

TRAVEL HISTORY CULTURE PEOPLE FOOD

ABRUZZISSIMO

MAGAZINE



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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.

CYCLING 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), Brittolì (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

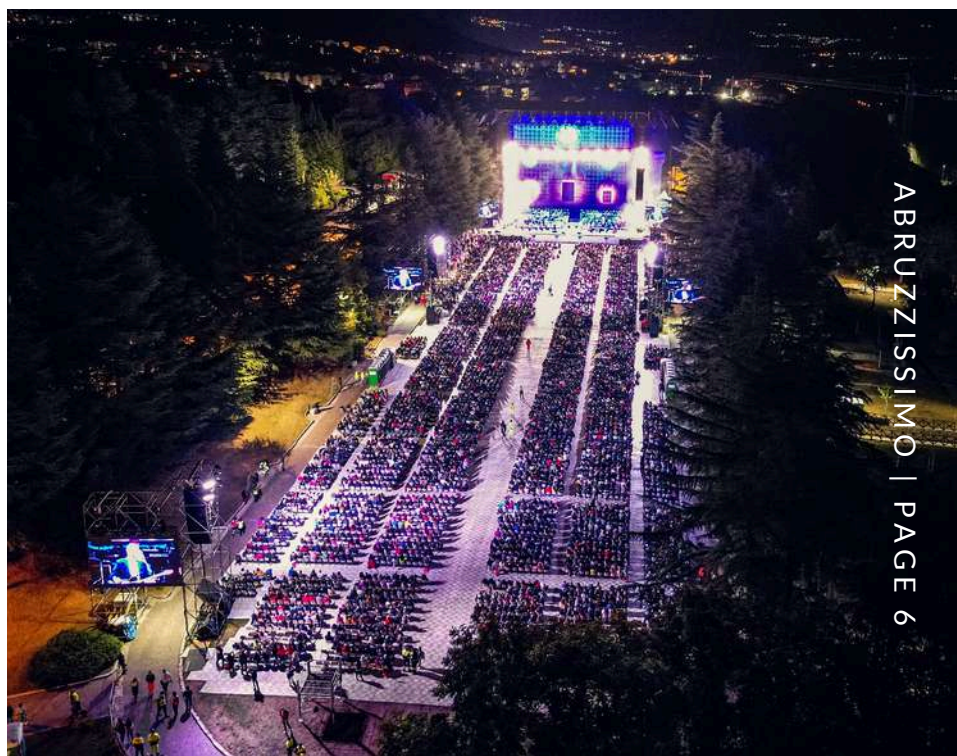
festival week. Concerts, theatre performances, exhibitions, readings, and talks with writers and cultural figures animate piazzas and church cloisters for five days.

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 Hatrianus (at the time a very important road and commercial center) and the ancient Roman road Hatria–Pinna) stopped to rest and thank the gods by sacrificing animals.

According to Adriano De Ascentiis, Director of the Riserva dei Calanchi di Atri, “The stone has been here in the nature reserve since time immemorial. Before it was used as a sort of pagan altar, it probably served as a Roman milestone, a road marker, as it stands along an old road that connected Atri with Penne.” With the advent of Christianity, the stone was dedicated to Saint Paul of Tarsus, protector against witches and demons — and once again, history becomes bound up with tradition and faith.

Photo: landscape in the Riserva dei Calanchi di Atri

ANCIENT RITUAL

Over time, Adriano goes on, a whole ritual tradition grew up around the stone: that it figured prominently in the healing of children with a condition known as *spina bifida*, or *male sinizzo*, whose onset was traditionally attributed to witchcraft and the evil eye. In fact, similar rituals are still performed on this spot today. *Spina bifida* can be treated now by the mother taking folic acid during her pregnancy, but the ritual is still remembered by the older locals.

The ritual required that the caravan of family members arrived on foot and in absolute silence to the stone. Inside the small chapel, the sick child was passed several times from the arms of the mother to the *commara* (often the godmother) and the child, once stripped, was placed on the stone and then washed with purifying wine. The ceremony was accompanied by a short verse recited by the elder of the family. Once washed, the child was carefully dried and, still sitting on the stone, fed (as an act of atonement) and dressed in new clothes while the old clothes were placed on the small altar for apotropaic (protective magic) purposes. After the rite, the procession went back to the house, this time following a different route — again, in complete silence.

A ROLLING STONE

Another legend is that the stone has moved. Earthquakes? Shifting terrain? People project onto the stone a kind of steadfastness — a desire for something that always returns to the same place. Much like the pilgrims who come to the stone.

