WWW.ABRUZZISSIMO.COM

ISSUE NO. 53 • JUNE 2025

TRAVEL HISTORY CULTURE PEOPLE FOOD

ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE

Special Supplement Inside:

106 Summer Sagre and Festivals in Abruzzo

CONTENTS

ON THE COVER:

Tagliacozzo. Photo by Anna Lebedeva. Read the story on page 9.

LEFT:

Tagliacozzo. Photos by Anna Lebedeva. Read the story on page 9.

ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE

www.abruzzissimo.com
editor@abruzzissimo.com

EDITOR & PUBLISHER
Anna Lebedeva
editor@abruzzissimo.com

COPY EDITOR
Linda Dini Jenkins

CONTRIBUTORS
Christine Mastrogiuseppe
Linda Dini Jenkins
Teresa Mastrobuono
Angiolina De Angelis
Anna Swann

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.

Editor's Note

There was a flurry of excitement in Abruzzo about the new series *Tucci in Italy*, as the region was featured in one of the episodes. Stanley Tucci visited the communal bread oven in Villa San Sebastiano di Tagliacozzo, which was brought back from obscurity a few years ago by young chef Lucia Tellone (ABRUZZISSIMO featured the story of the forno in the March 2024 issue), ate on a *trabocco*, explored the Pelino Confetti factory, cooked up a meal on a campfire with the "wild" chef Davide Nanni, and tried *arrosticini* at Campo Imperatore.

In our community group on Facebook, reactions were mixed. Some felt the episode "didn't do Abruzzo justice" or noticed that "all the shots were brown and rocky" and wished more towns and restaurants had been shown.

This is often the case with international coverage that Abruzzo has been getting recently: well-meaning, fleeting, and geared toward quick consumption. The emphasis is usually on *arrosticini* and low cost of living — hooks designed for broad appeal. There is more to Abruzzo. It is a region of astonishing contrasts and overlooked stories, where beauty and difficulty live side by side. Understanding it takes time, attention, and a willingness to listen. That is what ABRUZZISSIMO offers: not a travel snapshot, but an unfolding portrait, issue by issue, of a place that doesn't fit neatly into a soundbite.

It takes more than a flying visit and a bite-sized, easy-to-digest TV episode to understand and love Abruzzo. This magazine tells its lesser-known stories one issue at a time — stories that Disney+ wouldn't have the audience for. It is written and published from within the region, by those who call it home year-round.

This month, we talk about the humble potato from the **Fucino plain** — one of Italy's finest — two sisters who revived their late father's farm in the hamlet of **San Nicolao (PE)** to make excellent pecorino cheese, two small and fascinating museums in **Loreto Aprutino (PE)**, and a contemporary art installation trail in the mountains near **Pescasseroli (AQ)**.

On page 17, you will find a story about the semi-legendary figure of Solimo who, according to local lore, founded the city of **Sulmona (AQ)**. We invite you to try the recipe on page 22 for peasant potato bread, soft and chewy, born long ago out of necessity to save flour.

It has become our annual tradition to publish a special supplement, unique of its kind, about summer *sagre* and festivals, and this year we list a whopping 106 of them! Our premium subscribers can find the supplement at the end of the issue. If you are a free subscriber, you can upgrade to premium or buy the supplement separately.

Anna Lebedeva
Founder & Editor

DIGEST OF RECENT REGIONAL NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS FROM ABRUZZO NEWSPAPERS

MORE BLUE FLAG BEACHES FOR THE REGION

Abruzzo shines again in 2025 with 16 Blue Flags fluttering across its coastline and lakes. Fifteen towns have kept their mark of excellence, while **Torino di Sangro** joins the list for the first time, rewarded for efforts in sustainability and climate action. Inland, the mountain lakes of **Scanno** and **Villalago** are crowned once more. Handed out by the Foundation for Environmental Education, the Blue Flag awards the cleanest and most eco-friendly beaches and marinas in the world every year. See the full list of Abruzzo's Blue Flag beaches in our post on ABRIZZISSIMO website.

