

5th anniversary issue

TRAVEL HISTORY CULTURE PEOPLE FOOD

ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE



**Women's Work: Petals of
Devotion in Bucchianico**

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**A Home Above
Lake Barrea**

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*Special
Supplement
Inside:*

**5 Festivals Not
To Miss in May**

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Barrea. Photo by Anna Lebedeva.
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Raiano. Photos by Anna Lebedeva.
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ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE

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Editor's Note

ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine is five years old!

When I started the publication in 2020, I had no idea how long it would keep going – or how far it might travel. In these five years, it has grown into a small, but spirited, Abruzzo-based digital publishing venture. So far, we've published over 200 features exploring the region's history, traditions, people, and its most intriguing places. We've written about almost 90 towns and villages and interviewed nearly 150 people who call Abruzzo home and care deeply about its future, published four ebooks.

Over the years, ABRUZZISSIMO's mission has become more defined. We don't present Abruzzo simply as a place to visit – we explore it as a place people call home. We tell the story of a living land, not a pretty postcard – with its cracks in old stone walls, depopulated hamlets, and daily struggles – but also as a place of innovation and a fierce pride in tradition. We believe every corner of Abruzzo has something worth exploring with a curious and open mind: a small religious festival held by a village of 30 souls; a simple, honest dish made from a handful of ingredients; a faded fresco in a crumbling church; a conversation with a *nonna* sitting quietly outside her front door.

Although ABRUZZISSIMO doesn't exist in print format, running a digital magazine isn't cheap. We still have significant annual costs – including mailing platforms, hosting, software, and contributor fees. Thanks to our premium subscribers, many of these are now covered. But with a larger budget, we could do even more for you. If you've been enjoying the magazine, please consider marking our fifth anniversary with a donation – or upgrading to a paid subscription if you haven't yet. We're very close to 5,000 subscribers – will you help us reach that milestone by inviting your friends and family to subscribe via our website? And if you'd like to send birthday wishes our way, we'd love to hear from you!

As always, I thank you for your continued support. Wherever you are in the world, raise a glass of Montepulciano d'Abruzzo to ABRUZZISSIMO – and let's make five more years of storytelling and celebrating Abruzzo a reality together! *Grazie!*

As the magazine turns five, we are offering a small gift to mark the occasion: a free supplement: **"5 Festivals Not to Miss in May"** for all our subscribers. You'll find it at the end of this issue. For our premium subscribers there is a special discount for a visit to Palazzo Tilli in Casoli (CH).

Anna Lebedeva
Founder & Editor

DIGEST OF RECENT REGIONAL NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS FROM ABRUZZO NEWSPAPERS



PESCARA BRACES FOR DISRUPTION AS AQUEDUCT WORKS BEGIN

Pescara faces months of disruption as a €15 million overhaul of the city's main aqueduct gets underway. The project, involving the installation of a new five-kilometre pipeline from Colle Pineta to Aca's headquarters, is set to begin on 12 May. Major roads including Via Chieti, Corso Vittorio Emanuele, and Via Gabriele D'Annunzio will see closures, lane reductions, and suspended parking. Critics warn of severe impact on traffic, tourism, and local businesses, especially during the peak summer season. While the infrastructure upgrade is essential, the timing and planning have raised concerns about the administration's ability to balance progress with public welfare.

RIDLEY SCOTT TO FILM HIS NEW POST-APOCALYPTIC MOVIE IN ABRUZZO

The famous film director has chosen Abruzzo for his latest production, *The Dog Stars*, an adaptation of Peter Heller's post-apocalyptic novel. The production team has already begun setting up the area for filming, which is set to start in mid-May in **Ovindoli** (AQ) in the Sirente Velino Regional Park.

The story follows Hig, a widowed pilot living in isolation after a global catastrophe, played by Jacob Elordi. The cast also includes Margaret Qualley, Guy Pearce, and Josh Brolin. The production, involving around 300 people, is expected to bring a significant boost to the local economy. The film is due for release by the end of 2025.



