

TRAVEL HISTORY CULTURE PEOPLE FOOD

ABRUZZISSIMO

MAGAZINE



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ON THE COVER:

Pacentro. Read the story on page 5.

LEFT:

Goriano Valli. Read the story on page 14. Photos by Anna Lebedeva.

ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE

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*Periodico diffuso in via telematica non
soggetto a registrazione ai sensi degli
artt. 3 e 3 bis della legge n. 103 del 16
luglio 2012.*

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Summer holidays are over, and we're back with new stories. In August, Abruzzo's small towns and villages were alive with laughter and the voices of families returning to visit their parents, *nonni*, and relatives. Festivals and *sagre* filled the days, while the evenings were spent enjoying long *al fresco* dinners with the mouthwatering aroma of *arrosticini* wafting through the air. But now, the silence is returning.

Every time I visit a mountain village in Abruzzo and ask about its population, I'm given two numbers: the number of residents in winter and the number in summer, including returning extended families. In **Goriano Valli**, for example, I was told, "In winter, there are 80 people living here, but in summer we have around 600."

This small town has recently opened a fascinating museum dedicated to preserving its old buildings and memories of the past. Don't expect grand palaces or frescoed ceilings; instead, you'll find humble peasant houses, haylofts, and wine cellars that tell stories of everyday life. **Goriano Valli** is hoping to find a way to boost its resident numbers, and the museum is just a small part of their larger project. Read the story on page 14.

For grander historical ruins we take you to **Amiternum** that once was a bustling Roman politico-administrative hub with spectacular entertainment buildings, baths, and impressive wealth.

This month, **Pacentro** hosts its annual barefoot race that combines devotion, courage, and pain into a few exhilarating minutes, attracting thousands of spectators. Read our story about this centuries-old tradition on page 11.

Have you tried the *cococciata* from the Marsica area in Abruzzo? We share the recipe for this humble, yet delicious peasant dish on page 28.

I would like to remind you all that ABRUZZISSIMO is a reader-supported publication. If you are enjoying reading the magazine, please share the [subscription link](#) with other Abruzzo lovers, consider [upgrading](#) to the premium version, or [make a donation](#) to help us keep this publication going. It doesn't happen without your support. Thank you!

Anna Lebedeva
Founder & Editor

RECENT REGIONAL NEWS FROM ABRUZZO'S LOCAL NEWSPAPERS AND UPCOMING EVENTS



HONEY FESTIVAL IN TORNARECCIO

Tornareccio (CH) is gearing up for the 18th edition of Regina di Miele to celebrate Abruzzo's honey producers on September 21-22. The festival will feature a local produce market, tastings, guided tours of the town, and live music. One of the highlights will be the prestigious national competition awards for the Abruzzo section of the Tre Gocce d'Oro – Grandi Mieli d'Italia honouring the region's best beekeepers and finest honey. See the full programme on the festival's [page](#).

WATER CRISIS IN ABRUZZO

This past summer, many areas in Abruzzo faced frequent water shutoffs due to severe water waste issues. Fenimpresa, an Italian federation representing small and medium-sized enterprises, sent a note to the regional government highlighting that over 60% of water is lost in the region's distribution network, impacting residents, farmers, and industries. The group calls for immediate reforms, including advanced leak detection, network modernization, and sustainable practices like wastewater reuse. They also advocate for marine desalination to alleviate pressure on internal sources. Without a coordinated plan, Abruzzo risks ongoing crises and future uncertainty.



ART MEETS SCIENCE AT CAMPO IMPERATORE

A striking 2.30-meter wooden sculpture of an astronaut with a helmet reflecting the surrounding landscape has been installed near the Campo Imperatore Observatory of the National Institute of Astrophysics in the Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga National Park. The installation by Fabiano De Martin Topranin, a young artist from Belluno, is part of an exhibition curated by [Dolomiti Contemporanee](#). Italy's highest professional observatory, a research hub for nearly 60 years, adds powerful context to this installation, merging art and science and embodying the spirit of exploration. The sculpture will be on display until September 30.

PASTA AND WINE EXPORTS SURGE

The world loves pasta and wine from Abruzzo. While other Italian pasta regions face a decline in sales, the town of Fara San Martino (CH), home to renowned brands like De Cecco and Delverde, is shining, with an impressive 8.8% rise in exports for early 2024 in the US and Germany. The Montepulciano d'Abruzzo wine also stands out, with a 5.1% growth, beating the national average. Overall, Abruzzo's exports surged 13.8% to €204 million, with standout performances in the US (+19.2%) and Switzerland (+190.5%) and sales also growing in South Korea and China.



JOIN US IN OPPOSING ABRUZZO'S CONTROVERSIAL DEER CULL

The Abruzzo regional government has approved the selective culling of 469 red deer, citing overpopulation, agricultural damage, and road safety risks.

According to the official statistics, between 2019 and 2023, deer caused significant damage to agriculture in Abruzzo, amounting to €895,340. This figure is expected to exceed one million euros when damages from 2024 are included. Additionally, 806 road accidents involving deer were reported during the same period.

The government's decision has been met with disbelief and outrage, sparking a heated debate in both regional and national media. While Abruzzo's farmers' associations are pleased with the announcement, environmental groups, conservationists, and many citizens are calling for alternative methods. They insist that the culling of almost 500 deer is unnecessary and damaging to Abruzzo, a region known for its wildlife and where resident deer populations attract many tourists.

The culling season will start on October 14 in several areas of the L'Aquila province: around Avezzano, Sulmona, Valle Subequana, L'Aquila, and Barisciano. Ispra, the National Institute for Environmental Research and Protection announced that the selective deer hunting is only permitted when the deer density is at least 2 per square kilometre. In the areas selected for the culling the density is slightly above this threshold, at 2.58 per square kilometre. The WWF have brought to the media's attention the fact that the hunters will have to pay between €50 (for each young fawn killed) and up to €600 for a stag. However, the collected funds will not be going to support local farmers but to the *Ambiti Territoriali di Caccia* to the benefit of the hunting organisations involved.

We at ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine strongly believe in an Abruzzo capable of coexisting with wildlife and, while we always support local farmers, promote them, and encourage our readers to buy local products, we also believe in sustainable practices that ensure harmony between agricultural activities and natural ecosystems. We invite you to sign the petition – that has already gathered over 80,000 signatures – launched by the WWF calling to revise the region's decision.

DID YOU KNOW?

D'ANNUNZIO AND THE DISASTROUS OCCUPATION OF FIUME

Gabriele D'Annunzio, an Italian poet, writer, and nationalist born in Abruzzo, played a leading role in the *Impresa di Fiume*, or the "Fiume Expedition."

After World War I, the Treaty of Saint-Germain assigned the port city of Fiume (now Rijeka, Croatia) to the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia). Many Italians, including D'Annunzio, were dissatisfied with this decision, feeling that Italy's wartime sacrifices had not been adequately rewarded.

On September 12, 1919, D'Annunzio led around 2,600 Italian nationalist troops in a bold move to occupy Fiume. D'Annunzio's forces quickly took control of the city, and he declared himself the leader. The occupation was marked by D'Annunzio's flamboyant and theatrical style, blending politics with performance art.

D'Annunzio established the Italian Regency of Carnaro, a self-proclaimed state with a constitution. This constitution was notable for its progressive and eclectic mix of ideas, including elements of anarchism and proto-fascism. It also celebrated music and culture, reflecting D'Annunzio's own artistic inclinations.

The occupation of Fiume lasted for 15 months. It came to an end in December 1920, when the Italian government, under pressure from the League of Nations and facing internal political instability, negotiated the Treaty of Rapallo with Yugoslavia. This treaty declared Fiume an independent Free State. When D'Annunzio refused to recognize the treaty, Italian military forces moved in to oust him during what became known as the "Christmas of Blood" (*Natale di sangue*) and during which 30 people were killed including several civilians and a child.

