerary is within a reasonable distance of a stable, a blacksmith, a vet, has been crucial for Abruzzo: a positive competitive factor for enhancing its equestrian tourism organization.



THE CALDERONE GLACIER

Gran Sasso d'Italia, the true lord of the **Abruzzo** mountains, is the tallest peak in the **Apennine** chain. This the cradle of mountaineering (the first documented ascent of the slopes of this mountain was actually in 1573, by Bolognese military engineer **Francesco De Marchi**) also boasts another, and far less renowned, record: its peaks are home to the only **Apennine** glacier and the southernmost of all Europe: **Calderone**.

Unlike **Abruzzo's** other mountains, **Gran Sasso** is a **dolomite**, in other words it is composed of a rock typical of the **Alps**; the exterior is a series of tall, vertical faces, with sharp crests and peaks that are difficult to reach. The tallest peaks are **Corno Grande** and **Corno Piccolo**, concealing between them the **Calderone** glacier, a true rarity that can be admired close up by a hike along a really spectacular path, although it is quite demanding and in some places quite impenetrable. The trail begins in the **Prati di Tivo** square; from the **Arapietra** we cross the **Cornacchie** valley and continue up towards **Gran Sasso**, setting up a base at the **Franchetti** refuge, built by Italy's mountaineering club – **CAI** – in the 1960s. As far as the refuge the excursion is not taxing but in any case hikers should be alert and keep their wits about them, as well as carrying the right kit – hiking shoes, a backpack with appropriate apparel, water and a hat. It is beyond the refuge, when we gaze about us, that we realize we have really become mountaineers. An average commitment is needed to get as far as **Corno Grande**, whereas the ascent to **Corno Piccolo**, along the so-called via **Danesi**, requires lots of experience and self-confidence, so we would discourage anyone who is not extremely fit. Consequently it is always a good idea to rely on the highly professional, competent mountain guides of **Pietracamela** and other towns in the area.



THE RIVER ORTA'S TUMBLING COURSE



Majella is certainly the mountain that best expresses Abruzzo's alliance of stone with water. The ceaseless flow, over millions of years, has moulded its shape, dug out deep ravines, produced spectacular natural monuments. Like those created by the River Orta in its short, steep course, plunging into the River Pescara as soon as it reaches the foot of the mountain.

There are two places that must be seen: the "Amazonic" Cisterna and the erosion scenario of the Luchi and the Marmitte.

The Orta Valley has been a protected area since 1989, thanks to a Nature Reserve, now part of Majella National

Park; its 378 hectares are located between the Morrone and Majella chains. The most striking element is its great limestone canyon, dug out by the river and surrounded by woods that are a habitat for many species of plant life, as well as the rare otter, who lives only in very clean waters and seems to have found its ideal milieu in the Orta. The marvel to see in this valley is called the *cisterna*: a great natural pool that the water has dug into the bare rock, at the foot of a fine, vertical waterfall, whose overall effect is quite Amazon-like. The path leading to the pool begins in Bolognano's main square and passes through Fonte Orcina, indicated by the signposting; a detour will offer a vista from above or reaches its edges. Until a few years ago it was also possible to swim here, but it was seen that the delicate ecosystem and lichens that make the site so lovely ran the risk of being damaged, so a ban was introduced. The *cisterna* is fed by a splendid waterfall that is at its most spectacular in spring, when high-altitude snows melt. After the little town of Bolognano, in Caramanico territory, the river Orta offers other natural monuments, before plunging into the waters of the Pescara: the *luchi* and the *marmitte*.

The strong erosive action of the river waters has dug into the rock and the terrain, creating on one side a sort of spectacular canyon set in the bare rock, and on the other carving incredible rock turrets in various places along its winding bed. The strange name of *luchi* may derive from the Latin term *lucus*, the sacred woods of the ancients, since the site lends itself to this interpretation, but nowadays the expression refers to these regal rock towers. In fact, the location still seems to be pervaded by an evident natural sacrality that was so fascinating to the ancients, and which is further underscored by the visual contrast between the dense woods and the sheer towering rocks. The majesty of these enormous stone monoliths was certainly an element of attraction and allure for the ancient settlers, as we can see from the rock paintings discovered here. A nearby Roman road still has a bridge called Ponte Luco, built to connect the two sides of the Orta gully. Until very recently this was the only way of getting across the valley. In the Middle Ages the territory was owned by the abbey of San Clemente a Casauria, which is in the Pescara valley, further downstream. The panels on the abbey's bronze doors are still in place and depict the ancient castles that were part of its jurisdiction: they include the castle of Luco, which the *Chronicon Casauriense* (the abbey's chronicles) stated as having been built between 1006 and 1012. Its remains can still be discerned at the top of one of these suggestive rock turrets that are a major feature of the Luchi plain, and which are in the sightline of the castles of Paterno, Musellaro Cantalupo, Bolognano, Tocco da Casauria and *Pharum intermontes*. So its function was to defend and control the strategic Ponte Luco. The castle was built exploiting the terrain's significant defensive aspects: the edge of the rock tower was protected by a tall wall and the entrance was set into a natural crack in the rock. So the structure comprised two small buildings and a tower on one side of the courtyard. In the surrounding clearing there would appear to have been dwellings dating back to the Italic period.

If we continue to walk along the valley we reach the actual watercourse and yet another marvel of nature, known as the *marmitte*: an authentic canyon that has been dug out of the bare rock by the sheer force of the waters.

THE SALINELLO GORGES

The point of reference is Ripe di Civitella, a hamlet of Civitella del Tronto. A few minutes walk out of the built-up area and we will be surrounded by the wildest and most uncontaminated nature, enjoying an excursion that will lead first to the Eremiti grottoes then down into the splendid Salinello gorges, skirting a waterfall as far as the ruins of Castel Manfrino.

The downward dirt track soon becomes a narrow path that hugs the mountainside and in about ten minutes we will be under a sheer rock face. To the right it is only a short walk to the grottoes, which can be seen ten metres higher up. Two are in their natural state – just rock cavities – but the third is a great cavern closed off by a huge wall of stone blocks, entered by a narrow door. The hermitage is dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel and was restored some years back, fitted with a dubious zinc-plated catwalk for visitors. In the first cave there are still the remains of the improvements undertaken by the ancient inhabitants, whereas the other chamber, entered via a narrow passageway, was where hermits would spend most of their time in prayer.

The grotto has been used by humans since prehistoric times, as a sacred place for ritual ceremonies that left many traces discovered by archaeologists, including the tomb of a giant woman thought to have been a priestess. Then, in the Middle Ages, the cave was occupied by hermits who built the lovely stone altar, with its mysterious inscription running all around the edge. Until just a few years ago, the altar supported a huge statue of St. Michael, but this has been moved to the town church. In the upper right of the cavern a staircase leads to the natural opening that looks out over the valley and its marvellous view. As we leave we will understand just how the sanctuary dominates the mouth of the wild gorges that separate the Campoli mountains from the Fiori mountains. This area came under the protection of a Regional Nature Reserve in 1990 and is now part of the Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga National Park.

