

TRAVEL HISTORY CULTURE PEOPLE FOOD

ABRUZZISSIMO

MAGAZINE



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La Perdonanza in L'Aquila**

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**Torre de' Passeri:
more than meets
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ON THE COVER:

Torre de' Passeri. Painting by Rosa Cococcia. Read the story on page 11.

LEFT:

Torre de' Passeri. Photos by Anna Lebedeva. Read the story on page 11.

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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Editor's Note

Even after more than fourteen years in Abruzzo, I'm still learning. This land has a way of revealing itself—through small places, unexpected encounters, and traditional recipes. Sometimes all it takes is pausing by the side of a path to discover something extraordinary.

In this issue, we take you to one such place: a small votive shrine tucked away in the **Calanchi Nature Reserve** near **Atri (TE)**. Small and easy to miss, it contains *la pietra del santo*, a stone of mysterious origin that, for centuries, was believed to offer the hope of miraculous healing. You'll find the full story on page 8.

August brings **La Perdonanza** to **L'Aquila**, a tradition that spans centuries, yet remains surprisingly little known beyond Abruzzo. Our article on page 5 marks the final part of our Jubilee Year series, exploring this extraordinary festival and its 731 years of history.

We also take a closer look at **Torre de' Passeri (PE)**, a town that may seem unremarkable at first, but has a long history of ceramists, grand family *palazzi*, and a forgotten post-war protest – the “reverse strike”— a bold act of civil disobedience that made its way into the history books. Today, it remains well-connected and lived-in, thanks to its train station and motorway access. It's another reminder that in Abruzzo even seemingly ordinary places can hold fascinating stories.

When we talk about visiting our homeland, most of us think of boarding a plane to reach our destination. But Carmine de Grandis chose a different path – he walked from Rome to **Ortona (CH)** and on to his family in **Tornareccio (CH)**, crossing rugged mountains and lush valleys. And along the way, he set a record. Read his remarkable story on page 21.

Lastly, thank you to all who've downloaded our new ebook **106 Summer Sagre and Festivals in Abruzzo**. We're thrilled it's already helping so many of you discover not only the bigger events but also the smaller gatherings that open windows onto local life. If you haven't yet, you can still purchase it via [this link](#) or receive it as part of a one-year [premium subscription](#).

We are taking a break in August, so the next issue will be in your inbox on September 5.

Wishing you a summer of discovery, wherever your road leads.

Anna Lebedeva
Founder & Editor

DIGEST OF RECENT REGIONAL NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS FROM ABRUZZO NEWSPAPERS



NEW LUXURY HOTEL PLANNED FOR PESCARA SEAFRONT

A new luxury hotel is set to rise on **Pescara's** southern seafront, developed by the F.lli De Cecco di Filippo group, Abruzzo's most renowned pasta producers. The four-star superior structure will feature 50–60 high-end rooms, conference and event spaces, a wellness area, and a rooftop Michelin-starred restaurant. Covering over one hectare, the project includes a public piazza with a splash pad, a dune garden, and artwork by renowned Japanese architect Toyo Ito. Around 80% of the 10,000-square-metre site will be open to the public. The project responds to Pescara's growing demand for quality accommodation in this vibrant waterfront city that has experienced a boom in B&Bs in recent years.

NEW CYCLE ROUTE LINKING COAST TO MOUNTAINS

A new cycling route, *Ciclabile Val di Foro Mare-Monti*, will soon link the Via Verde cycling path on the Adriatic coast to the **Maiella National Park**. Stretching over 20 kilometres and crossing eleven municipalities, such as **Ortona, Francavilla al Mare, Villamagna, Bucchianico, Fara Filiorum Petri, Pretoro**, the path invites cyclists to explore mountain and hilltop towns, vineyards and olive groves. Several routes already exist but remain unconnected. Expected to be completed by summer 2027, the *Ciclabile Val di Foro Mare-Monti* will feature rest stops and bike maintenance stations along the way. Keep an eye on the cycling networks [website](#) for updates.



STRONG PASSENGER GROWTH

Abruzzo Airport has recorded a strong start to the summer season, driven by new routes to Wrocław, Cagliari, Milan Malpensa, Kaunas, and Valencia. Passenger traffic has soared, with June 2025 recording a nearly 40% increase compared to the same month last year, according to preliminary data released by the regional government. The growth translates to over 35,000 additional passengers, a result attributed to reduced fees to boost the airport's competitiveness. The final count is expected to rise further, setting the stage for strong performances in July and August and this year's trajectory puts the airport on course to surpass one million passengers for the first time.