The events in Fiume had a profound influence on Italian nationalism and the emerging Fascist movement. D'Annunzio's militant nationalism, charismatic leadership, and theatrical politics provided a model that Mussolini and the Fascists would later adopt and refine. Despite this bloodshed and controversy, Gabriele D'Annunzio is still celebrated and admired in Abruzzo.



AMITERNUM: THE FORGOTTEN JEWEL OF ANCIENT HISTORY

By Rosanna Tuteri

Amiternum is one of Abruzzo's most important archaeological sites, which tells the story of an ancient Sabine town that became an important hub for local governance and commerce in the times of Roman Empire.

If you travel along State Route 81 north of L'Aquila, beneath the small hilltop village of San Vittorino, you will see the monumental ruins of an ancient Roman theatre and, across the road and the Aterno River, you will spot an amphitheatre. This is Amiternum, a city founded by the Sabine people, an Italic tribe, and later became an important Roman settlement.

To understand why Amiternum was so important more than 2,000 years ago, you need to climb the hill of San Vittorino and gaze over the plain: the village dominated the Aterno Valley and the junction of ancient roads that, running north-south and west-east, connected the Tyrrhenian coast

Photo: The amphitheatre in Amiternum.
Via <https://cultura.gov.it/>

with the Adriatic Sea. Amiternum's strategic position meant that the city retained its important role after the Roman conquest in 293 BCE. A trace of the millennia-old route – running across the valley and known in Roman times as Via Caecilia – is still visible. Amiternum grew where the road met the important Via Claudia Nova, and two branches of the Via Salaria.

IMPORTANT CENTRE

Between the 3rd century BCE and 4th century CE, the city was sparsely populated, as its main purpose was serving as the seat of the praefectura, a political-administrative centre, where the prefect (sent annually from Rome) exercised his jurisdictional powers over villages around the valley. We can safely assume, based on some historical documents from that period, that the fortune of many families in Amiternum derived from trade and commercial relations established both in the Italian peninsula and in the East. Landowners and entrepreneurs, members of the high Sabine

aristocracy, also made fortunes from livestock and transhumance as well as military campaigns, in which many of Amiternum's prominent figures were involved. A significant number of stone inscriptions that have survived to these days provide information about the wealthy municipal upper class of the city, which included members of the equestrian order and even the senatorial aristocracy in Rome.

Today, only fragments of Amiternum's glorious past remain: a stretch of Via Caecilia that traverses it, the ruins of the theatre and amphitheatre, fragments of a large domus (among the largest found in Italy), and a temple. You need some historical knowledge and a lot of imagination to picture the thriving, rich Roman city it once was with its paved roads, riverbanks and bridges, hillside terraces, the porticoed forum, the basilica, the curia with its tribunals, temples and sanctuaries, taverns, fountains, and thermal baths.

In the second half of the 1st century BCE, Amiternum underwent significant territorial development that profoundly influenced its urban structure and road network. A road which traversed the river plain and the city in a long, straight path, became the central axis around

The theatre in Amiternum. Photo by Ra Boe, [CC BY-SA 3.0 de](#)



which the urban organization was built. This road served as the spine of the city, with key public entertainment buildings strategically placed along its course. The theatre, situated on the northeastern hill, and the amphitheatre, located on the southwestern plain, likely marked the urban peripheries, creating a monumental and scenic boundary that defined the city's layout and brought people from the nearby villages to the city.

IMAGINING THE CITY

Walking less than a meter below the current ground level 2,000 years ago, you would have admired the forum area with its porticoed square, the road crossing, the magnificent basilica, and the curia on the northern side. From the eastern side of the forum area, you could have followed a 15-meter-wide street connecting the forum to the theatre, a large porticoed pool and a grand domus, a residence of palatial proportions, with an atrium and two peristyles (continuous porches with columns) covering nearly five thousand square meters.

The theatre, constructed during the Augustan age (43 BCE – 18 CE), once held around 2,000 spectators, with the lower sections of the cavea, orchestra, and stage still visible today. In contrast, the amphitheatre was a much larger venue, accommodating up to 6,000 spectators.

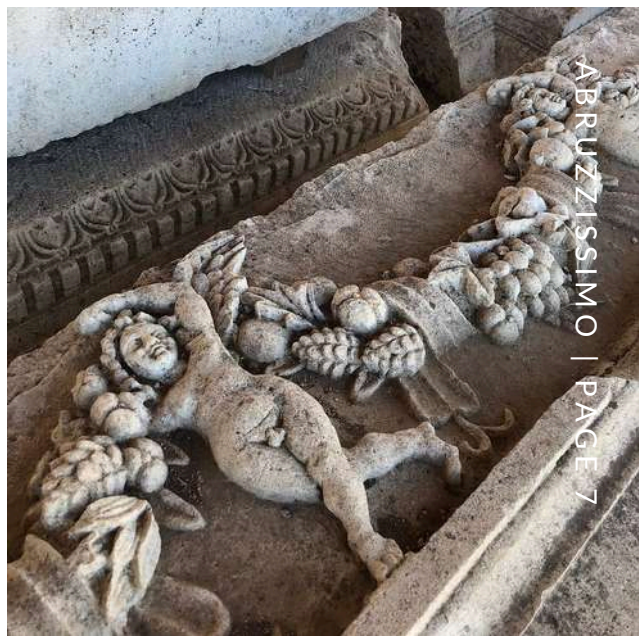
Photos: (below) areal view of the theatre, via [Musei archeologici nazionali di Chieti-Direzione regionale Musei Abruzzo](#); (right) carved stone fragments in Amiternum

It was designed and constructed with arches, vaults, corridors, and internal stairs for the entrance and distribution of spectators in the cavea (the seating section). Such a large, imposing structure signalled travellers the importance of Amiternum from afar.

Today, 48 arches of the amphitheatre still stand defining its perimeter. If you enter the imposing shell of the amphitheatre ruins through the triumphal gate, the elliptical space of what remains of the cavea and arena suddenly opens up before you: you sense the age of the stones with the silence being broken only by the chirping of crickets in summer.

SILENCE OF THE PAST

When you enter, Amiternum envelops you in silence, but you can imagine the sounds of the ancient city, thinking that some urban spaces must have been reserved for the productive activities of potters, sculptors, and stonecutters. Its streets echoed the voices of lanipendae (slave women overseeing the weighing of wool for spinning), butchers, cobblers, bakers, carpenters, blacksmiths, weavers and dyers, barbers, tavern keepers, and innkeepers. The city also served as a marketplace where you could buy local olive oil, fruit, and vegetables that were much appreciated in the ancient Rome. There were not many homes in Amiternum, as its main purpose was providing



public services, while most people lived in the villages scattered across the valley, but the streets were bustling with various commercial activities.

From the 4th century onwards, the landscape with small villages, villas, and farms scattered in the valley began to change. Amiternum might have been hit by a devastating earthquake in 346/7, the Roman Empire fell, a new era had begun and the city was gradually abandoned. Over time, many architectural elements from Amiternum were repurposed in the construction of nearby early Christian and early medieval settlements. One prominent example is the catacombs of San Vittorino, where the martyr of the same name was laid to rest, where archaeologists found many stone materials from Amiternum.

And while the ancient city is long gone, it can be still experienced as an island of memory within the modern landscape: as an archaeological park. Amiternum shows that the past lingers and time never truly fades away.

Rosanna Tuteri is an archaeologist and the author of the book [Amiternum. Guida archeologica](#).