As we leave the caves we can return to the path and in no time we reach the incline that on the left leads to the waterfall: one of nature's authentic gems. The descent is quite steep but not difficult and it takes just a few minutes to reach the fantastic cascades that tumble into a natural bowl of stratified rock. Progress may be difficult if the terrain is soaked by recent rains.

If we take the right-hand path, however, towards the woods, we pass the head of the waterfall and enter the gully, which becomes narrower and narrower (the path is shown by yellow and red markers that Italy's mountaineering club – CAI have painted on rocks and trees). The panorama is truly breathtaking: as we slowly approach, the soaring rock faces loom ever closer and give us the impression that they are about to tumble down onto us. When summer is at its torrid height, the gully dries out and the torrent bed is a fascinating sight. Past the final bottleneck, the gorge suddenly opens wide and we can decide to continue as far as the ruins of Castel Manfrino (a relatively easy, but quite long excursion), or turn back down the way we have come.

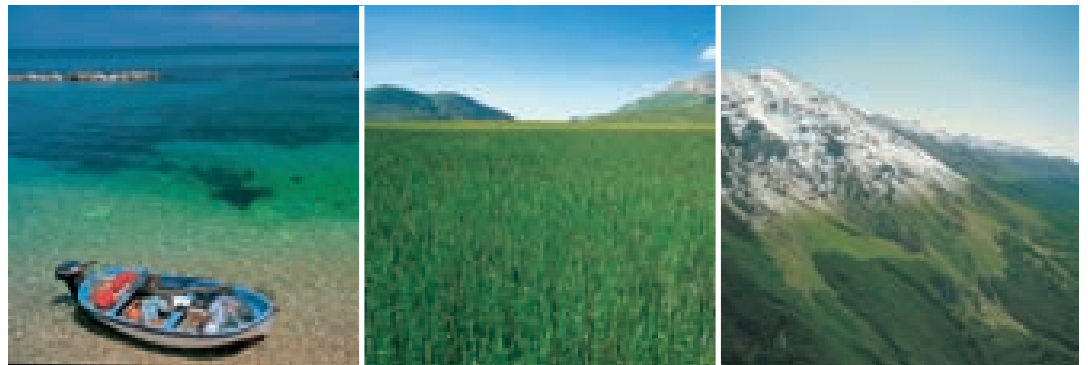


Abruzzo

THE GREENEST

The sheer range of Abruzzo's natural habitats (marine, river and lake, woods, mountain, high altitude) means that today, more than ever, the region is a sort of wonderful biolaboratory that protects nature and ecosystem.

A visionary mission projects Abruzzo into a major leading role in "green tourism".



region in Europe

A concise description of nature in Abruzzo would be most correct with a definition of it as an anthology of the Euro-Mediterranean landscape, since its boundaries embrace a concentration of natural environments that have no paragon in the rest of Europe if we consider an equally limited area of territory.

It is actually impossible to find another region in Europe that concentrates in such a small area: a Mediterranean coast with the most varied habitat (sandy shores, dunes, marshes, pine groves, shoreline maquis, cliffs, stacks, low pebbly shores); a hill strip with every level of human settlement, precious wetlands (river and lake oases) and fascinating geological features; a vast mountain zone, often with untouched nature, also with a wide variety of habitats (forests, prairies, mountain lakes, enormous Karstic highlands, canyons, cascades, grottoes, peaks and high-altitude environments that are quite alpine in nature, glaciers, volcanisms).

This astonishing variety of unspoiled and often wild habitats are the home to rare and precious species that Abruzzo's Parks are committed to protect, making the region an extraordinary biolaboratory for the preservation of nature and ecosystems, far

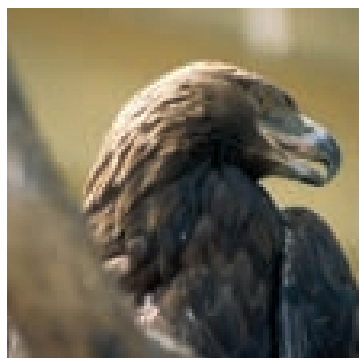
ahead of the rest of the world for the courage and determination of its decisions.

In fact, if the small wading dotterel of the plover family did not nest on Abruzzo high-altitude prairies, above all on Majella, we would have to seek it in the Arctic tundra; then there is the snow vole, an appealing rodent that biologists define a "relic of the Ice Age", in other words a species that liked its habitat so much that it has not sought any other since the last glaciation occurred; or wishing to stroll in mugho pine woods, apart from Abruzzo, the only other place to do so would be the Alps.

At this rate, the list would go on for pages, which would be entertaining because there are enough unknown facts to keep everyone happy, but what we cannot fail to mention are the great figures of nature in Abruzzo; bears, wolves, eagles, deer, otters and lynxes, living in the dense beech woods, scaling and flying the slopes of Majella and Gran Sasso, the mountains of Abruzzo National Park, on the Laga, Velino, Sirente massifs.

This is Abruzzo: a casket whose treasures protect 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.

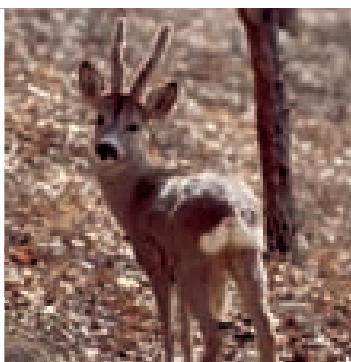
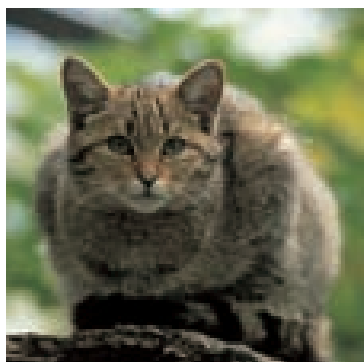
A journey that today is even easier thanks to the professional skills of mid-mountain guides, alpine guides, park warders and forest rangers, cooperatives offering tourist services, and of course thanks to the countless marked trails that make all excursions of all kinds and all complexities possible: 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.

The Parks

Abruzzo is the quintessential region for habitat and biodiversity, its reality and its mission to protect the environment testifying to how it is possible to achieve the coexistence of extraordinary natural heritage with the constant, dynamic and non-destructive presence of humankind. Three National Parks: the legendary Parco d'Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise, established in 1923; the Gran Sasso-Laga and the Majella-Morrone Parks, of more recent foundation; a Regional Park: the Sirente-Velino; over 30 reserves and nature oases. All this makes Abruzzo the green heart of Europe, with about one third of its territory being safeguarded.