TOWNS AT RISK OF IRREVERSIBLE DEPOPULATION

Abruzzo is among the regions most affected by Italy's demographic decline, with at least 20 small towns, such as **Montelapiano (CH), Rosello (CH), Brittoli (PE)**, listed as at risk of irreversible depopulation. The warning comes from Italy's *National Strategic Plan for Inner Areas* (the full text [here](#)), which cites ageing populations, low birth rates, and poor access to essential services as key factors. Many of these communities are classed as "peripheral" or "ultra-peripheral," located over 70 minutes from major service centres (see the full list for Abruzzo [here](#)). The plan controversially suggesting a managed path toward "irreversible depopulation" has drawn criticism from local mayors, who accuse the government of giving up on small communities and offering dignified decline in place of real investment. Many see the proposal as a resignation to abandonment, rather than a strategy for renewal.



FREE SUMMER PROGRAM AT ANCIENT AMITERNUM SITE

The **National Museum of Abruzzo** (MuNDA) extended opening hours for the Amiternum Archaeological Park, the magnificent site of an ancient Roman city near **L'Aquila**, enhancing access for families, residents, tourists, associations, and summer centres. Free guided tours of the amphitheatre will be held on 5 and 12 July at 6 pm, 19 July at 9:30 am, and 9 and 16 August at 6 pm. Educational activities for children aged 4 to 14 include themed tours, treasure hunts, drawing, and interactive games. All visits and activities are free. For more details see the dedicated [page](#).

WINE UNDER THE STARS

From July 25 to August 25, Abruzzo joins in *Calici di Stelle* – Italy's beloved celebration of wine under the stars. Organised by the *Movimento Turismo del Vino*, the event brings together wineries and musicians for a month-long toast to summer nights. The gala event is held at the Aragonese Castle in **Ortona**, where over 30 wineries offer tastings within the walls of the cliffside fortress, overlooking the shimmering **Costa dei Trabocchi**. Across the region, dozens of wineries host their own evenings with live music, food, and the occasional telescope – inviting visitors to sip, savour, and look skyward. The full programme will be published [here](#).

For more about this summer's events see our ebook "106 summer sagre and festivals" available on **ABRUZZISSIMO [website](#)**.

DID YOU KNOW?

THE TRUE COSTS OF THE GRAN SASSO TUNNEL



The Gran Sasso Tunnel is not only a remarkable feat of engineering – it's also the longest two-tube road tunnel in Europe built entirely within a single country. Stretching 10 km beneath the Gran Sasso massif in Abruzzo, it forms part of the A24 motorway linking Rome with the Adriatic coast.

Its construction, however, came at a steep price. Work began in 1968 and dragged on for 25 years, plagued by delays, soaring costs, and human loss. Eleven workers died during the project, and expenses spiralled from an estimated 80 billion lire to nearly 2,000 billion (around €887 million today).

During excavation in 1970, the tunnelling machine ruptured a vast underground reservoir. The resulting jet of water and mud – under intense pressure – flooded part of Assergi and forced evacuations. The disruption permanently altered local hydrology: water tables dropped by 600 metres, and the flow of the Rio Arno and Chiarino springs was nearly halved.

In recent years, the tunnel has again drawn concern. In 2019, prosecutors launched an investigation into possible contamination of nearby aquifers. The operator, the National Institute for Nuclear Physics (whose underground labs are accessed via the tunnel; read about it in the next issue of ABRUZZISSIMO), and the local water company were all named in the inquiry. A planned closure of the tunnel was narrowly avoided at the last minute.

The tunnel is monitored by an Operations Centre (System Monitoring Centre), staffed 24 hours a day by specialised technicians.



THE ORIGINS OF FORGIVENESS: LA PERDONANZA IN L'AQUILA

By Marianna Colantoni

The city of L'Aquila holds fast to a centuries-old ritual born from a single, radical gesture of mercy – offered not by a ruler or a pope in Rome, but by a solitary hermit cloaked in humility. This August marks the 731st edition of *La Perdonanza*, the celebration of forgiveness instituted by Pope Celestine V.