Photos: (below) ruins of the amphitheatre in Amiternum; (right) the map of the site



IF YOU GO

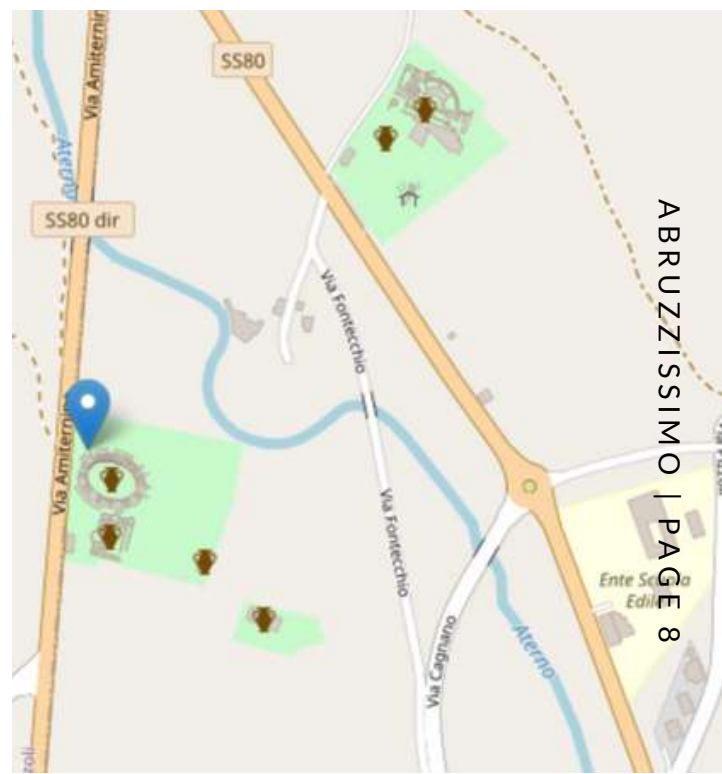
To reach Amiternum enter “Area archeologica di Amiternum Frazione San Vittorino” in your Google Maps navigator.

The archaeological site is open in summer on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday from 8.30am to 1.30pm, Thursday 2.30pm-7.30pm. Closed on Sunday and Monday. Make sure to check the opening hours via this [link](#) as they vary depending on the season. Free entrance.

On the site, you will find information boards in Italian and English.

Occasional guided tours of the site are organised for the national days of archaeology and other special occasions. Private and group guided tours in English can be booked via the [tourist information office](#) in L’Aquila.

Even if the access gates are closed you will be able to see the theatre and some other ruins from the road. See the map of the archaeological site below or by clicking [here](#).



ARCHAEOLOGICAL GEMS FROM AMITERNUM

Despite being one of the region's most important archaeological sites, Amiternum remains largely unknown to the wider public and has not been developed to its full potential. Over the years, many artifacts have been excavated in Amiternum: fragments of theatre masks, statues, bronze military eagle insignia, emperors' marble heads. Many of them are displayed in the *Museo Archeologico Nazionale d'Abruzzo* in Chieti.

IL SIGNORE DI AMITERNUM

During an excavation campaign in 2007 a statue was found known as *Il Signore di Amiternum*, a slightly larger-than-life marble portrait of a standing male figure, measuring 2.09 meters in height (it is one of the largest Roman statues found in Italy). Discovered in the southwest corner of the *domus*, the statue likely fell during the building's destruction, possibly due to the earthquake of A.D. 346/7. Crafted from rough, white crystalline marble, likely sourced from the Greek islands, the statue depicts a mature man clad in a chlamys cloak, holding a sheathed sword in his left hand with a spear resting on his right arm. The statue's weathered features suggest it originally stood outdoors in a public space before being relocated to the atrium of a large, wealthy *domus*. The detailed portrayal of the man's aged face and the statue's prominent position indicate that it likely represents a significant member of the municipal aristocracy, underscoring the importance of the family that resided in the *domus*.

In 2009, *Il Signore di Amiternum* gained international prominence when it was featured in an exhibition at the G7 Summit held in L'Aquila, showcasing its historical and artistic significance.

The statue is housed in the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo in L'Aquila.



Il Signore di Amiternum

FUNERARY BRONZE BED

The funerary bronze bed dating to the late 1st century BCE to early 1st century CE, is a remarkable artifact discovered in 1905 in a male burial plot at an underground chamber tomb near Amiternum. This luxurious bed, the only bronze example of its kind found in Abruzzo, symbolizes the wealth and status of its owner. The bed's design features a double headboard, intricately decorated with full-round and relief figures, as well as finely detailed geometric and floral patterns. The upper ends of the headboard display realistic mule heads, with their necks turned outward. Medallions on the headboards are embellished with busts of male figures in relief. The bed's opulent design reflects the broader cultural trend in ancient Rome of using such funerary beds as a statement of aristocratic refinement. The bed is displayed in the Archaeological Museum, Villa Frigerj, in Chieti.

POOL

One of the most recent finds is the remains of a large rectangular pool, or *natatio*, measuring approximately 12 by 30 meters dating back to the Augustan era (27 BCE to 14 CE). Its walls were likely lined with marble or *opus signinum*, a waterproof cement used by the Romans, and the pool may have been part of a public bathhouse or a grand private residence.

FUNERARY MONUMENT

Dating to the first half of the 1st century CE, is an exceptional example of Roman funerary art and architecture. This monument, featuring elaborate sculpted reliefs, was dedicated to an *Augustal triumvir*, a local magistrate responsible for overseeing the imperial cult and public spectacles.

Photos: (bottom) the funerary monument;
(below) the bronze bed from Amiternum; both
photos via Musei Archeologici di
Chieti/Facebook

The reliefs, originally placed on the inner walls of a semi-circular atrium in front of the burial chamber, depict a range of ceremonial scenes, including a *pompa circensis* (circus procession) and a *munus gladiatorium* (gladiatorial games). Crafted from local limestone, the monument showcases intricate decorative elements, such as the procession with a chariot bearing a winged Victory and detailed scenes of combat, emphasizing the high social status and economic power of the individual commemorated. Despite some blocks being repurposed in later periods, the monument's reconstruction in 1966 has restored its historical and artistic context, reflecting the sophisticated narrative techniques and the prominence of public and funerary rituals in provincial Roman society.

See this short [video](#) showing a 3D reconstruction of the ancient Amiternum.





LA CORSA DEGLI ZINGARI: THE BAREFOOT RACE IN PACENTRO

By Tommaso Paolini
Photos by Marinello
Mastrogiuseppe

This month, Pacentro (AQ) hosts the historic annual *La Corsa degli Zingari*, whose origins have been lost in the mists of time. The barefoot race, held in honour of the Madonna di Loreto, is deeply felt by the local community and draws thousands of spectators from the region and beyond.

On the first Sunday of September, as the bell at the church of Madonna di Loreto rings, a small group of barefoot runners descends from the top of a rocky ridge to the Vella stream below, then races up a steep hill, through the streets of the town to reach the altar of the Madonna in the church. The route is short, only 850 metres, but the downhill part is steep and rough, with brambles and sharp stones, and the last part is a tough climb. The fastest runners take only about five minutes to complete it, but it is a tough trail and the price is lacerated and bleeding feet.

Photo: a runners on the trail on Colle Ardinghi

At the finishing line, inside the church, medics provide first aid and, once the wounds are bandaged, the winner is announced. Afterwards, all participants, are carried around the town as heroes cheered by the locals and thousands of spectators.

MEDIEVAL ORIGINS

The origins of the race are uncertain, but Pacentro's oral tradition suggests that, in the Middle Ages, the town's feudal lord Giacomo Caldora selected the strongest young men from the race for his troops. A group of anthropologists and historians are currently undertaking a study to understand when the race started, and all evidence is pointing out that it might have been in the early Middle Ages, the period of the Longobard rule. Later, the religious aspect of *La Corsa* took centre stage, with devotion to the Madonna di Loreto becoming the focal point of the event.