The mountainscapes are varied: from the vastest of Karstic plains on Gran Sasso and Altipiani Maggiori, to the sharp peaks that evoke dolomitic scenarios; from Majella's deep canyons to Laga's rolling forests; from high-altitude plateaux to long valleys, some sloping gently and others circuitous and pitted; from high meadows scented by plant essences and painted by endless blossom to the green of the hillsides; not to mention snow fields, waterfalls, torrents, caves and even the only glacier – Calderone – in the Apennines, the southernmost of all Europe.

This wide-ranging and lovely environment is the protected milieu for many rare and special species – the Apennine wolf, the Marsica

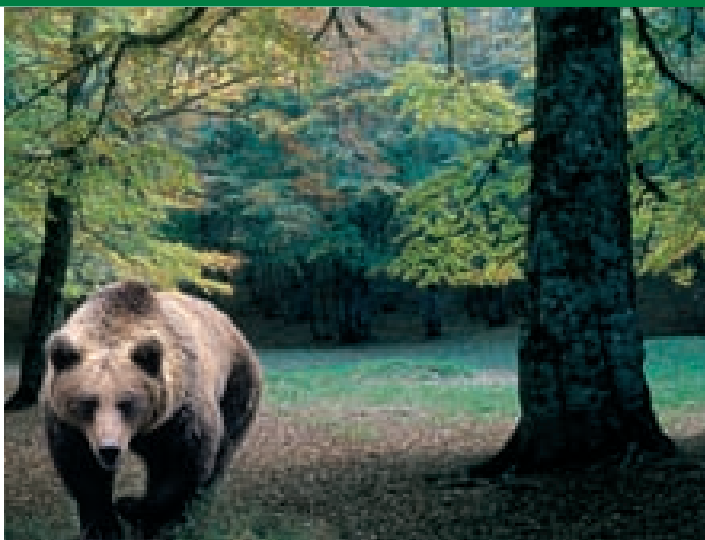


In Abruzzo nature is a protected resource. With a third of its territory set aside as parks, the region not only holds a cultural and civic record, but also stands as the biggest nature area in Europe: the real green heart of the Mediterranean.

bear, the Abruzzo chamois, the golden eagle.

The Visitor Centres opened by many local authorities in the Parks and in the Nature Reserves of Lago di Penne, Lama dei Peligni and Orfento a Caramanico, organize learning schemes. There are young experts with knowledge of the territory, wildlife areas and countless other initiatives that visitors can easily exploit, and which make the Abruzzo nature protection experience a reference model worldwide.

How was this all possible? Not so long ago Ignazio Silone described his fellow Abruzzese by saying that their very character was “forged by the millennia of coexistence with the most primitive and stable of the elements: nature”. A coexistence that has left a lasting mark, penetrating the heart and culture of this region, to the point that its plans for the future have been guided by it.



GRAN SASSO E MONTI DELLA LAGA NATIONAL PARK

Gran Sasso's rocky massif comprises the limestone slopes of Corno Grande and Corno Piccolo, stretches off to the Campo Imperatore plateau and to the north is embraced by magnificent beech woods. The mountain is extremely popular with trekkers, climbers and skiers. Less well-known is the Monti della Laga range, spectacular in spring with its abundance of water. Protected since 1995, the two massifs are a perfect journey through Abruzzo's nature and traditions. Fauna is enjoying a great recovery here.



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. The Park also includes the Morrone and Pizi Mountains ramparts. Legacies from the past include prehistoric settlements, sanctuaries, inscriptions left by shepherds, caves and blockhouses used by brigands and soldiers, *tholos* huts built amongst the fields and pastures. Human history plays a key role in the appeal of this Park.



ABRUZZO, LAZIO E MOLISE NATIONAL PARK

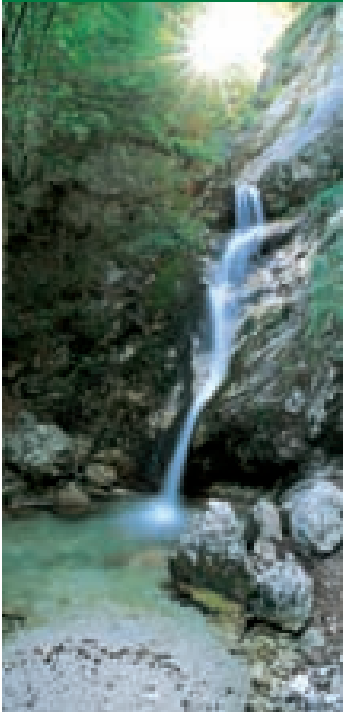


Bear tracks in the woods, wolf prints in the snow, chamois shadows amongst the rocks. The blossoming of spring and summer flowers, the Karstic landscapes, the beech woods. Abruzzo National Park was opened in 1922, and even today attracts a million visitors each year. Apart from the fauna and flora, its main appeal is the rugged orography of the mountains, as well as its lovely medieval villages, necropolises and sheep tracks. An extensive network of Visitor Centres, nature trails and wildlife areas are available to tourists. In winter, the path becomes an excellent trail for snow shoes or skis.

SIRENTE-VELINO REGIONAL PARK



The Sirente-Velino Regional Park is little more than an hour from Rome and is easily reached from anywhere in Abruzzo. On a clear winter day the snow-capped peak of Mount Velino is clearly visible from the Janiculum Hill. Although Velino and Sirente are not as tall as Majella and Gran Sasso, they are just as interesting as the greater massifs. The taller slopes have a barrier of rock; the gravel pits are a habitat for many rare botanical species. These mountains, popular with skiers for the ski runs at Ovindoli and Campo Felice, are much appreciated by trekkers too. What is more, the Park protects more than valuable species and habitats, it is also the location of interesting traces of the past: archaeological areas, towers and castles, medieval villages, convents and country churches, all still well-preserved, to be encountered as we explore the entire territory.

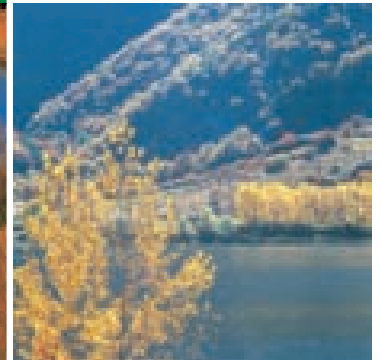
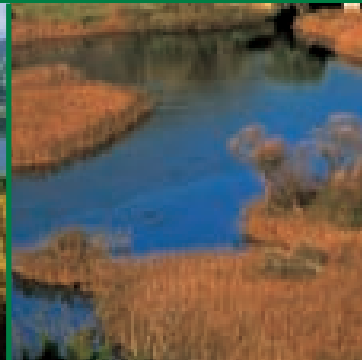
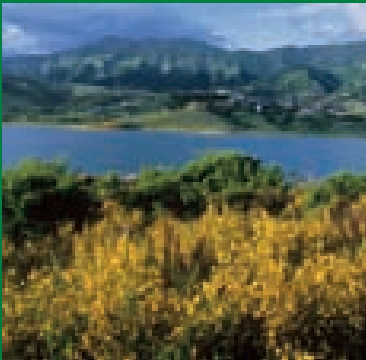


The seasons

The best seasons for discovering Abruzzo and its nature are spring, summer, autumn and winter; we think visiting during other seasons is a waste of time!