YOUTH EXIT ABRUZZO'S BUSINESS SCENE

The province of L'Aquila led Italy in innovative startups per capita, fuelled by government incentives and its proximity to Rome in 2024. Yet across Abruzzo, youth entrepreneurship is rapidly shrinking. A *Confesercenti* (an Italian trade association representing small and medium-sized enterprises) report reveals that youth-led businesses in Abruzzo fell by over 24% in five years, among the steepest drops nationwide. Shops, cafés, and small enterprises run by under-35s are vanishing, leaving behind an aging entrepreneurial landscape. Experts warn that without tax relief, better training, and regional development Abruzzo risks losing its next generation of independent entrepreneurs.

NEW MURAL HONOURING POPE FRANCIS IN AIELLI

Aielli (AQ) has welcomed a new mural by Roman street artist Laika, known for her social activism. Titled *Gli invitati* ("The invited"), the work depicts Pope Francis in heaven, haloed yet displeased as he reads the guest list for his own funeral. Beside it, a pointed caption asks, "*But who invited these people?*" The mural is an ironic yet respectful tribute to a Pope committed to the marginalized, while also critiquing those who praised him but overlooked the causes he championed. This is Laika's third mural in Aielli's historic centre on a street lovingly dubbed Corso Laika by locals. **Aielli** is renowned for its open-air street art gallery, featuring around 40 murals painted on the walls of houses by international artists.

COURT SHUTS DOWN DEER CULL PLAN

The Regional Administrative Court of Abruzzo has officially closed the case concerning the controversial deer cull approved last August. The plan had authorised the killing of 469 deer, including 142 fawns, but was suspended following widespread opposition. With hunting season now over, the decree has lost its effect. The decision comes after months of public outcry: over 136,000 people signed a Change.org petition (ABRUZZISSIMO reported on it and many of our readers participated), and 60,000 emails were sent to the regional president. For now, Abruzzo's deer are safe.

YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE TO ABRUZZO'S SUMMER FESTIVALS

Summer in Abruzzo means festivals and *sagre* in every corner of the region – from traditional pasta feasts in small villages to jazz concerts and street art events. Each year, ABRUZZISSIMO publishes a special supplement dedicated to summer happenings. This year's edition is a bumper guide, featuring 106 festivals and *sagre*, along with travel tips and in-depth articles. It's free for premium subscribers (available at the end of this issue). Free subscribers can upgrade their subscription here or purchase the supplement separately.

ABRUZZO LEADS ITALYS HOUSING MARKET GROWTH

Abruzzo recorded the highest residential property market growth in Italy in 2024, with 16,496 transactions – a 9.2% increase over the previous year. The data comes from the *Rapporto immobiliare 2025 – Il settore residenziale*, compiled by the Italian Revenue Agency's Real Estate Market Observatory. The increase in the number of sales brought Italy's property market back in line with pre-pandemic figures, the report said. While the national market showed signs of recovery, with 719,578 sales overall, Abruzzo outpaced all other regions. You can see the full report here.

DID YOU KNOW?

THE BALSORANO AIR TRAGEDY

High above **Balsorano (AQ)**, on the weather-beaten slopes of Monte Serra Alta, lie the remains of the most devastating air disaster in Abruzzo's history. On the stormy evening of 30 March 1963, Itavia Flight 703 — a Douglas DC-3 — vanished from radar and crashed into the mountainside, claiming the lives of all eight people aboard.

The plane was heading from Pescara to Rome-Ciampino, but the chosen route was unsafe due to severe weather conditions at the time: strong winds, rain, and snow. The flight crew decided to change the route, believing it would allow them to avoid the worst of the storm. With visibility reduced to almost nothing and communications severed, they lost orientation. When lights appeared to their right, they mistook them for Rome and banked in that direction. Moments later, the aircraft struck the snow-covered ridge above Balsorano at 19:36. The impact caused the fuel tanks to rupture, and fire quickly engulfed what remained.