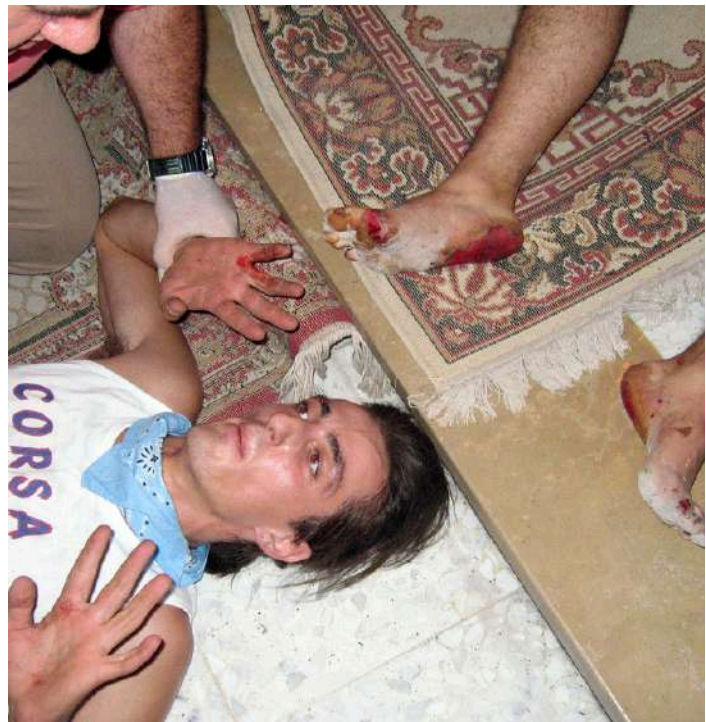
While the event's name, *La Corsa degli Zingari*, is often translated as the Gypsy Race, in local dialect the word *zingari* meant "the barefoot, poor, those who have only a few rags on them."

A shiver of genuine emotion runs through *pacentrani* (as the locals are called) when the runners sprint down the steep paths of Colle Ardinghi with faith, courage, and devotion. It is not a sports competition but an act of faith and devotion that has become part of our cultural identity.

Until not too long ago, the prize was a piece of high-quality fabric, which was traditionally used to make a good suit for the man's wedding. Today, in addition to the symbolic *palo* prize, the winner also receives money. As we say in Pacentro, today you run *La Corsa degli Zingari* to be, not to have. The proud winners and participants are celebrated and praised in the town. To emphasize the non-competitive aspect of the event, all runners receive small sums of money, ranging from €1,200 for the winner to €50 for the last finishers. Starting this year, the organizers have taken it a step further giving €500 from the winner's prize to a nominated local charity.

MODERN DAYS

La Corsa degli Zingari remained little known outside Abruzzo for a long time, but in recent years it has been widely featured in the national media and has begun to attract international tourists. According to the organizers, the latest edition of the event attracted



Photos: (from top) spectators are cheering on; medics provide first aid to the runners at the church altar

over 30,000 visitors to Pacentro, raising hopes that it could provide a significant boost to the local economy. The *Corsa degli Zingari* Association, in collaboration with the *Confraternita Madonna di Loreto*, has begun the process of requesting that Pacentro's Barefoot Race be added to UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

In the meantime, some rules have been updated and clarified. Starting this year, only 25 runners, men or women, can participate. Priority will be given to Pacentro's residents, those born in the town or married to a resi-

dent, as well as anyone who has participated in at least five runs previously.

Tommaso Paolini is a former professor of Tourism Economics at the University of L'Aquila. He has written 21 books as well as numerous reports and articles on tourism published in international newspapers and magazines.

Additional reporting by Anna Lebedeva.



IF YOU GO

The event spans two days, this year beginning on September 6, featuring a blend of religious and cultural activities. The religious program includes daily Holy Rosary prayers and a Novena dedicated to the Madonna di Loreto, culminating in a torchlight procession at 9pm. The cultural festivities begin on September 7, with traditional market stalls, street food, live music, a children's race at 4pm and fireworks. The main Corsa degli Zingari starts at 6pm, with the celebrations continuing during which the runners are carried around the town's streets cheered by spectators. The award ceremony is scheduled for 9pm. See the full programme on the event's [website](#).

The town provides parking spaces a short walk from the centre. Arrive early if you want to take a good spot closer to the finishing line (Chiesa Madonna di Loreto) but be prepared for big crowds, as the town's streets are narrow.

Photos: (from top) *La corsa degli zingarelli* for children; young participants after the race at the altar; participants are carried around the town after the race



GORIANO VALLI: FROM A TINY MEDIEVAL HOME TO NEW BEGINNINGS

Text and photos by Anna Lebedeva

The residents of the small town of Goriano Valli (AQ) are starting a new chapter in hopes of reviving the local economy and attracting more visitors and new residents. They've begun with small steps, such as opening a museum and a bottega, but their plans are bold.

On a small piazza in Goriano Valli, behind a narrow wooden door, five steep steps lead to a small room. A bed made of wooden boards with a straw mattress, a small fireplace in a corner, three wobbly chairs, a chest, and a night pot fill the minuscular space. No toilets or running water. It is a true time capsule, one that remained closed for over 140 years. "It measures just eight square metres and could be the world's smallest medieval house," says Fausto Di Giulio, an entrepreneur and founder of the MuDi, the *Museo diffuso del parco Sirente-Velino*. "The two peasants, Rachele Mariani and Pierfelice Capestrani, who were the last occupants here, looked after the orphans entrusted to them by the nearby Franciscan Convent of San Giorgio. It is hard to believe, but this small space used to be home to five-six people."

Photos: (below) the tiny medieval house in Goriano Valli; (previous page) Vigna di More vineyard

SCATTERED MUSEUM

The medieval tiny home is part of the MuDi, a scattered museum – with several spaces across the village's old centre – that offers a glimpse of the humble daily lives of past generations. Fausto Di Giulio's ancestors lived in Goriano Valli and his grandmother Concetta ran a small shop which is also part of the museum now. You can flip through her handwritten notebooks, where she kept records of the villagers' purchases and credits and see an ancient *neviera* – the predecessor of the modern fridge – a basement space filled with snow and straw inside the shop. There are also old, vaulted wine cellars, stables, haylofts, and a 15th-century *bottega*-workshop. In the 16th-century Palazzo Mariani, exhibits tell stories of local women and their daily lives. Here, you can see hand-woven fabrics, vintage knick-knacks, and old photos of rural life. I was fascinated by a dowry list from 1901, which provided a detailed breakdown of the items that a woman named Lucia brought to her new home: two pairs of shoes, nine handkerchiefs, one mattress, 30 new shirts, and four old ones.



Fausto Di Giulio says that all the museum spaces have been restored and opened by private owners and many locals have donated old photos and objects. "I hope that more people who own old buildings in the Aterno Valley will follow Goriano Valli's example to preserve these pieces of local history for future generations," he says.

Many of the exhibits are accompanied by descriptions in both English and Italian, which is surprising given the museum's small size and the town's off-the-beaten-path location. However, the founders aim to attract international visitors. Di Giulio, who works with Rex Roundtables – an international networking organization based in New York – has ambitious goals for the museum, as he plans to include it as a space for "individual reflection and meditation" during executive retreats for international CEOs and managers. "We already have many bookings from managers and businessmen, as the initiative has sparked interest in Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Estonia, and England," he says.

REVIVING THE TOWN

The museum is part of a larger effort to revive the local economy and bring discerning tourists and new residents to Goriano Valli. In August, like many other mountain towns in Abruzzo, Goriano Valli fills up with people who come back to their family homes for a summer break, but most of the year the streets are quiet, with only 80 full-time locals living here.

Maria Grazia Guidone, a member of the non-profit community cooperative Cuore delle Valli, told me about the grassroots initiatives that have been organised in the last few months as we sipped coffee in the local bar, the only one in town. "We have just opened a small shop, Bottega di Comunita, where locals can buy basic things as well as wine, pasta, and flour produced in Goriano Valli," she says. "It might seem like a small thing, but considering that the nearest grocery store is about 15km away and not everyone can drive it makes life for

Photos (from top): the old shop room at the MuDi; Fausto Di Giulio shows his grandmother's notebooks; an old photo of the town's women making bread displayed in the MuDi



A

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residents much easier.” The cooperative has launched a programme for locals and visitors: tennis tournaments, walks with donkeys, wine tastings, and tours of the medieval towers in the area. “We are also hoping to persuade a few big companies to set up a base here for their employees to work remotely, so they can move with their families and enjoy the peaceful and affordable life in the town,” says Maria Grazia.