The *Perdonanza Celestiniana* dates back to 1294, when Pope Celestine V, just one month after his election, issued a ground-breaking document, papal bull, known as *Inter sanctorum solemnia*, later called the *Bolla del Perdono* and still preserved in the city. In an era when spiritual absolution was often tied to wealth and privilege, Celestine offered a plenary indulgence to all humanity, without distinction. To receive forgiveness, one needed only to enter the Basilica of Santa Maria di Collemaggio in L'Aquila between the evening of August 28 and sunset on the 29th and be truly repentant and confessed. This act laid the foundation for the Catholic Church's Jubilee tradition, anticipating by six years the first official Holy Year declared by Pope Boniface VIII (for more, see the March 2025 issue of ABRUZZISSIMO). Over time, popular tradition attached the indulgence to a specific entrance, the Porta Santa, although the original bull made no mention of it, as the door was added centuries later. It remains sealed all year, opened only once each August.

Photo: The historical re-enactment procession during La Perdonanza

Born Pietro Angelerio, Celestine V lived far from the machinery of ecclesiastical power. A hermit in Abruzzo's mountains, he led a life of prayer and poverty. In 1294, already elderly, he was elected pope after a two-year deadlock among cardinals, weary of politics and unable to agree. When Pietro Angelerio sent them a letter urging spiritual renewal, they elected him instead. Just months after his election, Celestine V abdicated the papacy — an act almost unheard of at the time — wishing to return to his hermitage rather than rule from Rome. His gesture became both a scandal and a parable of humility (for more, read our article about Celestino V in the April 2025 issue).

WHEN THE CITY BECOMES A STAGE

In addition to its religious and historical importance, the *Perdonanza Celestiniana* has evolved into a cultural festival that brings the entire historic centre of L'Aquila to life. The modern celebrations of La Perdonanza begin with a symbolic journey of light known as the *Fuoco del Morrone*. Revived in 1980, the ritual sees torchbearers light a flame at the Hermitage of Celestine V on Mount Morrone and carry it in relay over several days, weaving through ridgelines and towns, gathering quiet crowds along the way. On or around August 24, the flame arrives in Piazza Palazzo, where it is used to light a cauldron beneath the civic tower — the very one that holds the original *Bolla del Perdono*. This act marks the official opening of the

Il *Fuoco del Morrone* arrives to L'Aquila; a concert at the Basilica di Collemaggio during La Perdonanza

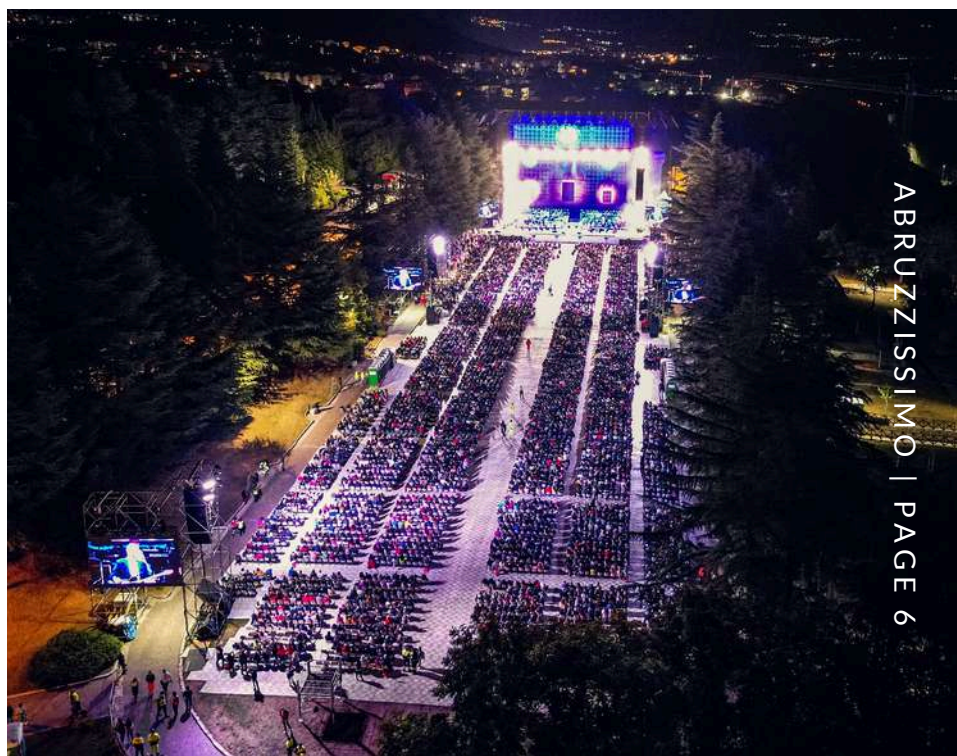
festival week. Concerts, theatre performances, exhibitions, readings, and talks with writers and cultural figures animate piazzas and church cloisters for five days.