Yes, in Abruzzo nature is a major player all year round: always the same and always different. In any season Abruzzo's splendid scenario is ready to embrace guests and offer them new emotions. Light and colours and scents interweave to the point that the more distracted will fail to recognize in autumn the meadows and beech groves encountered in summer. The appearance of the beech trees will change completely, bathed in reds, yellows and golds. Then if this is a beech grove in Abruzzo Lazio and Molise National Park, we might spot a stag and hear his mighty bell, indicating the start of the mating season.

Whatever time of year, the Visitor Centres of Abruzzo's Parks, Oases and Nature Reserves will be working to assist visitors wishing to organize their stay, providing advice and tools for the best enjoyment of this environment, signing them up for guided visits and excursions, to achieve a full and problem-free immersion in nature.



ZOMPO LO SCHIOPPO NATURE RESERVE

ABRUZZO ITALY 69

Waterfalls are rare in the mountains of Abruzzo, because it is a limestone area subject to extensive Karstic phenomena, that even at high altitude drag water down to the substrata.

Sometimes, however, melting snows that have cloaked the peaks for months do successfully escape the clutches of the mountains as they tumble downwards, and create lovely cascades. One of the finest is in the Roveto valley, a far outcrop of Abruzzo reaching into Latium, and has an odd name: Zompo lo Schioppo.

It is very well-known both because it is easier to reach than the nonetheless splendid Sfischia, in Majella National Park above Caramanico, and the Morricana, on the Laga Mountains.

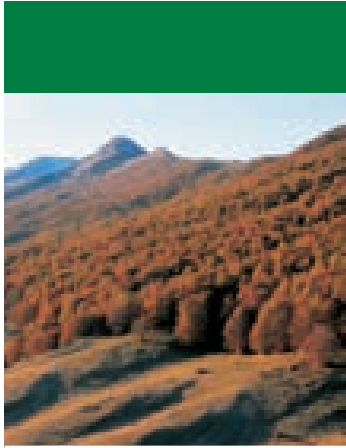
This waterfall is thought by many to be the most spectacular in Abruzzo, and its name comes from a quite unusual dialect word *zompo*, which means “leap” or “fall”. It is the waters that make the great leap, to make their way downhill from the peaks of the Cantari Mountains, near the town of Morino. The name is by no means the only astonishing aspect of this wonder of nature: the height drop is almost 100 metres and the force with which it hits the rock has dug a sort of large natural pool at its feet; the noise of its tumbling waters is deafening when the flow is at maximum capacity.

This beauty spot is in a fantastic landscape, at the foot of the lovely Viglio and Crepacuore beech woods, an area protected since 1987 when a Regional Nature Reserve was established, which covers 1,025 hectares. Worth a visit especially in spring, because the melting snows increase the water capacity and the falls become absolutely spectacular.

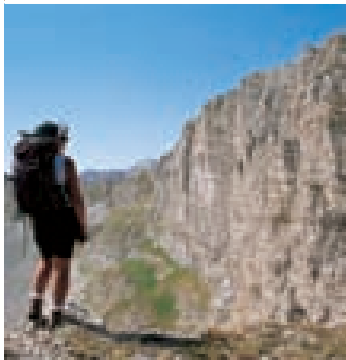


Winter transforms much of the region, often for many months of the year, into a valid subsidiary of the Great North. In the harsh light of winter dawns the highlands seem to stretch into infinity, in panoramas worthy of Tibet, whilst joyfully noisy waterfalls of other seasons transform into massive pillars of ice that challenge climbers with their difficult scaling. Down valley, in the Sorgenti del Pescara Reserve or in the other protected wetlands, morning mists tinge with mystery the dense cane beds where ducks, coots and herons can be glimpsed.

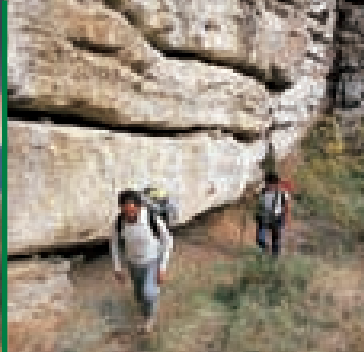
In spring, when the feel of new grass on the skin is soft and reassuring, colours, scents and sounds explode. Regal bears lumber slowly through the yellow laburnum, offset by the brilliant green of tender beech shoots in Val Fondillo, or the monumental Sant'Antonio woods, while the Pescara slope of Gran Sasso offers the greenest of amphitheatres, with Voltigno's slopes once again the scenario of lavishly blossoming red lilies.



In summer the luxuriant flourish of nature paints the entire region with ripe splendour: green mountain woods and meadows, boundless highlands dotted with pasturing cattle and sheep, hillsides ripe with corn and overflowing fruit groves, the coast's sunny beaches, against the backdrop of Gran Sasso and Majella at a stone's throw, singing the notes of the unique pleasure to be found in Abruzzo: that of discovery.



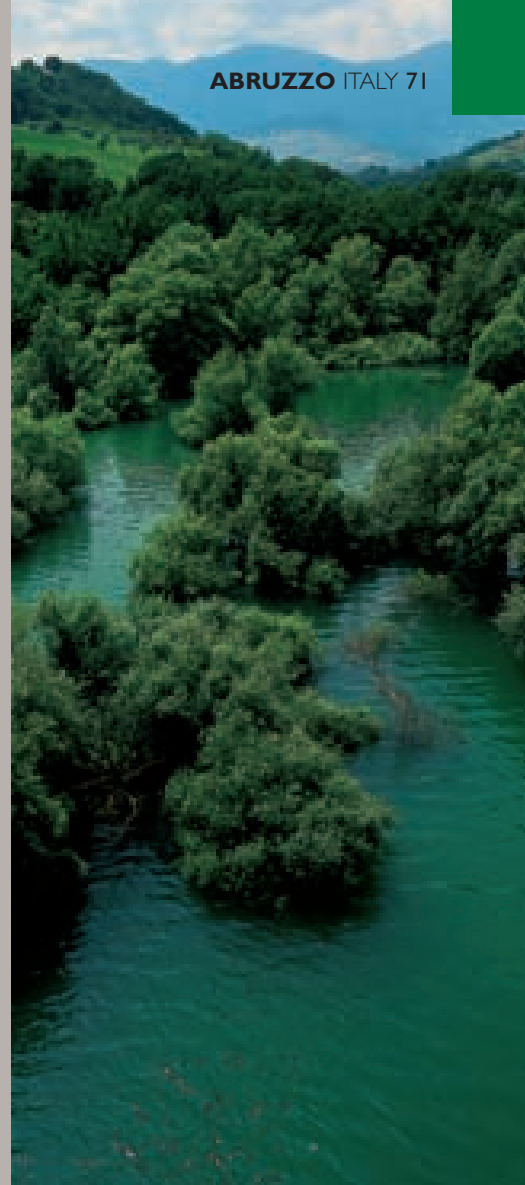
Nature in Abruzzo takes the stage every day of the year: and every day the show is new, different, thrilling. Each season shows its colours, expresses its perfumes, its gifts, and can be the right moment to lose oneself in order to... find oneself.