Goriano Valli might not have big shops or restaurants, but there are several farms that produce cheese, wine, cultivate heritage grains, and even a mill. It is a different kind of life here: the latest news is discussed at the bar under old poplar trees while the kids zoom past on their bicycles, and everyone knows each other by name. In a town where the past is preserved and celebrated, it’s not hard to imagine that some people will be drawn to Goriano Valli’s quiet, close-knit community and the charm of a simpler way of life.

THINGS TO DO IN GORIANO VALLI

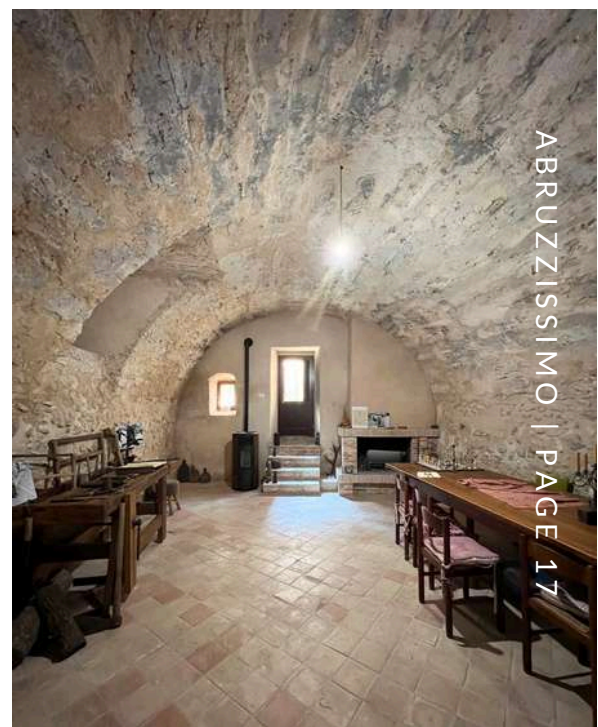
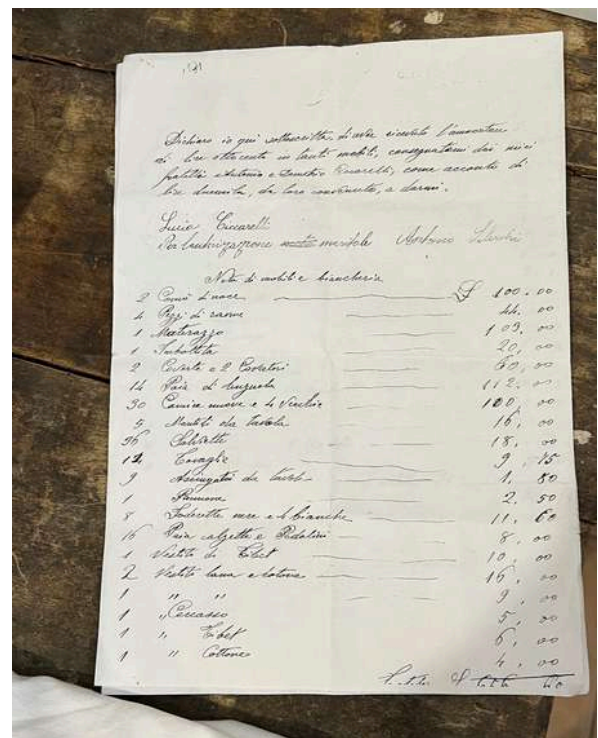
EXPLORE THE MUSEUM

The museum will be officially inaugurated on September 21 at 5 p.m. It may take some time before regular opening hours are established. To visit, be sure to call 0039 351 925 6889 or email info@mudimuseo.it to schedule an appointment. For more details check the museum’s [website](#).

TREK WITH DONKEYS

A young couple, Giuseppe and Saskia, offer short and multi-day walks for all ages with their charming donkeys. You can choose to visit the medieval tower of Goriano Valli, take a leisurely stroll to the ruins of the nearby Roman bridge spanning the Aterno River, or venture a little further to see the Beffi Castle. Saskia speaks German and some English. Contact [AbruzzoMio](#) for additional information.

Photos: (from top clockwise) Maria Grazia Guidone at the museum; the dowry list from 1901 displayed at the MuDi; a room in Palazzo Mariani; Goriano Valli



TASTE WINE

Vigna di More is one of Abruzzo's highest vineyards, with spectacular views. The winery runs excellent wine tasting events for small groups. You can also buy their wines at the small *bottega* at the local bar (Via Roma, 103). For more information see their [website](#).

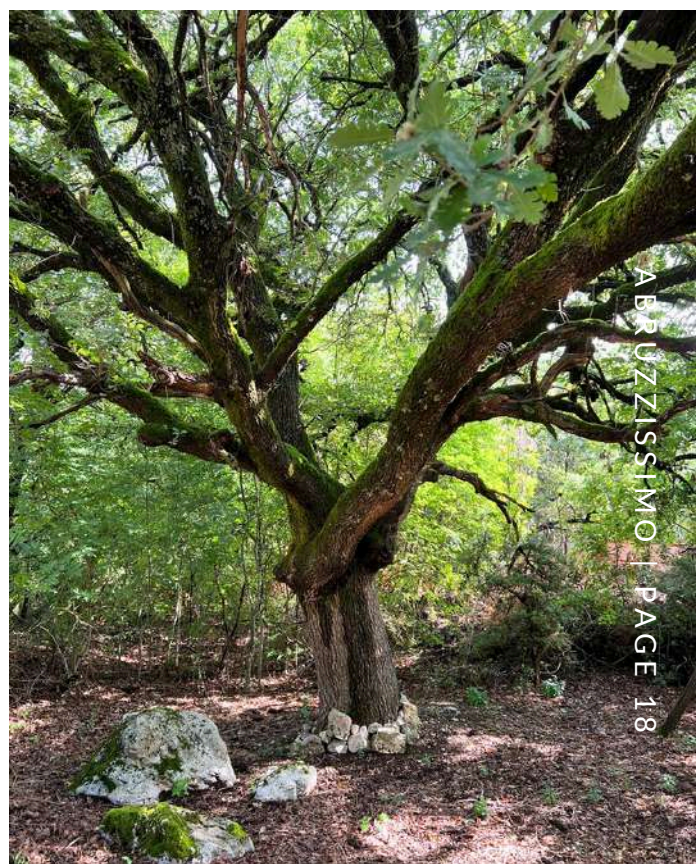
VISIT AN OLD MILL

The mill, originally built in 1950 by the renowned and respected miller Vittorio Capaldi, served the entire Aterno Valley. Locals would bring their grain here daily for milling. Recently renovated, the mill is now run by Vittorio's grandson, Antonio Cercarelli, who also cultivates local heritage wheat varieties such as Solina and Bolero on the family's land. Contact Antonio to buy high-quality flour or organise a visit (in Italian) to the mill at +39 345 7013 334.

WALK UNDER THE OAKS

The *Cuore delle Valli* cooperative has created a beautiful itinerary, *Camminata delle querce vecchie*, that takes you to see the town's old oaks. Follow the easy route to discover more than a dozen magnificent trees, each marked with a small heart. Information boards telling stories from the town's past will soon be added beside them. You can find a map of the itinerary at the bar on Via Roma, 103, or by contacting the cooperative through their Facebook [page](#).

Photos: (from top clockwise) an old cellar at the museum; a street in Goriano Valli; an old oak on the *Camminata delle querce vecchie* trail; walking with donkeys, photo courtesy AbruzzoMio.





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ABRUZZISSIMO
MAGAZINE

THREADING THE NEEDLE: FROM YORKSHIRE TO TORNARECCIO

By Linda Dini Jenkins

When Dionne and Mark Swift decided to look for a holiday home, they put no limitations on where they should look. They each went online and, independently, unbelievably, came up with the same property in Abruzzo. That was the auspicious beginning to a decision which, they agree, was the best one they ever made.