STANLEY TUCCI IN ABRUZZO

In the upcoming National Geographic series *Tucci in Italy*, premiering on May 18, Stanley Tucci returns to Italy to visit five regions: Tuscany, Lombardy, Trentino-Alto Adige, Lazio, and Abruzzo. The details of the show haven't been revealed, but the programme's trailer and some announcement show Tucci enjoying a fire-cooked meal with the famous chef Davide Nanni in Castrovalva, participating in grilling traditional *arrosticini*, and enjoying a family Sunday lunch. The Abruzzo episode is set to air on June 1 on Disney+ and Hulu.

POPULATION DECLINES AGAIN BUT IMMIGRANTS SLOW THE TREND

Abruzzo lost 3,056 residents in 2023, according to the latest ISTAT census – roughly the population of a small town like Altino or Balsorano. The decline, driven by low birth rates and an ageing population, marks a continuation of the region's demographic slide. Births fell to a historic low of 7,578, while deaths totalled 15,829. Without the positive contribution of foreign residents, the loss would have been almost triple. Migrants from abroad increased by 2,924 people, helping to counterbalance the decline and lower the region's average age. **Teramo** saw the highest foreign growth rate at 4.6%, offering a rare demographic lifeline.

As of the end of 2023, Abruzzo was home to approximately 85,828 foreign residents, accounting for about 6.5% of the region's total population. This diverse group includes immigrants from Romania, Albania, Morocco, North Macedonia, China, and smaller numbers from the UK and the US.



TWO EVENTS FOR WINE LOVERS

This month, Abruzzo will host two hugely popular events for wine lovers.

From May 16 to 18, **L'Aquila** will host *Vinorum – Festival del Vino d'Abruzzo* in the historic Piazza Duomo, the largest wine festival in the region. Visitors can enjoy tastings, direct sales from local wineries, gastronomic specialties, and guided wine tastings, all while discovering new labels and meeting the region's renowned wine producers. See the full programme on the event's [page](#).

On May 24-25, *Cantine Aperte* will return with dozens of wineries across the region opening their doors for visitors. The event offers an incredible opportunity to taste local products, enjoy educational workshops, and experience scenic picnics and sunset aperitifs. See the full list of the open wineries on the *Movimento Turismo Vino Abruzzo* [page](#).

BOBBIN LACE SCHOOL REOPENS IN L'AQUILA

The bobbin lace school in **L'Aquila** reopens for the new season, offering afternoon courses for anyone eager to learn this ancient craft. Known locally as *tombolo aquilano*, the technique has been practised in the city for centuries. It involves weaving threads into intricate geometric and floral patterns using bobbins. Local artisans will guide beginners and advanced learners every Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday in central L'Aquila. For more details, contact the organisers via their [page](#).

DID YOU KNOW?

THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR IN ABRUZZO



After the First Crusade, the Templars established a network of commanderies in strategic locations – along ancient *tratturi*, Roman roads, and mountain passes – to protect pilgrims and travellers. Their distinctive symbols – roses, tau crosses, lambs, and the fleur-de-lys cross – can still be found carved into churches across Abruzzo. Examples include the church of San Leucio in **Atessa (CH)**, the sanctuary of Maria Incoronata in **Pescasseroli (AQ)** (photo above), and the Abbey of Santa Maria della Vittoria in **Scurcola Marsicana (AQ)**. Remains of the Templars' presence have also been found in locations such as **Vasto (CH)**, **Penne (PE)**, and **Monteodorisio (CH)**.

Some historians believe that **L'Aquila** was designed to mirror Jerusalem and may have been chosen by the Order as a hiding place for its immense treasure. It is said that the **Basilica di Collemaggio** once held sacred relics, including thorns from Christ's crown and the index finger of John the Baptist.

Pope Celestine V, whose tomb lies within the basilica, is believed to have become the custodian of the treasure after meeting the Templars at the Council of Lyon in 1274. Inside the basilica, a fresco depicts Celestine V alongside an angel holding a coat of arms marked by the red cross of the Knights Templar.