The wreck was discovered by a local resident who, despite the heavy snow, rushed up to the mountains, but there was nothing to do as all onboard were already dead. Today, the mangled remains of the aircraft still lie where they fell, weathered by the seasons and partially reclaimed by the landscape. A memorial stone with the names of the victims stands nearby. Experienced hikers can reach this remote memorial following a challenging trail.

THE TIME IT TAKES: MAKING CHEESE IN SAN NICOLAO

Text and photos by Anna Lebedeva

In a small mountain hamlet above Caramanico Terme (PE), two young sisters have brought their late father's farm back to life. Today, they produce pecorino cheese and welcome visitors eager to learn about pastoral life.

In a cool, whitewashed room on the ground floor of a house in *contrada* San Nicolao, the scent of warm milk drifts through the air. A large pot filled with ewe's milk is heating up slowly. Angiolina De Angelis, sleeves rolled up, stirs the milk with a *mnature*, a traditional wooden rod worn smooth by frequent use. Her movements are steady, unhurried. "You can't rush cheese," she says. "It takes the time it takes. We're not very technological here — everything is still done by hand, like it used to be."

The milk begins to thicken. With a change in rhythm, she breaks the curds from the whey. "*Questa fase si chiama 'rompere la cagliata'*," she explains, working quicker, with more force now. Her sister Marina arrives, and together they scoop the steaming curds into perforated plastic baskets. With firm but gentle hands, they press the cheeses into shape, coaxing them into future wheels of *pecorino*.

Photo: Marina (left) and Angiolina De Angelis at their farm

"From 50–60 litres of milk, we make about 15 kilos of cheese," Angiolina explains. "We never pasteurise — this way the cheese holds the flavour of the mountain herbs the sheep feed on."

During late spring and early summer, production begins at dawn and continues into the evening. They start at six in the morning and stop around eight at night, only breaking for meals. It is a rhythm dictated by the seasons and their animals.

FOURTH GENERATION

Angiolina and Marina De Angelis, aged 40 and 38, are the fourth generation to tend sheep in this remote corner of the Majella mountains. Their father Antonio once had 800 animals and, in the 1990s, he built a large barn in San Nicolao, continuing the work of his father and grandfather before him. "They used to take the sheep up into the mountains to graze and, like all shepherds back then, carved their names into the rocks — we can still see them today," says Angiolina. But Antonio died young, and for nearly 20 years, the buildings stood abandoned.

Photos: (below) fresh pecorino cheese made by the sisters; lambs at the farm

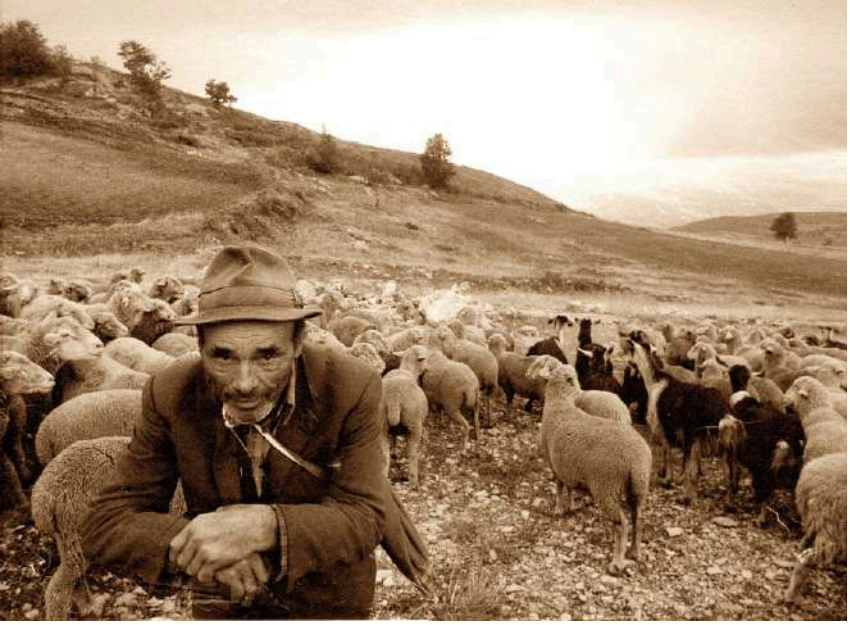
The sisters tried other paths — helping at the family's pizzeria in Caramanico Terme — but the frantic pace of restaurant life was not for them. "We didn't like it," Angiolina recalls. "The hours were irregular and exhausting."