LAGO DI PENNE NATURE RESERVE

ABRUZZO ITALY 71

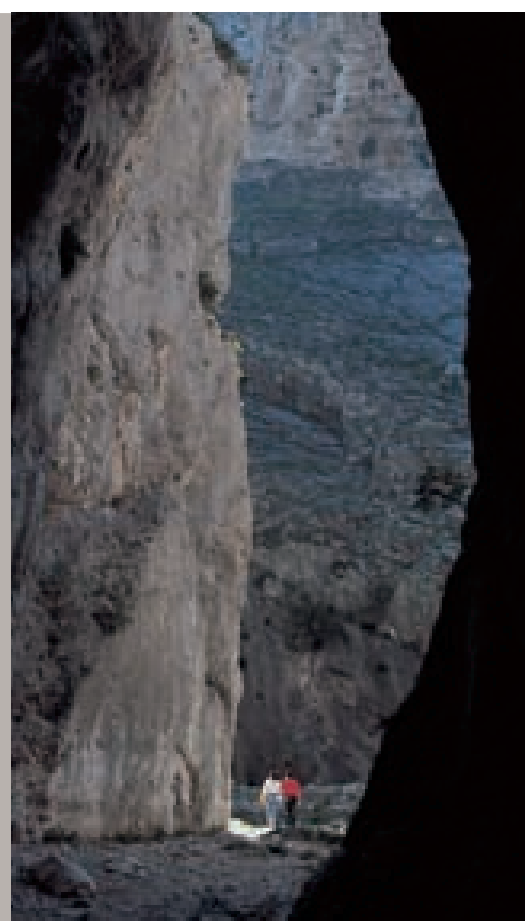
In the early 1980s a group of young nature-lovers from Abruzzo decided to take responsibility for the precious natural habitat that had developed around the artificial lake at Penne. Their interest was initially attracted by research into the extent of flora and fauna that had evolved on the shores of this lake, but they were also concerned about the need to offer adequate protection to this ecosystem. Thanks to their commitment, in 1985 Pescara provincial authorities resolved to establish an oasis for protecting animals living around the lake, and banned hunting. Then in the late 1980s, Abruzzo regional authorities approved two special laws that gave life to the Lago di Penne Controlled Nature Reserve, to preserve almost 150 hectares, including the lake, a large strip of its banks, part of the course of the river Tavo and its affluent the Gallero; the laws also extend to safeguard an external area of almost another 1,000 hectares. Any time of year is good for visits, but anyone interested in birdwatching should prefer the period from autumn to spring. The Reserve is co-managed by the WWF and the local cooperative (Cogecstre), and its main features are a structure that allows visitors, especially schoolchildren and young people, to experience nature actively. The structure has been equipped with a Visitor Centre, a hostel and a dining hall. Educational and study activities are organized by the Centro di Educazione Ambientale "A. Bellini", a Natural History Museum dedicated to Nicola De Leone, the Botanical Gardens, the Otter Centre and a Butterfly Garden, as well as some wildlife areas and hiking trails. The Reserve is involved in intense scientific research and has started up several important wildlife protection projects, of which the most famous is the Progetto Lontra, otter preservation scheme. For this purpose a special structure was created on the shores of lake Penne, where this shy and very rare animal can be observed, and where it can mate in tranquillity. The environmental conditions and the protection afforded by the Reserve have made this lake a significant habitat for resident and migrating birdlife, who nest and reproduce here. The night heron, the symbol of the protected area, has been nesting here for a number of years, as has the dwarf heron. The Reserve is also a stopover for many migrant birds like rare cranes, of which over 1,000 landed in 2002, causing a major zoological event.

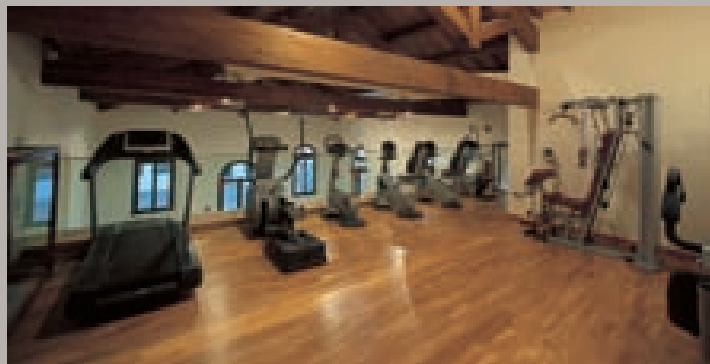


THE SAN MARTINO GORGE

One of the longest in Italy, this gorge is an outright canyon of 14 kilometres in length, with sheer slopes that reach the top of Mount Amaro, penetrating the very heart of Majella. It is easily reached from the town of Fara San Martino – a settlement of Longobard origins on the slopes of eastern Majella, now considered a major pasta production location worldwide, since one of Italy's most prestigious factories, of international renown, is located here.

There is a bottleneck opening into the valley, after which the first section is quite accessible, soon leading to a sort of small natural clearing enclosed in two very high, very steep walls. The site is uniquely exciting, especially for the perception of immensity evoked by the dizzying rock faces that seem to close over our heads as we walk through, with only a tiny glimpse of the sky. The terrain is gravelly and from amongst the stones the remains of a belfry appear: part of the abbey of San Martino. Before the year 1000 several Benedictine monks began to build their abbey here, dedicating it to St. Martin; in the 19th century a terrible flood submerged the complex and covered it with gravel, leaving only a few visible remains. Continuing along the gorge, the trail becomes narrower. Tight sections alternate with tiny clearings, as we proceed along a truly unique path, with one of the steepest height changes in the Abruzzo mountains: the route actually leads to Mount Amaro, which is at 2,300 metres further up. The best time to visit depends a great deal on the weather. In summer the beech woods encountered on the way up are ideal for a rest, but to go further expertise and appropriate equipment are essential.





Against Abruzzo's backdrop of great natural resources, another significant role is played by its thermal springs and spas, one of the most attractive features in this region of Parks. Abruzzo's thermal waters were famous even in ancient times, and nowadays attract an increasing number of users since the method is the most natural there for dealing with ailments. The Caramanico, Raiano and Popoli springs are all located at the foot of Mount Majella, whilst the Canistro waters come to light in Val Roveto, surrounded by the woods that separate the Marsica area from Latium's Ciociaria. At the foot of the great mountains, often immersed in Parks and Nature Reserves, the spas of Abruzzo offer health and beauty treatments, to soothe the spirit and the body: a superb way to stay younger, longer.