In the church of Santa Maria ad Cryptas in **Fossa (AQ)**, a depiction of Christ bears a striking resemblance to the Shroud of Turin – long believed to have been in Templar possession. The figures of Saint George and Saint Martin also appear there, wearing white garments linked to the Order.



WOMEN'S WORK: PETALS OF DEVOTION IN BUCCHIANICO

Text and photos by Anna Lebedeva

In anticipation of *La Festa dei Banderesi*, I visit Bucchianico – not for the parades or pageantry, but to see the quiet labour of the town's women who, night after night, keep an old tradition alive, one paper flower at a time. Without them, the festival could not exist.

The bright, spacious room hums with the soft chatter of women gathered around long tables. A television murmurs from one wall, while the gentle rustle of crepe paper fills the air. Lilac wisteria, whimsical orchids, delicate apple blossoms, deep burgundy roses, cheerful crocuses, and vivid gerberas – paper flowers in every hue – spill across the room in a joyous riot of colour. I am in Bucchianico, in the thick of preparations for the *Festa dei Banderesi*, one of Abruzzo's most beautiful festivals. A few members of the Pro Loco – a grassroots organisation that promotes the town and coordinates local events – are taking me to several homes to show the behind-the-scenes work that sustains the celebration.

Photo: Women carrying baskets with paper flowers during the festival. Photo courtesy of the ProLoco di Bucchianico

OLD TRADITION

With the festival, the town honours a centuries-old tradition that dates back to the 1600s, commemorating its legendary defence against a barbarian siege, attributed to the wisdom of its patron saint, Sant'Urbano. In May, over four days, the streets fill with the sound of traditional songs, historical parades, and the solemnity of religious services.

To an outsider, it may appear to be a male-dominated event: the main figures are men – the official representatives who preside over ceremonies, lead the processions, carry the flags, and recount the soldiers' tale of victory. Women, dressed in traditional red and white costumes, appear prominently during the *Ciammaichella*, a zigzagging march in the main square, and the *Trasporto delle Some di Sant'Urbano*, balancing baskets filled with thousands of colourful paper flowers on their heads, re-enacting an ancient ritual in which food and wine were gathered for the feast honouring the patron saint. But there is more to the women's role than what unfolds in the square. Behind every costume stitched, every loaf baked, every paper flower pinned to a float, there are countless hours of work carried out in kitchens and basements.

(below) Rita D'Amico is making a paper flower; a basket with paper flowers ready for the festival



Gianluca Di Pasquale, president of Bucchianico's Pro Loco, notes that what spectators see in May is only the surface of a much deeper tradition. "*La Festa dei Banderesi* goes on all year. And women are its main force."

From December onwards, women gather almost nightly to make *i fiori di carta* – delicate paper blossoms that will later fill baskets and decorate the big wooden floats. The division of labour remains much as it was in decades past: while men work outdoors, building the massive *carri* that will be hauled through the streets by tractors, women carry the greater weight of the preparations: sewing costumes, preparing communal meals, baking hundreds of *cancellate* waffles and *pesche dolci* biscuits, and assembling, patiently, thousands of flowers by hand.

WHERE THE FLOWERS ARE BORN

In Contrada Piane, we visit the home of Sheila Palmitesta and her family. "It's our second year opening the house," she says. "Last year, my husband was *il Banderese*. This year we volunteered to host again. I teach during the day, so the real boss here is my mother-in-law, Rita D'Amico."



MORE THAN PAPER

Around the kitchen table, about a dozen women are deep in their work. Someone is making leaves, others are coaxing strips of crepe paper — purple, blue, pink — into sculptural blooms. Each flower is crisp, deliberate, some uncannily true to life. Later, these will be arranged into compositions and placed in baskets, each labelled with the name of the woman who will carry it during the procession.

Rita takes a piece of yellow paper and, almost without looking, folds and curls it into a sunflower no larger than her palm. “Where did you learn?” I ask. “By watching the others,” she replies with a smile. “I’ve been doing this thirty years. I came to Bucchianico after I married — and learned it all from the women here.”