Adriano De Ascentiis says that some testimonials gathered from the elderly locals, said that the stone was located a hundred meters below, where now there is an olive grove. The owner of the land brought it closer to the house. It took seven pairs of oxen to transport it, but the stone returned to its original place three times. “The little brick chapel, with the roof, was built in the 1970s by another farmer, so that those who went there would not be cold or exposed to the elements. It also provides privacy to the pilgrims who came. Before that, the stone was sheltered with only a makeshift hut,” he says. A farmer who lived nearby kept the site tidy and in return accepted offerings from those who came to visit; the current landowner



The chapel where *la pietra del santo* stands

also cares for it but no longer charges because the Stone of Saint Paul is now regarded as a place of cultural interest within the Calanchi Reserve. With the disappearance of *spina bifida* and rickets that the stone’s ritual was thought to cure — even the *malocchio* — who comes there now? According to Adriano De Ascentiis, the last known child came in 2022, when they found children’s clothing and little shoes. “But we found signs of rituals even last year, performed by two adults, judging by the size of the clothes left behind,” he recounts.

So the stone retains its charm of the occult and esoteric powers so much so that the legends are remembered, guarded, and passed down from generation to generation as an important testimony of faith and devotion within the Atrian population and for the people living in the surrounding areas.

IF YOU GO

La Pietra di San Paolo is located within the *Riserva dei Calanchi di Atri* and can be reached either on foot or by car. One option is to park near the reserve’s office and walk downhill for about 20 minutes — the road is quite steep and not ideal for driving. Alternatively, you can drive around the reserve and approach from the lower side, arriving at the site from the bottom of the hill. Enter “*La Pietra di San Paolo*” in your Google Maps navigator and see both options. The site is always open and free to access.

Linda Dini Jenkins is a travel planner and author of several books. Her new book, *How Way Leads on to Way*, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press.

HEALING STONES IN ABRUZZO

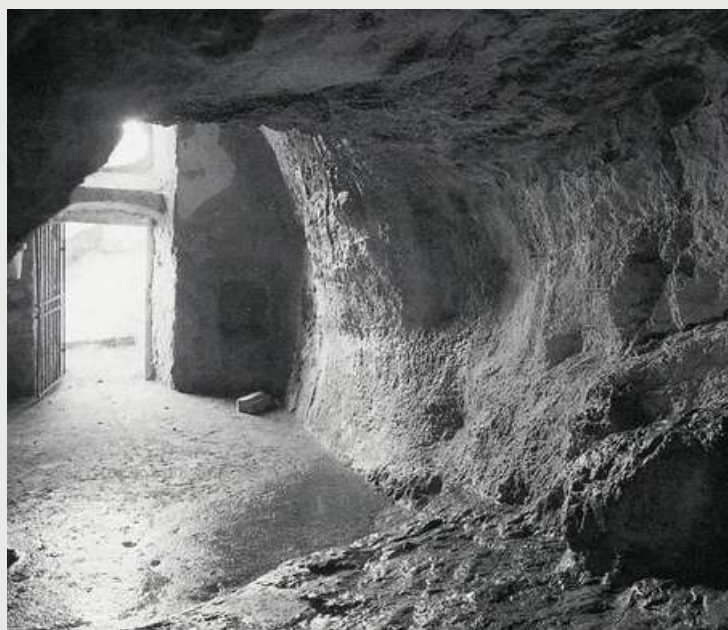
In some corners of Abruzzo, ancient rituals quietly persist. *Litoterapia* – the practice of rubbing parts of the body against stone to ease pain or illness – is still alive in the region's mountains and caves. Though its roots likely stretch back to pre-Christian times, today it's often connected to religious devotion.

One of the most well-known places where this happens is the **Eremo di Sant'Onofrio** on the Maiella, near **Serramonacesca (PE)**. On the saint's feast day, pilgrims enter the cave and lie down in a hollow known as the "cradle of Sant'Onofrio," smoothed by centuries of contact. They hope it will ease stomach aches and fevers.

A second hermitage to Sant'Onofrio, this time on Monte Morrone near **Sulmona (AQ)**, overlooks the remains of a Roman temple to Hercules. Here too, people rub their aching limbs against a rock wall inside the cave. Some say that long ago, the sick would sleep on the stone to draw out the pain.