“Both sets of our parents talked about buying a holiday home,” reflects Dionne. “But it never happened. Life always got in the way, and my Dad died at age 64. We didn’t want that to happen to us.” Over a bottle of wine on January 28, 2015 – they remember the date because it was so life changing – they decided to start their property search. They enrolled in Italian lessons the very next day. Six weeks later, in March 2015, Mark and Dionne came to Italy to look at what they’d found online. With almost a meter of snow on the ground, they couldn’t even see the nearby village, but they didn’t care. They knew it was their house.

VILLAGE OF THE THREE “M”S

The couple, still living in the UK – where Mark was a solicitor and Dionne was an international textile artist and tutor – bought La Vecchia Scuola in May 2015 right from the builder. As Dionne says, it was not picture postcard perfect. “It was a 1960s building, basically a big white box that had been renovated once before but could be again. Of course, being a school, it had no kitchen, but it had big rooms and high ceilings and would absolutely work as a holiday home.” And it was near the village of Tornareccio, which they both fell in love with.



Dionne and Mark Swift

There’s a lot going on in Tornareccio. A tight community of about 2,000 inhabitants, Dionne says the people are very friendly and welcoming, and she’s always keen to show off what she calls the town’s three “M”s: MuMo (*il Museo dei Mosaici Tornareccio*), an open air museum of contemporary mosaics (read Dionne’s article about the mosaics in the July-August 2022 issue of ABRUZZISSIMO available [here](#)); Miele (honey), with more than a dozen honey producers in this town that is called the “capital of honey;” and Monte Pallano, with its pre-Roman megalithic walls that were discovered by archaeology students from Harvard and Oxford.

And while Dionne and Mark recently sold La Vecchia Scuola for bigger digs, they remain close to their friends and all the activities in Tornareccio.

“We searched for two years,” says Dionne. “We were desperate to stay in Tornareccio, but we couldn’t find exactly what we wanted. Fortunately, we’re only a 30-minute drive away.”

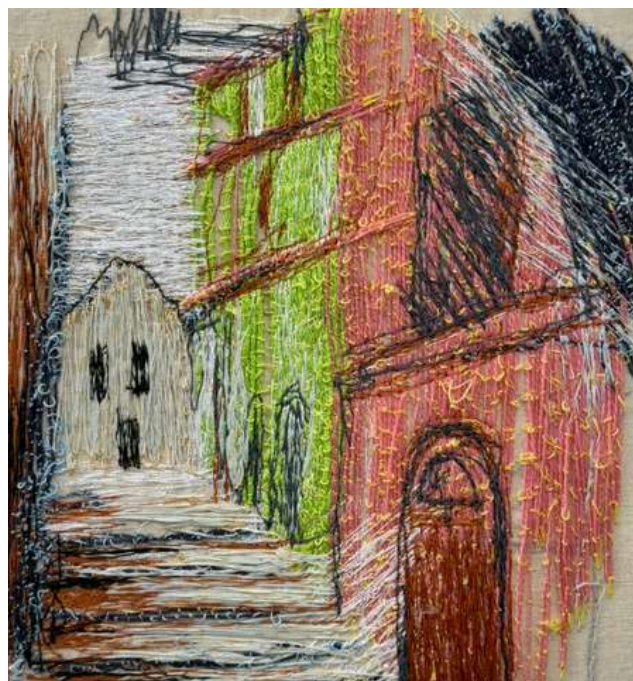
FINDING PERMANENCE

By this time, Mark had retired and they needed a larger, more permanent home. They found it in Castel Frentano, closer to the sea, with a population of 4200, and are creating a studio where Dionne can expand her classes and retreat offerings. They also have nine hectares of land with olive groves, so Mark is now producing olive oil and learning to keep the deer, wolves, and the ubiquitous wild boar at bay.

There is a large ex-pat community in Abruzzo, but that’s not what they came for. “I try to put in the effort,” says Dionne. “Working with the pro loco and other organizations, participating in art projects, going to yoga with the locals . . . it takes work, but it’s well worth the effort.” She also volunteers helping a local association to run mosaics tours in English in Tornareccio. And when she’s not going to exhibitions or creating her own art, she’s teaching.

NOT YOUR GRANDMOTHER’S EMBROIDERY

Dionne has more than 30 years’ experience in creating, exhibiting, and teaching. She specialised in Textiles and Machine Embroidery at Goldsmith’s College in London and has a Masters degree in Textiles from UCE, Birmingham. She says, “My work is not only a personal exploration, but also a contribution to the broader discourse on the intersection of art and craftsmanship.” As a textile artist, Dionne seeks to celebrate “stitch” as a true artistic medium, using thread as paint and needles as brushes. “I use free machine embroidery, working at 1600 stitches per minute,” she explains. “It’s fast, furious, and often physically hard work.”



Dionne’s free machine embroidery work 'Steps to Heaven' depicting a street in Tornareccio

She has been teaching students for more than 20 years, and the move to Abruzzo has shifted her focus to bringing students to the region which, as she says, “is too good a place not to share.” She runs small group textile retreats and has many repeat participants. Her first week-long summer school filled up within 48 hours and there is already a waiting list for the [2025 Italian Textile Summer School](#).

But she offers students more than instruction and hands-on experiences in a highly creative environment – she also introduces them to the beauty of Abruzzo. Students discover an off-the-beaten-track Abruzzo, drawing in small villages, experiencing the *trabocchi* coastline, writing and drawing in local bars and restaurants. “Best of all, they get to experience the magical Italian evenings on their own,” she says. “I book them into local hotels and recommend bars and restaurants, but they are free to explore the wine, food, and cultural offerings of each small town.” They also have nightly homework: do 10 drawings in a bar or take a photo of yourself outside of all the churches, and so on.

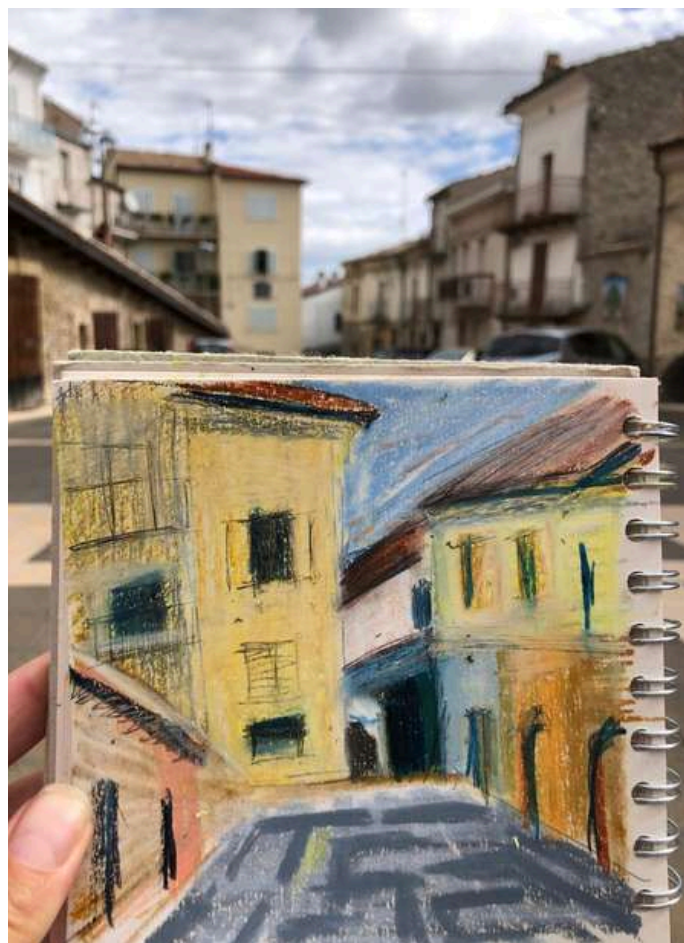
THE JOURNEY AND THE DISCOVERY

They are looking to sell their home in the UK now, so they will soon be full-time residents here in Abruzzo. Asked if they were fluent in Italian when they arrived, Dionne says no, adding, "Where would the discovery be if we knew everything ahead of time? The journey and the discovery are the exciting bits."