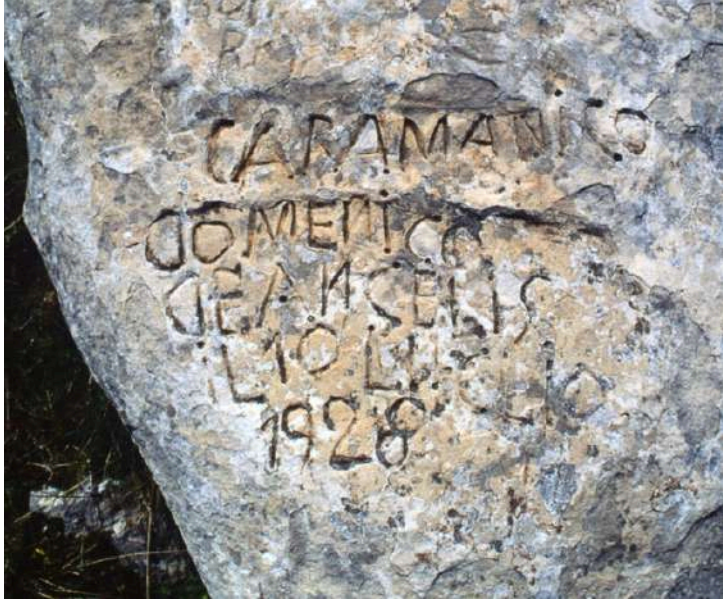
In 2018, they took a leap: reviving their father's farm and founding *Società Agricola DA come una volta*. The name reflects both their heritage — DA for De Angelis — and a way of life: *come una volta*, like it used to be. "DA was the mark our family used to stamp on the wool, to distinguish our flock from others when the herds shared the mountain pastures," says Angiolina.

They began with a small flock, a cheesemaking room at the back, and a shop. Today, their 300 sheep graze the meadows in the heart of the Maiella National Park, feeding on wild herbs and grasses that give their cheese its distinct character.

A WAY OF LIFE

In spring and summer, the days are filled with milking and making cheese. The sheep spend their daylight hours in high pastures under the watch of a hired shepherd. During the winter, the work shifts indoors: feeding the sheep hay, cleaning the barn. They make cheese only from spring to August, following the traditional rhythm of mountain grazing, rather than the year-round cycle of larger farms.





Photos: (above) Nonno Domenico, Angiolina and Marina's grandfather; (right) his carved name and the year 1928, still visible on a stone in the mountains today; the sisters making cheese

Angiolina and Marina sell unpasteurised *pecorino* and *ricotta* directly from the farm shop, mostly to loyal clients who come from larger towns and cities, as well as to holidaymakers staying at the nearby campsite. In between the milking and cheesemaking, the sisters are raising four children, two each. Their farm is also a *fattoria didattica*, where schoolchildren and city dwellers come to learn about rural life and cheese making. They also organise events with visitors following the flock to the pastures and picnics for hikers and mountain bikers. It's a family effort: their mother, Diana, helps to look after the children and knits scarves, socks, and hats from the sheep's wool to sell in the shop, while their husbands lend a hand on weekends.

IN THE MOUNTAINS

San Nicolao is a tiny hamlet with around 50 year-round residents and a handful of houses scattered along a winding mountain road. There's no public transport. No doctor. Just a bakery known for its excellent bread, a restaurant, the De Angelis cheese shop — and all around, magnificent views of the mountains. That's about it.