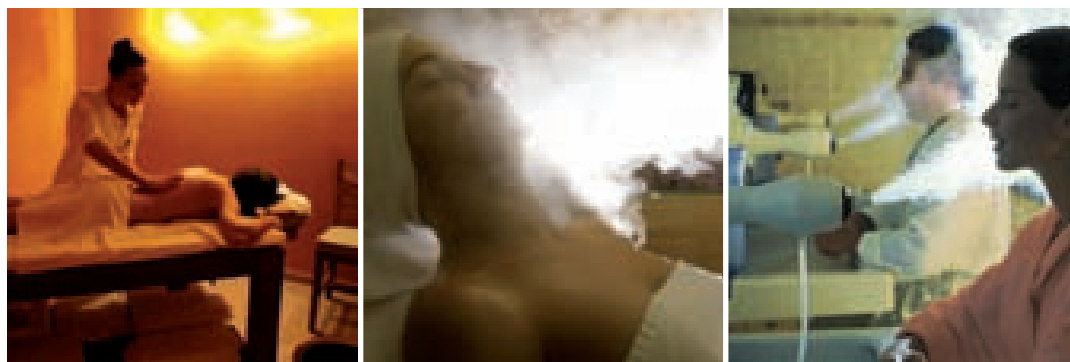
CARAMANICO TERME

This old town is built at the opening to the Orfento canyon, at the foot of Mount Majella, and is famous for waters with a high sulphur, bromide, iodide and sodium content, rising from La Salute, Santa Croce and Pisciareello springs, already famous at the time of Charlemagne. The waters also boast a high percentage of hydrogen sulphide and are most effective in the

treatment of rheumatism, metabolism, nervous, skin and gynaecological, lung, digestive systems and genitourinary tract disorders. They also provide excellent relief for pancreatic diabetes and rhinogenous deafness. The season begins in spring and continues into autumn. Visitors can expect to find an excellent range of accommodation and on hand they have the wonderful environment of Majella National Park. Caramanico overlooks the spectacular Orfento gorge, with its unspoiled nature and the splendid Celestine sanctuaries.

POPOLI SPA

At the opening of the narrow gorge that separates the Gran Sasso massif from Mount Majella, Popoli has recently become aware of its spa nature, reinforced by the industry that bottles water from the Valle Reale mineral springs. Known for centuries as the "the key to the three Abruzzos", this little town is built at the confluence of the Aterno with the river Pescara, at the mouth of the Peligna basin, and by the ancient road that crosses the Navelli plain to reach L'Aquila. The spa amenities are in the De Contra district. The waters of Popoli are recommended for treatment of arthrosis and rheumatism, including osteoarthritis, but also for extra-articular



rheumatism, airways disorders and rhinosinusitic syndromes. Popoli also offers treatment of chronic bronchial syndromes, bronchitis, vasomotor rhinitis, chronic pharyngolaryngitis, chronic sinusitis, tubal stenosis, chronic catarrhal otitis. During the spa season, the facilities offer various types of therapies: therapeutic mud applications and baths, inhalation treatments and cycles for treating rhinogenous deafness and for pulmonary ventilation.

RAIANO SPA

The spa town of Raiano is famous for its La Solfa mineral waters, rich in sulphurous and bicarbonate-sulphate content. These waters, offered as inhalation treatments, are particularly suitable for chronic catarrhal pathologies of the airways and hearing disorders, whilst they can be drunk to activate biliopancreatic and digestive functions. They play a decisive role in the treatment and prevention of chronic and degenerative disease of the locomotor system, and are effective against skin allergies and eczematous affections. The low mineralized content has a diuretic effect. Moreover, the presence of sulphide ions makes the water an effective antitoxin and metabolic regulator.

CANISTRO SPA

The mineral waters of Santa Croce and Sponga have been known since at least 1493, the year an anonymous document referred to their health-giving properties. Today Canistro, in the heart of the Roveto valley, at over 700 metres asl, is considered one of the most suitable summer resorts for children and for the elderly, thanks to its healthy air and its position, amidst great chestnut and beech groves. The waters of the two springs have been bottled for a number of years and are especially pure since they are filtered through the calcareous rock of the Simbruini-Ernici and Abruzzo National Park mountains. The disorders that benefit from these waters are those affecting the liver, the gastroenteric systems, the biliary ducts, female genital system, as well as allergies, gout, diabetes and obesity. Just a few kilometres from Canistro, near Morino, we find the splendid Zompo lo Schioppo Nature Reserve, where Abruzzo's highest and most spectacular waterfall is located. Valle Roveto, connecting Marsica with Latium's Ciociaria, offers some interesting excursions on the Ernici and Simbruini mountains, and in Abruzzo National Park.



Many of the visitors who come to Abruzzo nurture a desire to visit its places of religious worship. Not only are there famous sanctuaries like San Gabriele at Isola del Gran Sasso, the Miracolo Eucaristico in Lanciano, the Volto Santo in Manoppello, but also dozens of other places of worship are installed throughout regional territory, where the power of its primitive nature has always fostered curiosity in its inhabitants with regard to the mystery of transcendence. From the Middle Ages (when Abruzzo was christianized), the region's grottoes, prehistoric scenarios of ancestral rites, and its great Italic-Roman sanctuaries, were occupied by the first communities of monks and hermits, thus sketching a truly unique backdrop of ongoing religious dedication.

Abruzzo

THE PATHS

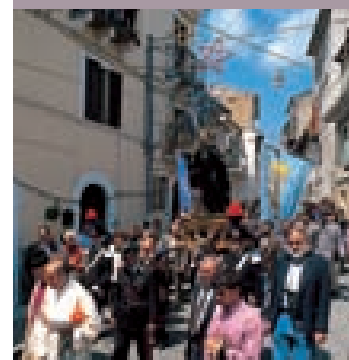


Every town in Abruzzo will be found to have a busy calendar of patron saint and religious celebrations. In particular, there are some fascinating ceremonies during Holy Week in Chieti, for Easter in Sulmona, as well as the commemoration of San Pietro Celestino, held in the basilica of Santa Maria di Collemaggio during L'Aquila's *Perdonanza* celebrations. Then there is the unique atmosphere of the rituals still held in many mountain villages, in honour of St. Anthony Abbott and St. Dominic. In honour of St. Anthony, animals are blessed and fires of all types are lit, the most famous being the *farchie*; St. Dominic, on the other hand, is worshipped in Cocullo, and in other towns, through the ancient snake-handling rites. These expressions of popular devotion are an invitation not only to the believer, but also to a lay visitor interested in discovering these traditions and their history.