I try to gauge the total. “How many flowers do you make each year?” I ask a few of the women. They all shrug and say the same: “Many. Maybe thousands.” They don’t count. That isn’t the point. What matters are the hours spent together — coffee shared between hands sticky with glue, plates of cancellate passed round the table, the conversations, and the laughter.

Photos: (below) paper crocuses arranged in a basket; (right) folding paper leaves

I ask if the same flowers might be reused the following year. Mirella Tucci, a member of the Pro Loco, responds with patient clarity: “The colours fade, and they wouldn’t look as nice the following year. But the real reason is that for many women, it’s a kind of devotion to Sant’Urbano — a way of honouring him by dedicating time to this ritual and offering freshly made flowers each year.” Once the festival ends, the flowers are given to friends and family, making way for the next year’s creations.

Mirella tells me that everyone has their own technique. “Some roll a strip of fringed paper into shape, others build their flowers petal by petal. Some even add hand-painted details.” New shapes and designs appear each year. “They are also those who prefer the old-style flowers,” she adds, “larger, with curled edges — they take more skill to make.”

I watch the women work, hands moving with the assurance of long practice. Every cut is clean, every fold exact; there’s no room for waste, no





Photos: (from top clockwise) women working in Contrada Pozzo Nuovo; Elvira Palombaro; paper flower waiting to be arranged in baskets; smaller blossoms require more patience

need to start over. Each woman brings her own strength to the task — like Elvira Palombaro, with her flair for elegant lilies, and Gabriella D’Onofrio, who makes the smaller blossoms that frame the image of Sant’Urbano, just as her mother once did. Their skills are known and respected.

“I’ve been making flowers since I was born!” laughs Stefania Di Pasquale, whose house in Contrada Pozzo Nuovo we visit next. In Stefania’s kitchen, another group of women is making paper flowers. She recalls how, in years past, women would take apart fresh blossoms — petal by petal — to understand their structure, so they could recreate them in paper. “Now it’s easier,” she adds. “There are photos and videos online.”

“*La Festa dei Banderesi* is in my blood,” Stefania says. “My father was *Il Banderese* once, and twenty-one years ago, my husband was too, for the first time. Our daughter was still a baby, and I was pregnant with our son. This year, my husband is *Il Banderese* again.”

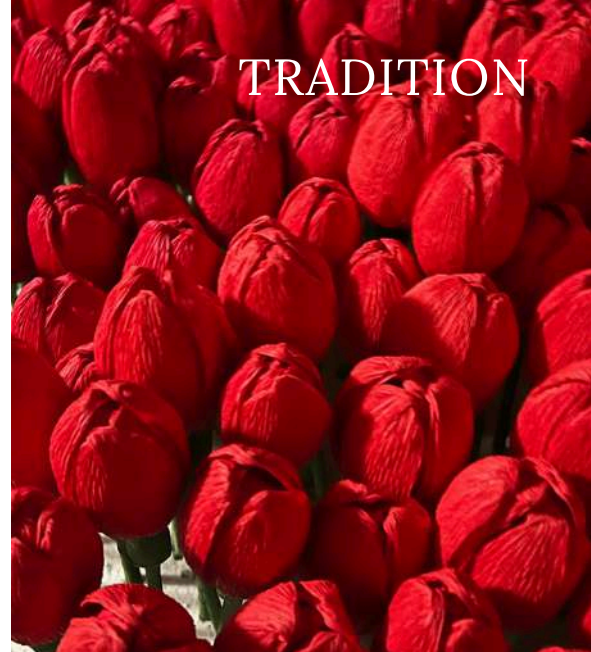
CHANGING TIMES

In Bucchianico, *Il Banderese* is a symbolic figure rooted in a 14th-century tradition — once a peasant leader entrusted with defending the town and its flag, now a married local man with a house in the countryside and at least one son chosen by draw to take on the honour and burden of organising key parts of the *Festa dei Banderesi*. The role demands months of preparation, from building four main floats to hosting communal meals, and opening his home to the entire community,



TRADITION





Photos: Stefania Di Pasquale; paper tulips waiting to be arranged in a basket

with the women in his family taking on the bulk of the behind-the-scenes work.