On a more serious note, she is well aware how fortunate she and Mark are. "We had the opportunity to change our lives," she says. "We're happier and healthier now than we've ever been. Coming here was the best decision we ever made, and it's added years to our lives."

Linda Dini Jenkins is a freelance writer and travel planner. She is the author of [Up at the Villa: Travels with my Husband](#), and the new memoir, [Becoming Italian: Chapter and Verse from an Italian American Girl](#).

Photos: (right) Dionne's sketch of a street in Tornareccio; (below) the couple's olive grove





ATAVISMO! MY HOME IN ITALY

by Anna Maria Baccellieri

This heart-warming memoir takes readers on a deeply personal journey of rediscovery, heritage, and the magic of Abruzzo. Anna's narrative unfolds as she visits her ancestral homeland, a small town of Goriano Valli (AQ), for the first time connecting with long-lost family members.

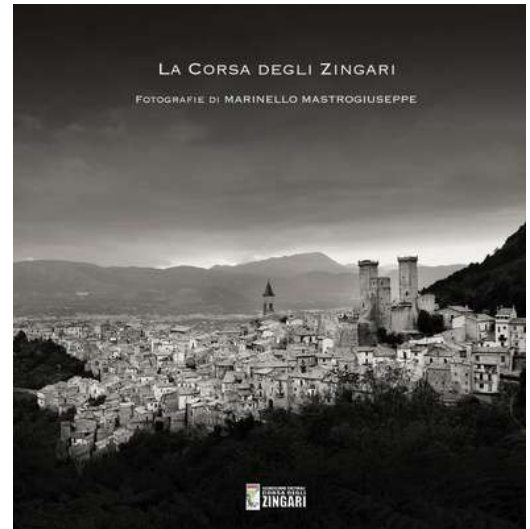
The book is more than just a travelogue; it is an intimate exploration of identity, tradition, and the transformative power of embracing one's heritage. Baccellieri's vivid descriptions transport readers to medieval mountain villages, busy local markets, and a shepherd's shack. Her accounts of the *tartufo* festival in Succiano, the lively *Ferragosto* celebration, and the colourful patron saint's *fiesta* in Goriano Valli are personal and the passion for her newly discovered heritage is contagious.

The author shares not just the recipes passed down through generations, like *cinghiale* and zucchini flower fritters, but also the experiences of cooking in a monk's kitchen, capping 100 bottles of wine, picking artichokes in her cousin's garden, and shopping from local vans which deliver fresh produce right to the door.

The discovery of a family scandal, tales of unrequited love, and wartime heroism add depth and poignancy to Anna's story, revealing the complex layers of her heritage. These revelations, previously unknown to her American family, offer a fascinating glimpse not only into her ancestors' past, but Abruzzo's small town's history.

While some Italian expressions have grammatical errors, it doesn't distract the reader from the author's important message: it is never too late to reconnect with one's roots and that sometimes, the most unexpected adventures can lead to profound personal growth.

The book is available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).



LA CORSA DEGLI ZINGARI DI PACENTRO

By Marinello Mastrogiuseppe

The book, published by the cultural association *Corsa degli Zingari*, is dedicated to the centuries-old tradition of La Corsa degli Zingari, Pacentro's barefoot race (for more about the event, see our article on page 11). It includes 135 photos taken by Marinello Mastrogiuseppe between 1998 and 2018 which beautifully showcase the event Pacentro has been hosting for many centuries. These photos capture the excited faces of the spectators, the determination of the participants to arrive at the finishing point at the church of Santa Maria di Loreto, and the pain they endure running barefoot on the rocky ground.

In the book's introduction, readers will find a brief history of the event and reflections on the role of *La Corsa degli Zingari* in the local economy. The texts are presented in both Italian and English.

Marinello Mastrogiuseppe is a well-known professional photographer and teacher who has dedicated his life to documenting Abruzzo's religious traditions and historical re-enactments. His photographs have been published in national magazines and regional newspapers. He also the founder of the Museum of Photographic Technics in Sulmona.

The book is available on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com) and or on the association's [website](https://www.corsadeglizingari.it).

33 dessert recipes



DOLCI

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EXTRA VIRGIN, EXTRA GOOD

By Anna Swann

There is a saying in Abruzzo: *Se la vita nzaffronde, l'unico rimedio è il pane onde* (If life gets tough, the only remedy is bread with olive oil) and I couldn't agree more. A generous drizzle of good extra virgin olive oil from a good producer makes life so much better.

Italic tribes tended olive groves on the territory of the modern-day Abruzzo well before the Roman Empire conquered the area. Romans expanded the cultivation, but it slowed down in the Middle Ages with the land being used mostly for vineyards and sheep farming. In the 1800s, olive oil production was revived and has been a big part of the local economy since.

Today, there are nine million olive trees spread across 40,000 hectares of land, with over 500 olive mills in Abruzzo. The region cultivates more than 80 native olive varieties used in oil production, each distinguished by its own unique flavours and characteristics: strong or delicate, peppery or almost sweet, with notes of almond, fresh grass, artichoke, green apple, or tomato leaves.

In the province of Pescara, the "golden oil triangle" (the area between the towns of Loreto Aprutino, Pianella, and Moscufo) is renowned for its exceptional extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) produced from the Dritta variety. It has long been celebrated, even by the ancient Romans, for its high yield and almond notes. In the province of Chieti, the Gentile di Chieti olive variety stands out for its excellent productivity and resilience to cold temperatures. It ripens gradually in a medium-late season, producing oil with a moderate fruitiness.

One of my favourites is the Tocolana, native to Tocco Casauria and Castiglione a Casauria, which makes excellent oil with well-balanced peppery and light bitter notes.

In the last few years, olive oil production in Abruzzo has dropped by about 50% due to drought, heat, and olive fruit fly damaging the fruit. If the trend continues, olive oil from Abruzzo will become a rare delicacy rather than a familiar staple.



WHERE TO BUY HIGH QUALITY EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

Many families in Abruzzo have their own olive groves which provide them with an annual supply of oil pressed at their local mill. If you don't have relatives or friends who could share their extra virgin nectar with you, find a producer or *frantoio* (olive press) near you, where the quality is almost always guaranteed (for more see my tips on buying EVOO on the next page).

AZIENDA AGRICOLA MARINA PALUSCI

Located within the 'golden oil triangle', in the hills of Pianella, the Palusci farm has been producing extra virgin olive oil of the highest quality for generations. Their EVOO has won numerous national and international awards. **Address:** C. da Fonte Gallo, 2, Pianella (PE).

AZIENDA AGRICOLA GUARDIANI FARCHIONE

Guardiani Farchione is a small family-run winery in Tocco da Casauria but they also make excellent olive oil: monocultivars Tocolana and Intosso as well as a blend (Dritta, Leccino, and Tocolana), which is milder and can be used for cooking. **Address:** Via XX Settembre, 30, Tocco Da Casauria (PE).

TRAPPETO DI CAPRAFICO DI TOMMASO MASCIAntonio

Since 1874, the Masciantonio family has been cultivating olives in Casoli (CH). They work with several cultivars producing exceptional multi-award-winning extra virgin olive oil. This year, their monocultivar Crognale and Intosso have been named the best EVOO in Italy. The olives are harvested from centuries-old trees and pressed at the farm's mill within six hours. You can buy Masciantonio's oils directly from the farm or online. **Address:** Località Caprafico 35, Casoli (CH)

10 TIPS FOR BUYING QUALITY EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

By Anna Swann

1

EXTRA VIRGIN

Always buy extra virgin olive oil (EVOO). All other grades of olive oil are held to a lesser standard. EVOO has no defects, acidity level of no more than 0.8g per 100g and is cold pressed using only mechanic methods (pressing or centrifugation). EVOO should taste fruity, has a peppery bite to it and a bitter note. The slightest hint of stale walnuts, mustiness, soil or pond water means the oil is defective and is not extra virgin.