On August 28, the week-long celebrations of *La Perdonanza* culminate in a solemn, theatrical procession that blends religion, historical re-enactment, and modern civic pride. Citizens in 15th-century dress walk alongside public officials and members of the clergy, bringing past and present into step. The procession begins at Palazzo Margherita and makes its way to the Basilica of Santa Maria di Collemaggio, carrying the original *Bolla del Perdono* through the city.

In 2022, during the 728th edition of the *Perdonanza*, Pope Francis made history as the first pope of Rome to attend the event and to personally open the Holy Door of the Basilica of Collemaggio. On that occasion, he also extended the plenary indulgence granted by Celestine V to an entire year. A deeply symbolic gesture, it broadened the *Perdonanza's* universal meaning and brought renewed international attention to L'Aquila and its most treasured tradition.

CULTURAL HERITAGE OF HUMANITY

In recent years, the *Perdonanza* has become not only one of Abruzzo's most important religious events but also a major cultural occasion, with performances by some of Italy's most celebrated musicians, singers, and dancers. At the time of



writing, the programme for this year's celebration was not yet published, but you can expect some of the city's most iconic spaces to host orchestral concerts, ballet galas, theatrical readings, and open-air performances. Many events are free, and the atmosphere ranges from solemn to festive, drawing both pilgrims and those simply seeking to experience L'Aquila at its most alive.

On summer evenings, the steps of the Basilica of Collemaggio transform into a stage for orchestras, choirs, and solo performers who blend classical compositions with modern interpretations. Nearby, the staircase of the magnificent San Bernardino Church hosts an elegant ballet gala beneath the stars. Elsewhere in the city, alleyways and piazzas come alive with book readings and street concerts, many of them open-air and free to the public. *La Perdonanza* draws over 20,000 spectators every year, from pilgrims to curious travellers.

A DOOR THAT STILL OPENS

Though rooted in religion, the heart of the *Perdonanza* speaks to all. It is a hymn to reconciliation, peace, and hope. In the years following the 2009 earthquake, the *Perdonanza* gained renewed urgency for many Aquilani — not only as a spiritual event, but as a reaffir-

reaffirmation of identity. Restoration of the Collemaggio Basilica, completed in 2017, was seen as a cornerstone in the city's slow rebirth.

In 2019, UNESCO recognised the *Perdonanza* as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, honouring its cultural, historical, and symbolic depth.

IF YOU GO

La Perdonanza includes both religious and civic events, offering something for everyone. If you're in L'Aquila between August 24 and 30, you can see the city's open-air concerts, medieval processions, and exhibitions throughout the historic centre. One of the most meaningful moments is the opening of the Holy Door at the Basilica of Collemaggio, which takes place between the evening vespers of August 28 and 29. Arrive early — the ceremony attracts large crowds — and soak in the quiet beauty of the illuminated basilica as night falls. The full programme will be published shortly on the event's [website](#) and Facebook [page](#).

Marianna Colantoni is the founder of [Taste Abruzzo](#), destination maker and communications specialist. Photos via [Perdonanza Celestiniana/Facebook](#).

Opening of the Holy Door in the Basilica of Collemaggio





THE HEALING STONE OF SAINT PAUL IN ATRI

By Linda Dini Jenkins

Faith, legend, and history intertwine around the mysterious monolith that stands in Santa Margherita di Atri in Teramo province. The stone is white, soft — much like a broken column — and different from the others in the area. Phallic in shape, it has a top with a hollow and a small channel for the flow of liquids. What was it used for? There are several stories . . .

The Stone of Saint Paul (La Pietra del Santo) is the subject of legends. One is that it is the stone on which Saint Paul the Apostle was martyred. More likely, it is the remains of a pre-Christian altar where travelers and merchants moving along the Ager Hadrianus (at the time a very important road

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