In the basement of Stefania's house, apart from numerous trays and baskets filled with paper flowers, I see trays of cancellate waffles, packs of soft drinks, cardboard boxes with pasta – a few hundred kilos' worth. "And this is just part of the provisions," explains Stefania. As *Il Banderese*, her husband and family are responsible for hosting five or six communal meals, each feeding up to 600 people. "For one lunch alone, we'll need more than 40 kilos of pasta." To be *Il Banderese* is to take on an honour charged with both prestige and expectation – one that carries weight only locals can truly grasp. During the months of preparation, the true strength of the community emerges – friends, neighbours, and relatives of the *Banderese* family unite to bake, gather materials for the floats, organise fundraisers, and share meals. Still, each year it grows more difficult to sustain the scale of the event. The draw to select the next *Banderese*, once held reliably in June, has in recent years been often postponed due to a lack of candidates. "There's always so much anxiety in the lead-up," says Stefania. "We're constantly wondering if someone will come forward."

Gianluca Di Pasquale notes how times have changed: "Women are working now, lives are busier, and fewer families can commit the time and money needed. But we're trying to adapt – simplifying some of the rituals where we can. What matters most is that the festival doesn't disappear."

THE FESTIVAL THAT UNITES

I see a flicker of tiredness in Sheila's and Stefania's eyes – they both admit that hosting the *fiesta* preparations these months have been exhausting. "When the festival ends, everyone breathes a sigh of relief," Stefania confides. "But a month later, there's this odd emptiness. You wonder, now what? What do I do with my evenings?" Before long, the conversations turn to the next year's celebrations and by winter, the flower-making begins again. There's a special energy during the preparations," she says. "People stop each other to ask how things are going, to say, 'See you tonight for the flower-making.' She smiles. "*La festa ci unisce*. The festival brings us together."

Like many traditional festivals in Abruzzo, *La Festa dei Banderesi* has two sides: the one shared on social media – colourful parades, fluttering flags, beautiful costumes – and the hard, often unseen work that sustains it. It is in the kitchens, workshops, and communal halls that the true festival takes shape. Here, women play a central role – not just as caretakers of tradition, but as the engine that keeps it going. Theirs is the less glamorous labour, carried out with precision and pride, the invisible scaffolding that gives the festival its depth and its soul, and its myriads of paper flowers.

Read about the history of the Festa dei Banderesi and this year's details in our special supplement "5 festivals not to miss in May" at the end of the issue.



RAIANO: CHERRIES, SAINTS, AND ANARCHISTS

Raiano (AQ) sits on the northern edge of the Valle Peligna, where the River Aterno runs through ancient gorges. Once part of an important route linking Rome to the Adriatic coast, the town remains better connected than many others in the region. Still, it faces the familiar challenges shared by small towns across Abruzzo. Here, we explore its way of life and what a visitor can see and do in Raiano.

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you a free special supplement (see next page)



5 FESTIVALS

NOT TO MISS
IN MAY

RAIANO
ROCCA DI MEZZO
PRATOLA PELIGNA
PREZZA
BUCCHIANICO





FESTA DELLA MADONNA DELLA LIBERA IN PRATOLA PELIGNA (AQ)

When: all month of May

Known as *il paese della Madonna* — the town of the Madonna — Pratola Peligna celebrates its most important festival in May, honouring its patron saint, Maria Santissima della Libera.

The festival begins on the Friday before the first Sunday of May, when pilgrims from Gioia dei Marsi arrive on foot, walking for about 11 hours to the Sanctuary of the Madonna della Libera in the centre of Pratola Peligna. Upon arrival, they enter the sanctuary on their knees, making their way down the central nave.