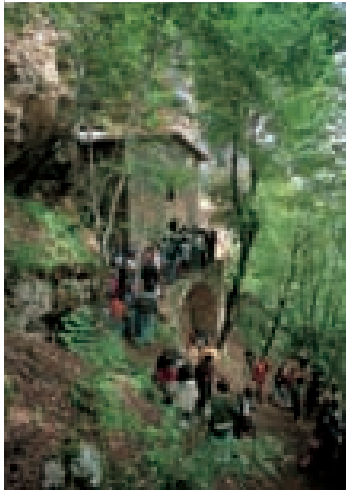
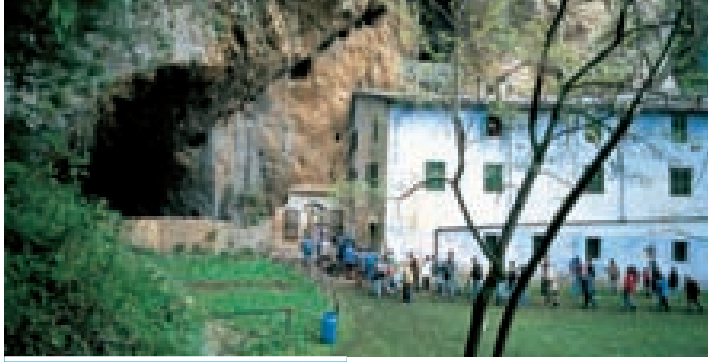
Major sanctuaries

The sanctuary of San Gabriele, Isola del Gran Sasso

At the foot of the impressive Teramo slope of Gran Sasso, the sanctuary of San Gabriele receives visits annually from two and a half million worshippers, making it the most popular religious location in Abruzzo. It is consecrated to San Gabriele



of the faithful



dell'Addolorata, who died there in 1862, at only 24 years of age. His fame began to grow from 1892.

The many miracles attributed to him led to his beatification in 1908. He was made a saint in 1920, by pope Benedict XV, and was proclaimed patron of Abruzzo in 1959, by pope John XXIII. The early 20th-century sanctuary took the place of a 1200s complex probably founded by St. Francis of Assisi, next to which a church dedicated to the Immaculate Mary was later built. In 1970 the old sanctuary was flanked with a new, modern construction, inaugurated in 1985 by pope John Paul II. Its great hall, which measures 90 by 30 metres, can hold up to 10,000 people. The old sanctuary houses not only the saint's tomb, where the remains are stored in a bronze urn, but also displays the collection of San Gabriele's personal mementoes and ex votos left to him. Worshippers visit the sanctuary all year round but particularly significant moments are 27 February, anniversary of the saint's death; the month of March when thousands of students visit the shrine 100 days before their final high school exams; late August, when groups of young people come to camp and celebrate near the sanctuary.

The Miracolo Eucaristico sanctuary, Lanciano

In the centre of Lanciano (ancient *Anxanum*), the church of San Francesco, built in 1258 in Burgundian Romanesque style and later refurbished to Baroque in the mid-1700s, is the location of the Catholic church's most ancient testimony of a eucharistic miracle. Some time in the 1700s, in the church of San Legonziano, a

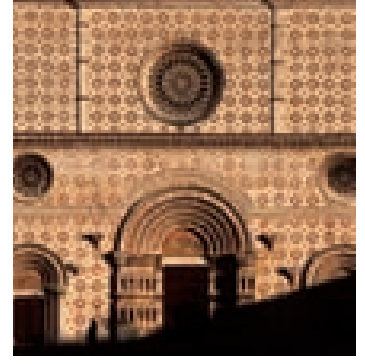
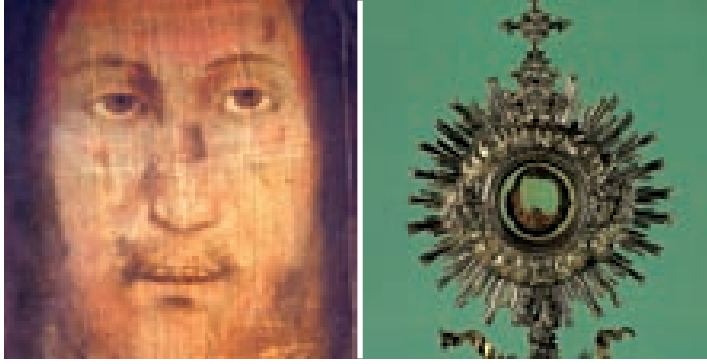


MORRONE'S SANCTUARIES

A really unique example of this uninterrupted religious continuity, so typical of devout Abruzzo, can be found in the Peligna valley, at the foot of the massive rock face of Mount Morrone. In just a few metres of space, but evidently connected by a shared perception of the divine presence in this location, we will find: a Neolithic rock sanctuary (6th millennium BC), with marvellous praying figures painted in red ochre on the rock; the spectacular proscenium of the temple of Hercules Curino, where the Italic Confederation gathered 22 centuries ago to oppose and fight against Rome's rising star; the sanctuary of Sant'Onofrio, founded in medieval times by Celestine V, and set into the fearful rock cliff like some eagle's nest; lastly, the massive elegance of a Renaissance complex – Badia Morronese – where the Celestinian monastic order established its mother house. Four religious settlements in four different periods, set in three

different types of places of worship, installed in a tiny space, and just a few metres away from each other: a testimony of the continuity of local religious devotion whose roots are buried in the mists of prehistory, and which has continued seamlessly into the modern era!





Basilian monk expressed his doubts as to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. During mass, however, the consecrated host and wine were transformed into real flesh and blood. The two relics were preserved first by the Basilian order and then by the Benedictines, finally passing to the Convent Minorites, and are now kept respectively in a monstrance (1713 - Neapolitan school) and in a crystal chalice. Now, as in the past, the relics comprise five drops of coagulated blood and a fine membrane of flesh resulting from the transformation of the host. Histological tests performed in 1971 and in 1981, in Arezzo Hospital, state that the relics are human blood and human heart tissue, which have never been subjected to any preserving process. Tens of thousands of believers visit the Miracolo Eucaristico sanctuary every year.

The Volto Santo sanctuary, Manoppello

At the foot of Majella's northern slope, near the historical village of Manoppello, the Volto Santo sanctuary is visited by believers all year round and is the destination of a pilgrimage on the second Sunday each May. The church was built between 1617 and 1638, but largely rebuilt in the 20th century; it houses an image of Christ on a linen cloth, called "the Veronica veil" (from "vera icona" meaning "true icon"), said by tradition to have been brought in 1506 by an angel disguised as a pilgrim, and given to the scientist Giacomo Antonio Leonelli of Manoppello. Some

historians believe that the image, which appeared as if by a miracle at the foot of Mount Majella, was already described by several medieval chroniclers as being in the Holy Land, where it was stolen and taken to Rome by the Romans. Recent research by Prof. H. Pfeiffer states that the relic might be the only other known acheropite (a supernaturally produced portrait on cloth) image of Christ apart from the Turin Shroud.