In **Raiano (AQ)**, at the **Eremo di San Venanzio**, the faithful still press sore backs and knees against the cave walls – especially against a dip in the rock said to have been the saint's resting place (watch a short [documentary](#) from 1967 about the ritual).

Other places known for healing stone include the **Grotta di San Michele** in **Liscia (CH)**, where visitors not only rub the walls but drink water from a spring inside the cave, and two more sites on the Gran Sasso: the **hermitages of San Franco di Assergi (AQ)** and **Santa Colomba in Isola del Gran Sasso d'Italia (TE)**. In some cases, the healing isn't tied to a particular saint, but to the rock itself—perhaps because hermits once lived there, or perhaps simply because people have always sensed that certain stones held some special power.



Photos: (from top) a woman lies on the healing stones at the Eremo di San Venanzio; the hermit's cave at the Eremo di Sant'Onofrio near Sulmona; the pietra del santo in Atri



TORRE DE' PASSERI: MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Text and photos by Anna
Lebedeva

Torre de' Passeri is one of those towns where character is found not in grand monuments but in the steady hum of daily life. Its streets hold stories reaching back to medieval times, from long-forgotten ceramics workshops to postwar protests and the lively community that thrives today.

At first glance, Torre may seem younger than its neighbours, with its modern era buildings spreading towards the motorway. Yet behind this practical façade lies a history that stretches back more than a millennium.

The origins of Torre de' Passeri lie in the 10th century, when it grew from a small Benedictine settlement connected to the powerful Abbey of San Clemente a Casauria, a few kilometres away. Over time, its location — on the Roman road linking the capital to the Adriatic — transformed it into a key stop on the route eastward. The town's strategic position would continue to shape its fortunes for centuries.

Photo: Torre de' Passeri. Photo courtesy of the Comune di Torre de' Passeri.

High above the newer streets stands what remains of the oldest part of town: Castello Gizzi or *castelluccio* as it is called locally. “The castle was built on an 9th-century watchtower by the noble Mazzara family of Sulmona and was expanded in 1719 under Marchesa Smeralda Mazzara, who commissioned a new noble residence,” explains Antonio Alfredo Varrasso, a local historian. The Gizzi family purchased the castle in 1967 and established the Institute of Studies and Research Casa di Dante Alighieri, a cultural centre with international reach. It became a prominent venue for exhibitions and Dante-themed events. However, following the death of its founder, Corrado Gizzi, activities gradually wound down, and the *castelluccio* has remained closed for many years. Recently, the castle was put up for sale for a rumoured four million euros – a move that prompted some voices in the media to express disagreement with the private sale, given the significant public funds invested in its restoration.

CERAMICS INDUSTRY

The Mazzaras shaped the town’s economy. The baron gifted land and building materials to those willing to settle, and in doing so, attracted entire families of ceramists from Castelli, the cradle of Abruzzese maiolica. The town’s location – surrounded by hills abundant with clay, forests, springs and not far from Sulmona’s bustling market – provided ideal conditions for maiolica production. Several families of ceramists relocated here, bringing their expertise and kilns, and established a ceramics tradition that flourished for more than two centuries.

The De Pompei family was among them, and their history is closely intertwined with the town’s ebbs and flows. They built a modest *casa-bottega* on what today is Piazza Plebiscito, near Chiesa della Beata Vergine Maria delle Grazie, with living quarters above and a ceramics workshop below at the close of the 17th century. The family's output was aimed at the upper-middle class and local nobility: tableware that was both decorative and practical, featuring stylised garlands, floral medallions, and classical busts in the Castelli tradition. “The first documented client was the Mazzara baronial household, who commissioned a variety of ceramics, including complete tableware

Photos: Chiesa della Beata Vergine Maria delle Grazie; a street in Torre de’ Passeri



sets,” says Vincenzo De Pompeis, a descendant of the ceramists (the family later added an “s” to their surname). “We still have the oldest surviving piece from our family’s production — a vessel used to store and pour wine dated 1698.”

Over time, as the family grew in wealth and number, the building expanded both upward and outward. It still stands on the *piazza* today, stately and elegant. “There are four salons opening onto the main ballroom,” Vincenzo explains. “The 18th-century Rococo balcony, and the second floor rooms with pastel frescoes of allegories and soft Neapolitan hues.” According to family lore, Joachim Murat, Marshal of the French Empire and Napoleon’s brother-in-law, stayed at the palazzo for one night in 1815, after the defeat at Tolentino. The bedroom where he slept, known as the ‘pink room’, is still preserved today, complete with canopy bed.