During these three weeks, streets fill with pilgrims, market stalls, marching bands, and processions. On May 3 and 31, the town gathers for beautiful torch-lit processions, when the statue of the Madonna is carried through the streets. On May 4 and 24, fireworks light the night sky. Every evening, festive lights illuminate the town, and live concerts take place in Piazza Garibaldi, with performances ranging from the nationally famous star Fiorella Mannoia to a local Eric Clapton tribute band and DJ sets.



The origins of the festival go back to the early 16th century. A man named Fortunato, stricken by the plague, fled to the ruins of a chapel in the hamlet of Torre, on the slopes of Mount Cerrano. There, weakened and alone, he lay down to die. But in his sleep, a vision came — a woman in red and pale blue, the Liberatrice, she who delivers and liberates — and said she would save him and the people of Pratola from the plague.

When he awoke, Fortunato found a fresco of the Virgin Mary. Overcome with joy, he cried out, “Madonna, liberaci!” — “Madonna, deliver us!”

The fresco was brought to the town, but a fight ensued with neighbouring Sulmona, whose people also wanted to claim the miraculous image. They brought seven pairs of oxen, yet the cart carrying it would not move. When two oxen were hitched by the people of Pratola Peligna, the cart moved forward effortlessly — and stopped on the spot where the Sanctuary of the Madonna della Libera now stands. The image is still preserved inside showing the Virgin upright, serene, with angels lifting her mantle above two groups of kneeling worshippers — women on one side, men on the other.

Yet it is the processional statue, consecrated in 1741, that commands the most fervent devotion in the town and is carried during the celebratory processions.

The current sanctuary was built between 1851 and 1912. It also houses a monumental organ with 3,200 pipes.

See the full programme of the festival on the sanctuary’s [website](#) or their public Facebook [group](#).

Photos via Parrocchia Maria Ss. Della Libera Pratola Peligna/Facebook



FESTA DEL NARCISO IN ROCCA DI MEZZO (AQ)

When: May 23-25

Rocca di Mezzo, located in the Altopiano delle Rocche in Abruzzo, celebrates the *Festa del Narciso* (Daffodil Festival) each May. Now in its 79th edition, the festival is known for its unique parade of daffodil-covered floats and its strong community participation. In 2025, the main event will take place on Sunday, 25 May, with related activities beginning two days earlier.

The festival was first held in 1947, as a way for the town to come together after the Second World War. According to local accounts, some of the organisers had been inspired by the Rose Parade in Pasadena, California, an idea brought back by emigrants. The daffodil was chosen as the symbol of the event because it grows spontaneously across the plateau during the month of May.

The central event of the festival is the parade of allegorical floats, each one elaborately decorated with fresh wild daffodils. The themes of the floats vary each year and often include references to folklore, current events, or pop culture. The floats are judged at the end of the procession, and a prize is awarded to the best creation.



The floats are constructed throughout the month of May by local teams known as *costruttori*, who dedicate many hours to designing and building them. Originally, the floats were wooden platforms pulled by oxen and decorated with whatever materials could be found. Today, they are large, complex structures with moving parts and coordinated performances involving both adults and children.

Visitors can take part in the preparations in the days before the parade. On Friday 23 and Saturday 24 May, from 9:30am, tourists are welcome to join the locals in *la raccolta* – the gathering of wild daffodils from nearby fields – and watch how the flowers are attached to the floats.

In the final 24 hours before the parade, work continues through the night. Volunteers complete the decoration of the floats with daffodils, pinning each flower into place and making final adjustments.

The *Festa del Narciso* attracts over 10,000 visitors each year. The main event – the float parade – begins from Piazza Principe Piemonte on Sunday 25 May at 3pm. Spectators line the streets to see the floats pass through the town centre. At the end of the route, judges announce the winning float. You can reserve a place in the front row by calling at 0862 916125. For more information see the festival's [page](#).

Photos via Festa del Narciso/Facebook



SAGRA DEL CARCIOFO IN PREZZA (AQ)

When: May 24-25

The town of Prezza will host the 14th edition of the *Sagra del Carciofo*, celebrating the local variety of artichoke that has been cultivated in the area for a long time.