The Madonna dei Miracoli sanctuary, Casalbordino

Close to the coast and surrounded by the Sinello and Sangro valleys, the Casalbordino sanctuary commemorates the miraculous apparition of 1526. Whilst the peasant Alessandro Muzii was approaching his fields, reciting the rosary, the Madonna appeared to him in an oak grove and revealed that the terrible storm of the previous day had been provoked by divine ire for the sins of local folk. A chapel was built on the site of the apparition, which was then replaced by the sanctuary. The current building dates back to 1824, and is visited on 11 June each year by numerous pilgrims. The form and intensity of popular worship inspired Gabriele d'Annunzio to write "The Triumph of Death" and the canvases of painter Francesco Paolo Michetti.

THE HOLY STAIRCASE OF CAMPLI

ABRUZZO ITALY 79



Campoli is now a quiet foothill town on the Gemelli Mountains, the first peaks of the Laga range, but centuries ago it was one of the most important border settlements between Teramo and Ascoli Piceno, so between the Bourbon Kingdom and the Papal State. A wealthy, thriving town, the home of wealthy guilds of craftsmen and merchants, whose position had earned it ecclesiastical privileges that included the bishop's palace: Campoli's heritage includes extensive traces of its splendours, like the *Scala Santa* – the Holy Stairs.

“[...] Loving custodian of the Church's heavenly treasures, to increase the piety of the faithful and the salvation of souls, to each and every believer, men and women alike, who are truly repentant, having confessed and taken communion, who ascend on their knees the Stairs built in the town of Campoli [...] by this letter and by apostolic authority, we paternally concede each and every indulgence and remission of sins and punishment will be obtained, as might be obtained by personally and devoutly ascending the Holy Stairs of our own Rome. What is established will endure in eternity for the future, notwithstanding any action to the contrary [...] Dated Rome, in Santa Maria Maggiore, sealed by the Fisherman's Ring, XXI January 1772, third year of Our Pontificate”. Signed, Clemente papa XIV. This “breve”, an edict similar to a “bull”, issued by pope Clement XIV, officially attributed the Holy Stairs privilege to the town of Campoli. It was not an unexpected concession to the little Abruzzo town, but rather the fruit of long, patient diplomatic negotiations by lawyer Gianpalma Palma, formerly the municipal camerlengo, who achieved the highly-sought after

papal privilege for Campoli, and ordered construction of the Holy Stairs. Palma was prior of the Sante Stimate di San Francesco Confraternity, which was appointed custodian of the religious building.

The Holy Stairs can be found at the edge of the main square, behind Palazzo Farnese. Its nucleus is the set of 28 oak steps that the devout must climb on their knees (women must also cover their heads), praying and asking forgiveness for their sins. The devout are rewarded with absolution and, on some days of the year, even a plenary indulgence, which has the same value as that obtained by praying on the more famous Holy Stairs, in Rome's basilica of St. John Lateran.

The monument is dense with symbology that motivates each single element. The believers must climb the stairs on their knees, observed by the figures of six exceptional paintings – three to the right and three to the left of the staircase, which illustrate six salient moments of the Passion of Christ – thus imitating the stages of Jesus' approach to the cross, and thus symbolically experiencing His suffering. The final step leads to the Sancta Sanctorum, with the altar of the Saviour, Christ as Salvator Mundi, who will free the sinners of their burden. After paying symbolic homage to pope Clement and to St. Elena, so convincing in the splendid colours of their life-size portraits, the believers' soul is purified and they can return to the light of day, but walking erect, accompanied by joyous Resurrection scenes, observed by smiling cherubs peeking over the roof.

The Holy Stairs of Campoli are some of the best preserved in Italy, but also some of the least famous.

THE HERMITAGE OF SAN BARTOLOMEO DI LEGIO



On Majella's northern slopes, clinging like some Mexican pueblo to the rock of the Santo Spirito ravine, in Roccamorice territory, we find one of the most spectacular retreats in Abruzzo: San Bartolomeo in Legio. The path leading to the ravine and its sanctuary are marked by ancient iron crosses. Once past the third cross, the sanctuary is accessed through a large gap in the rock, with steps carved into the bare rock. Sheltered by a compact ridge, the façade of the tiny chapel then appears, to astonishing effect, set in the ledge that runs along the rock face like a balcony. From the chapel two steep sets of stairs lead to the lovely underlying strand also etched into the bare rock. The events linked to this sanctuary are also closely linked to the famous figure of Pietro Angeleri, the Majella hermit who was elected pope in 1294 with the name of Celestine V, and who often retreated to this mountain in the late 13th century, to pray with his disciples. Inside, the little church is almost completely carved out the rock: only the outer wall is in brickwork. In a niche above the

1500s altar there is a painted wooden statue of St. Bartholomew, a modest 19th-century opus but greatly venerated and not only by local devotees. Each 25 August, in the morning, hundreds of believers climb up to the little church and after hearing mass, they carry the statue of the saint in a procession as far as Roccamorice parish church, where it is the focus of great festivities. The devout also turn to St. Bartholomew at other times of year, borrowing the statue's knife, using it to exorcize illnesses and beseeching the intercession of the saint. However, the popular cult is also linked to the presumed curative and miraculous powers of the water that springs from a source at the bottom of the ravine. A small door next to the altar leads to a cell that is used as a sacristy and was once used by hermits as a shelter. The rear exit leads onto a stunning view over the ravine's terraces. Nearby there is another rock shelter, very similar to the hermitage, brought to light by archaeologists who discovered a Stone Age village dating back to the Neolithic period.



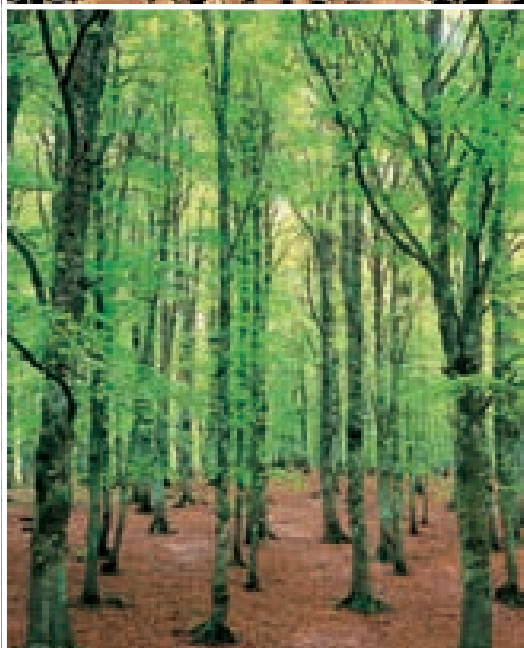
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