2

PRESS TYPE

Ask what kind of press the producer is using. The old style machinery with stone grinders and hydraulic presses that use round grass mats might look romantic but they significantly reduce the quality of oil. Those grinding stones and mats are very hard to clean and residues can spoil olive oil. They are also slower and the production chain is more exposed to air, so the olives oxidize quicker than in more modern machines.



3

FILTERED VS UNFILTERED

Unfiltered oil doesn't always mean better. If you are buying large quantities of EVOO, choose filtered oil as it will last longer. Unfiltered oil tastes good and is often marketed as healthier but because of organic residues it has a very short shelf life, not more than a few months.



4

HEALTHY OLIVES

If you are buying directly from a producer, go to the olive mill and check the olives that are being pressed. Do they look healthy? Are they in perforated boxes rather than plastic sacks? The sacks make olives "sweat" and drastically reduce their quality. Surprisingly, many farmers in Abruzzo still use plastic sacks to transport their olives and sometimes store the fruit in them for several days. To make EVOO, olives have to be milled within 12 hours after the harvest otherwise they'll lose their nutrients and flavour and could begin to ferment.

5

D.O.P

Look for “DOP” (Protected designation of Origin) on the label as it is a guarantee of quality. It means that the oil was produced, processed and prepared in a given geographical area following strict standards. There are three DOP areas for oil in Abruzzo: Aprutino Pescarese, Colline Teatine, Pretuziano delle Colline Teramane.

6

BITTER IS GOOD

Olives are bitter, so a bitter note in EVOO is a sign of quality and freshness. Younger olives make more peppery and bitter oil. Certain cultivars can be more bitter than others, so train your palate and find the level of bitterness you love.

7

HIGHER PRICE

EVOO is expensive to produce, so be prepared to pay a higher price. In Abruzzo, a litre of extra virgin olive oil blend costs at least €10-12 when bought directly from a producer, and it is often sold in one-, three-, or five-litre tins. Monocultivar oils are more expensive and typically sold in 0.75-litre bottles, priced between €14 and €25. The oil you see in supermarkets labelled as EVOO with a price tag of €5 is very unlikely to be of true extra virgin quality.

8

COLOUR DOESN'T MATTER

Our brain likes the colour green and people tend to think automatically that greener oil tastes better. So much so that some industrial scale producers tint their cheap olive oil green to help sales. The truth is the colour never reflects the quality. That's why professional tasters use blue glasses, so the oil's colour doesn't affect their judgements.



9

SINGLE CULTIVAR VS BLEND

You'll find different olive cultivars in each Italian region. In Abruzzo, the most prevalent are Gentile, Intosso, Tocolana, Leccino, Dritta. Each varietal has particular characteristics and a unique taste. For instance, Dritta oil is milder than others, with a note of artichoke. Intosso olive oil is characterised by intense taste, with a hint of fresh walnuts and tomato leaves. If you are after an olive with a strong character, go for a single cultivar (it will say “monocultivar” on the bottle). Blends tend to be milder.



10

HEAT, LIGHT AND AIR

These are olive oil's enemies. Never buy or keep olive oil in a clear glass bottle even if the label says “extra virgin olive oil”. Light triggers the oxidation process and it quickly becomes rancid. Keep your EVOO in dark glass bottles in a cool place (not by a cooking stove!) where the temperature never exceeds 20C (ideally it should be between +14C and +18C), so a wine cellar or a dark basement would be the best places.

COCOCCIATA MARSICANA

By Anna Swann

A few years ago I happened upon a small, delightful *Sagra della Cococciata* in Paterno (Avezzano). The town's square was filled with long tables and benches, cheerful live music was blasting away, and everyone was enjoying a simple traditional dish – *cococciata*. The ladies from the local ProLoco served generous slices of this *pizza rustica* and I asked them for the recipe. It is very simple, with just a few ingredients: zucchini, flour, a splash of water, and some olive oil. Since then it has become one of my favourite quick *pizze rustica*.

A dish with the same name exists in the Lazio region, but there, *cococciata* is a hearty vegetable stew made with zucchini, eggs, tomatoes, and *pecorino* cheese. In Tuscany, a similar recipe called *la scarpaccia* includes finely chopped onions in the dough. I enjoy that extra flavour and often add an onion to my *cococciata* sometimes.

I enjoy cooking *cococciata* at the end of summer or early autumn, when the zucchini season in my vegetable garden is winding down and the zucchinis have lost their crunch and flavour. As a personal touch, I serve the *cococciata* with a generous drizzle of Toccolana or Intosso olive oil (see page 25).

The *Sagra della Cococciata* is celebrated every year in July. Keep an eye on the organisers' Facebook [page](#) for the next year's dates.

INGREDIENTS

Makes 6-8 portions

- 350g flour
- 350g zucchini
- 1 large white onion, sliced into fine rings (optional)
- 200ml water
- 50ml olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Some good extra virgin olive oil for drizzling



PREPARATION

Preheated fan oven at 200°C (390°F).

Slice the zucchini into thin rounds (or half circles if the zucchini are large) using a vegetable slicer, place them in a bowl sprinkled with a little salt. Leave them for about 30 minutes to allow the release of moisture.

If using an onion, peel it and slice thinly into half- or full rings. Add salt, pepper, and the sliced onion to the bowl. Mix in all the flour and water, stir well.

Pour the entire mixture onto a baking sheet lined with parchment paper, spreading it evenly to a thickness of about one to two fingers. Drizzle with olive oil.

Bake the *cococciata* for 30 minutes, or until a golden crust forms on the surface.

Remove from the oven and drizzle with good extra virgin olive oil. Serve the *cococciata* cut into squares as a snack, appetiser, or a light main dish with a salad.

CELLI RIPIENI

These simple biscuits are filled with grape jam. The name means “Stuffed birds” because in some areas of Abruzzo, they used to be shaped like little birds. Traditionally, they are filled with a homemade Montepulciano d’Abruzzo grape jam called *scrucchiata*. Almost black, this dense jam is made by slowly cooking Montepulciano d’Abruzzo grapes. High-quality *scrucchiata* (also called *ragnata* in some areas of the region) will never have any added sugar. The preparation is time consuming, as the skins and pips are separated from the pulp by hand (the process is called *scrocchiatura*) with the help of *lu crivillucc*, a sieve-shaped tool with tightly strung concentric wires through which the grapes are crushed and squeezed. After that, the pulp is cooked in copper cauldrons, on an open fire, so the jam will have a lovely smoky note.

Very few households make *scrucchiata* nowadays, but you can find grape jam in some supermarkets to use for this recipe.

If you are using the homemade, thick *scrucchiata*, you can skip adding crushed biscuits to the filling. In a more traditional version of the recipe, there is no sugar added to the dough.

For more dessert recipes from Abruzzo see our ebook *Dolci* available [here](#).

INGREDIENTS

Makes 25-30 biscuits

For the pastry:

- 500g flour
- 150ml extra-virgin olive oil
- 150ml white wine
- 2-3 tbsps sugar
- A pinch of salt

For the filling:

- 300g grape jam
- 100g almonds, peeled and chopped
- Zest of 1 orange or lemon
- 5-6 plain biscuits (e.g., digestive), crushed
- 1 ½ tbsp unsweetened cocoa powder
- 15g dark chocolate, grated (optional)



PREPARATION

Preheat the oven to 180°C.

For the pastry, mix all the ingredients together to make a smooth, elastic dough, just firm enough to handle. Let it rest while you prepare the filling.

In a bowl, combine the almonds, crushed biscuits, citrus zest, cocoa powder, grated chocolate (if using). Add to the jam and mix thoroughly. The filling must be thick enough not to slide off the spoon.

Roll out the pastry to a few millimetres thick and cut it into disks (about 10cm diameter). Add the jam mixture into each disk, slightly off centre. Fold over the pastry to create a half-moon, seal the edges well, bring the two corners together to create a ring, and press them to seal.

Bake for 20 minutes or until golden. While the biscuits are slightly warm sprinkle them with some sugar.

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Tracing the historic path of
salt trade in Abruzzo

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Reviving the forgotten heritage
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