First held in 2010, the festival has grown into one of the most anticipated annual events in the Peligna Valley. It offers an opportunity to taste traditional dishes centred around the artichoke. Over the two days, visitors will be able to explore food stands and taste grilled artichokes, fried artichoke hearts, artichoke pasta dishes, *lasagna alla crema di carciofi* and more.

In addition to food, the programme includes live music and entertainment.

Entry is free, and the event takes place in the town centre. For more details see the festival's [page](#)



LA FESTA DEI BANDERESI OF BUCCHIANICO

When: May 24-25

Since medieval times, Buccianico has celebrated the *Festa dei Banderesi* to honour the town's patron Sant'Urbano with parades, ancient rituals, and big feasts.

Local legend has it that during the Middle Ages, a territorial dispute broke out between the municipalities of Chieti and Buccianico. As the story goes, Chieti's army laid siege to Buccianico, but the town's commander devised a clever ruse. Allegedly, Saint Urban appeared to him in a dream, instructing the men of Buccianico to wear red and blue armbands and helmets adorned with coloured feathers, and to run in zigzag patterns along the defensive walls to create the illusion of a large force ready to defend the town. The plan worked: Chieti's troops, convinced they were outnumbered, quickly retreated, lifting the siege. The town commemorates this victory with *La Festa dei Banderesi*, held each May to coincide with the feast of Saint Urban, Buccianico's patron saint.

Photo above: la Ciammaichella march during the *Festa dei Banderesi*

The festival has developed over time, incorporating different customs and festive rituals of Bucchianico. "Over the centuries, the festival has transformed, but many elements have remained unchanged," says Giuliano Di Menna, the vice-president of Bucchianico's ProLoco (a local grassroots organisation that runs events and promotes the town), who has thoroughly researched the festival's history. "Historical documents mention that carts became part of the celebration from 1550, and later, paper flowers were added as decorations." Today's version of the *Festa dei Banderesi* is a week-long celebration – a joyful mix of history, legends, pagan and Christian rituals.

MAIN FIGURES

The *festa* revolves around a peasant becoming a knight. In the 14th century, *Il Banderese* was an elected peasant who had the right to guard and carry the municipal flag and recruit a small army of relatives and friends (*banderesi*) to protect the town and its inhabitants. They were distinguished by a strip of cloth (*banda*) attached to their coats. "The *Banderese* had to have a large kinship and have sons who could be initiated into knighthood, a custom that has remained unchanged to this day," explains Di Menna.

Photos: (below) *Il Banderese* and his wife with an image of Saint Urbano, 2019; (right) *Il Banderese* and *Il Sergentiere*, 2018

In Bucchianico, any married local man with a house in the countryside and sons (these are the main requirements) can self-nominate for a draw where the *Banderese's* name is picked every June. The title comes with a lot of responsibilities: raising a bull for the procession, collecting money for the festival, building four carts, and serving refreshments and festive meals. Additionally, his house will be open to everyone for the entire year, and his whole family will be involved with social events and preparations for the festival, according to Di Menna.

Another central figure is *Il Sergentiere*, the festival's highest authority. The title is hereditary and has been passed from father to son within the local family of Tatasciore-Papè for at least 200 years. According to tradition, they are the descendant of the commander who defended Bucchianico with the help of Saint Urban. He is a knight whose task is to instruct *Il Banderese* and his children in the practices of knighthood. The *Sergentiere* brandishes an ancient battleaxe and is followed by an escort of 10 drummers, 30 armourers and damsels, all dressed in 14th-century historical costumes.