"In summer it gets livelier," says Marina, "when families come to their holiday homes and the campsite fills up." But winters can be hard. "In 2017, after a heavy snowfall, the power went out for a week," Angiolina remembers. "We used our *nonna's* old wood stove for heat, and I and my husband had to walk in with snowshoes to bring supplies from the car parked on the main road below." Trips to the supermarket become half-day affairs. Holidays are rare. "The only break I had last year was a day at my mother-in-law's in Pescara," Marina laughs.

Still, neither sister would trade it for town life. "I feel lucky," says Angiolina. "It is beautiful and quiet here. It is home and it is good for our children. These little hardships — they toughen them up and prepare them for life."

THE FUTURE

Angiolina notes that fewer tourists have been visiting since the thermal complex in Caramanico Terme closed a few years ago — a loss that dealt a heavy blow to the local economy and left a gap still unfilled. Yet the sisters remain optimistic. They have started cultivating the ancient grain *solina*, plan to expand their flock slowly over the coming years, and begin ageing cheeses longer to add to the fresh varieties they currently sell.

The future of the farm already has names. Angiolina's son Marco is studying agriculture and plans to help to run the farm. Marina's daughter, Antonia, aged ten, has already chosen a plot of land nearby where she dreams of building her own home. "Just a few hundred metres from ours," Marina says. "She's made up her mind."

In San Nicolao, life is measured not in profits or visitors, but in hands that still work the milk, and children who already know they belong.

The family a few years ago: front row: Marina and Angiolina with their mother Dina, and Marco; second row: Marina's and Angiolina's husbands, their sister Monica, and the younger children.

VISIT THE FARM

Società Agricola DA come una volta will be hosting *La Notte di San Giovanni* celebrations on June 24 with a walk and picnic at the farm. In August, you can participate in the *Notte di San Lorenzo* watching falling stars, listening to live folk music and gorging on the *arrosticini* and cheese from the farm. For more information, see the farm's Facebook page.

See Angiolina's recipe for a *crostata* cake with *ricotta* on page 24.

AND THERE AT TAGLIACOZZO THE PAST IS PRESENT

This elegant town can claim it all — Dante named it, princes ruled it, and artists still find a stage here, amid noble façades and a lively calendar of festivals.

"Not many towns can claim a place in the verses of Dante Alighieri, but Tagliacozzo's name lives on in the Divine Comedy, immortalised in Inferno, Canto XXVIII:

"*E là da Tagliacozzo,*
dove senz'arme vinse il vecchio Alardo."

MEXT

Majellacase Experience Tour

Experience Abruzzo through the eyes of those who live here

Our tours are designed for those who wish to discover authentic Abruzzo and find the ideal property.

We will guide you through an immersive experience, where the search for home merges with the discovery of the land. We will visit enchanting villages, taste typical products, have wine tastings, take part in cooking lessons, and visit properties for sale.

BOOK YOUR MAJELLACASE EXPERIENCE TOUR TODAY!

www.majellacase.it
mext@majellacase.it

GIVE THE GIFT OF A ONE-YEAR SUBSCRIPTION

TO YOUR FAVOURITE ABRUZZOPHILE

SEE MORE DETAILS ON OUR WEBSITE

ABRUZZISSIMO
MAGAZINE

NEXT ISSUE
JULY-AUGUST

ABRUZZISSIMO
MAGAZINE

TORRE DE' PASSERI
A small town with a big past

PERDONANZA CELESTINIANA IN L'AQUILA
The historic annual festival honouring Pope Celestine V

FROM ROME TO ORTONA ON FOOT
How a teacher walked the Cammino di San Tommaso solo, with €20 and a prayer

EASY WALKS, TRAVEL TIPS, RECIPES

NEXT ISSUE IN YOUR INBOX ON JULY 5

Subscribe to ABRUZZISSIMO here

DONATE TO SUPPORT ABRUZZISSIMO