PROCESSION

Di Menna says that what spectators see in May and know as *La Festa dei Banderesi*, is only a small part of this historical event. "When people ask me how long the festival lasts, I always tell them that it goes on all year." The festival's main events start the Sunday before May 23rd, with the *Trasporto delle*





Photos: (clockwise from above) festival participants in historical costumes; festive lights decoration that reads "Viva Sant'Urbano"; hand-made paper flowers; *la Ciammaichella*

Some di Sant'Urbano: when the roads leading to the town's old centre fill up with almost 1500 people dressed in traditional costumes. Men drive carts featuring peasant scenes, and women carry baskets with 100,000 paper flowers on their heads, re-enacting an ancient ritual when food and wine were collected and brought to the feast in honour of the patron saint. The family of *Banderese* brings four carts filled with bread, wood, wine, and a bed — re-enacting the old legend about the imminent siege of Bucchianico, when peasants fled carrying their life possessions.

After a celebratory mass at the church of Saint Urban, the procession moves to the main piazza where the most spectacular event begins: *la Ciammaichella*. Women march, zigzagging left and right, creating a mesmerising sea of bright colours and flowers. The same zigzagging spectacle will be performed by men dressed in red and blue medieval costumes on May 25th, accompanied by flag throwing.



RITUALS

La Festa dei Banderesi is filled with many rituals — some of which have been carried on from the Middle Ages. There is the initiation of *Il Banderese* to the rank of the knight, gifting him a golden ring (made every year for the occasion from real gold, as Giuliano Di Menna tells me)





A procession during La Festa dei Banderesi

and a horse. There is also a ceremony of handing of municipality's flag and other beautifully staged events that might seem confusing to an outsider who is not familiar with the historical background of the festival. All these are accompanied by music, church bells ringing, and cheerful exclamations: "*Eh eh evviva Sant'Urban, eh eh evviva Lu Bannaraise, eh eh evviva Lu Sergentier.*" And food. A lot of food. Banquets are part of the programme and locals also organise their own private feasts. It has been proudly reported in the press that around 20,000 *cancellate* (traditional waffles) are baked in Bucchianico each year for the feast of Saint Urban.

Nowadays, the festival might not carry as much religious meaning as it did in the past, but one theme remains strong – merry gatherings of friends, families, and neighbours.

The full programme of the festival is published on the main Facebook [page](#). For those who cannot make it to this year's Festa dei Banderesi in Bucchianico, a live broadcast will be organised on a dedicated YouTube [channel](#).

IF YOU GO

This year, the festival will be on May 18, 24-26. To see a particular event during the festival, you will need to arrive at least an hour before the start. The town's centre will be closed for traffic for most of the week, so you will need to park on the outskirts and walk. The Sunday with its *Trasporto delle* Some procession (this year, it will take place on May 18) and la *Ciammaichella* is the most popular and busiest, so arrive early and plan to spend the whole day to enjoy the festive atmosphere. There will be stands selling food and refreshments in the town. If you prefer a sit-down meal in a restaurant, make sure to book a table at least 7-10 days in advance.

All photos courtesy of ProLoco Bucchianico.



SAGE DELLE CILIEGIE IN RAIANO (AQ)

When: May 30-June 1

First launched in 1946 by poet Ottaviano Giannangeli, *La Maggiolata*, or *La Sagra delle Ciliegie* celebrates the town's cherry harvest. Once a symbol of Raiano, the fruit grew in the orchards surrounding the town. In the 1960s, Ferrero, the renowned confectionery company known for products like Nutella, Kinder, and Ferrero Rocher, selected Raiano's cherries for its popular *Mon Chéri* chocolates. Today, very few farmers still cultivate cherries, but producers from across Italy participate in the festival.

The three-day programme features concerts, folk dances, a food market, and the eagerly awaited "Cherry Red Night," an evening event that attracts young crowds to celebrate under the stars. A highlight of the weekend is the colourful parade of allegorical floats, all adorned with cherries.

The town will be adorned with festive lights and flowers as part of the "*Balconi Fioriti*" competition, where locals decorate their balconies with floral displays, competing for the title of the best. There will be also a homemade ratafia liqueur competition, so make sure to have a sip and cast your vote.

Guided tours of the nearby San Venanzio Gorge Nature Reserve will be organised as well as walks in English to explore the town's murals dedicated to Umberto Postiglione, a local poet and scholar that the town is proud of.

The full programme is published on the festival's Facebook [page](#).

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