Photos: (below) a balcony of the Palazzo de Pompeis; a room in the palazzo; a fresco in the palazzo. Photos by Michele Boccia for Progetto Casa A Associati



THE GOLDEN YEARS

By the late 19th century, Torre’s position again paid dividends. With the arrival of the railway, the town became a shipping hub for Abruzzo’s agricultural goods. “The town was at its most prosperous after Italian unification,” De Pompeis explains. “The railway made it possible to export Montepulciano grapes from local vineyards to Milan and Piedmont — where, at the time, the wine wasn’t called Montepulciano d’Abruzzo but Torre Passeri wine, named after the station from which it was shipped.” His ancestors were among the first to bottle and label wine for wider distribution.

In the 1950s, the growth of nearby Pescara drew people and resources away from the town. During the post-war decades, the population steadily declined as many families relocated to Rome and Pescara. The old medieval centre, costly and difficult to maintain, was gradually abandoned and demolished, with the town expanding downhill.



THE REVERSE STRIKE

The post-war years were marked by hardship, but the town's spirit did not fade. Torre de' Passeri became one of the key centres of one of Italy's most significant protest movements: the *sciopero alla rovescia* – the reverse strike.

On 15 March 1950, about 200 people, driven by hunger and unemployment, picked up shovels and tools and began repairing the old mule path to the nearby town of Pietranico – a symbolic act of labour in protest. It was a strike without crossing arms – instead, people spent a day working without pay, carrying out useful tasks to show their commitment and demand employment opportunities. After hours repairing the road, the protesters marched through the town and encountered a line of riot police. It ended in violence: tear gas was fired, dozens injured, 24 arrested. The event reverberated through courtrooms and parliament, but like many such stories, slowly faded from national memory.

This year, on the 75th anniversary, Torre inaugurated Largo Sciopero alla Rovescia, a square to honour those workers and their determined act of protest.

Photos: (below) a tabaccheria in Torre de' Passeri; streets in the town



A TOWN THAT STAYS BUSY

Jake Rupert and his wife Lisa Grassi moved to Torre de' Passeri from Ottawa, Canada, in 2015. "Torre has a history of entrepreneurialism, so they're used to new people arriving with new ideas," says Jake. When the couple launched their all-inclusive, Abruzzo-focused tourism business [Amazing Abruzzo Tours](#) (read their story on our [website](#)) – something that might have seemed far-fetched in a small inland town – they found encouragement, not scepticism. "They might have thought it was a crazy idea," Jake adds, "but we felt welcomed, and when we needed help, the local people were there."

Jake sees a town full of life. "It's a typical working Abruzzese town," he says. "Three grocery stores, two garden centres, lots of bars, shops, schools, a pharmacy, a *gelateria*, and a great *pizzeria* with a wood oven."

And, unusually for the region, Torre's population hasn't declined in recent years. "We've got kids on the streets, a strong immigrant community, a very active mayor and a ProLoco that organises local festivals. Torre is definitely busier than many other small towns in Abruzzo, with more street life." It helps, too, that trains on the Rome–Pescara line still stop daily at the town's small station, keeping Torre de' Passeri connected to both capital and coast.

Jake's favourite spot in the town is the old Piazza Plebiscito. "Several of the buildings are still being restored there, but it's already a beautiful place to walk my dogs, especially when people are out enjoying an *aperitivo* at the Caffè dell'Arte and the kids are kicking a ball around."

Torre de' Passeri has known change. The ceramic kilns have long gone cold, and much of the past lives on only in family stories and dates etched above old doorways. Yet, the town persists, life carries on, and there's always something going on in Torre. That, perhaps more than anything, is what defines it: a town that still finds ways to fill its streets.



Photos: (below) Castello Gizzi (photo via Jamesedition.com); a street in the town; locals outside Caffè dell'Arte



WHAT TO SEE AND DO IN TORRE DE' PASSERI

WALK IN THE OLD TOWN

Take **Via Castelluccio** to the top of the town. The castle is closed but there is a small *piazza belvedere* from which you can admire the rolling hills around Torre de' Passeri. From **Piazza Plebiscito** several small streets will bring you to the old part of the town, with many buildings dating back to the 1700s, baron Mazzara times. Here you will find many charming, old-style shops: a butcher, a *tabaccheria*, a clothing shop. Stop at the **Caffè dell'Arte** to linger over a coffee and admire the Rococo balcony of the **Palazzo De Pompeis** beside it.

SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESSES

For an original souvenir from Torre de' Passeri, head to the **Bottega d'Arte**. Its owner Rosa Cococcia is a local artist who paints scenes of the

town (one of her paintings is on this month's cover of ABRUZZISSIMO). From small keepsakes to larger pieces, she has something for every budget.

In the **Bottega delle Delizie** you will find chocolates galore and excellent, fragrant coffee beans (Via San Vittorino 59/61). The **Pasticceria Glacè** sells freshly baked pastries and in the family-run **Pelletteria Sonsini** you will find beautiful Italian clothes and accessories. Grab a pizza at the **Pizzeria Il Capriccio** (Via G. Garibaldi, 203) or an excellent aperitivo or pasta dish for lunch at **Le Bistrot** (Via S. Clemente, 42).

VISIT ABBAZIA DI SAN CLEMENTE A CASAURIA

Among the finest medieval monuments in Abruzzo, the Benedictine **Abbey of San Clemente a Casauria** was founded in 871, according to the *Chronicon Casauriense*, a 12th-century manuscript by the monk Giovanni di Berardo.

The church façade features a three-arched portico and a magnificent bronze central door with 72 sculpted panels illustrating the abbey's history.

Abbazia di San Clemente a Casauria



Inside, finely carved furnishings — such as the pulpit, paschal candle, and ciborium — are highlights of Abruzzo's medieval art. The crypt houses a marble reliquary with the remains of Saint Clement. An on-site antiquarium displays archaeological and medieval artefacts from the surrounding area and the small garden gives a fresh respite on hot summer days. In May, the abbey's walls are draped in lilac wisteria blooms. Entrance fee: €5. See the opening hours on the museum's [page](#).

ENJOY LOCAL FESTIVALS

The town's main celebration is the patron **Saint Sant'Antonino festival** on September 2-4. The three days are filled with live concerts, marching bands and fireworks. On December 13, the town celebrates the **Feast of Santa Lucia** with a religious programme and the traditional *pupa*, a large papier-mâché effigy of a woman with exaggerated features. In the evening, the pupa "dances" through the main piazza, fireworks shooting from its head as the crowd cheers and applauds. It's loud, chaotic, and wonderfully theatrical. Torre de' Passeri is one of the few towns in Abruzzo where the old tradition of the *ballo della pupa* is still kept alive.

Details of the festivals are published on the ProLoco's [page](#).

The real estate agency Majellacase has a number of interesting properties in Torre de' Passeri and now offers experience tours for non-residents considering buying a home in the town or elsewhere in Abruzzo. It's a chance to explore the area with fresh eyes—and perhaps imagine a future there. This mention is part of our collaboration with Majellacase.

Photos: (from top right) Rosa Cococcia in her shop; an old pasticceria in the town; a fragment of stone carving at the Abbazia di San Clemente a Casauria





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A HOUSE FOR ALL CREATURES IN CIVITELLA MESSER RAIMONDO

By Linda Dini Jenkins

When Jeroen (Joe) Beltman and Else De Jong (Els) left the Netherlands in search of a sunnier, slower life, they weren't expecting to become known for having "one of the most loved homes on Airbnb"—or for caring for a rotating cast of rescue dogs in the heart of Abruzzo's Majella. But three years in, that's exactly what's happened.

Joe and Els now live in a restored country house with wide views, olive trees, and an open invitation to travellers who prefer not to leave their four-legged companions behind.

Els, a former fashion designer who was influenced by her travels to India, left that world at the age of 40 to pursue a degree in teaching English. Joe describes his career path as "turbulent," with chapters in architecture, graphic design, fine arts, industrial design, illustration — and a few brief detours into things that simply didn't hold his interest. The couple met 12 years ago and quickly connected over their shared love of dogs.

Together, they began a search for a place in the sun for their retirement. A photograph of the Gran Sasso mountains was enough to tempt them into booking a two-week holiday in Abruzzo. Once there, they were immediately taken with the landscape and the rhythm of local life. During the Covid lockdowns, Els — an accomplished internet sleuth — took charge of the house hunting. She compiled all the options on Pinterest, where Joe could review and compare them each month. The favourite for each of them turned out to be the same property, in Calazzotto, a small hamlet near Civitella Messer Raimondo. They put an offer on the houses in July 2022 and moved in a few months later.

JUST RIGHT

The house, with its generous rooms and tall windows, proved an ideal fit for Joe, Els, and their ever-changing family of rescue dogs (currently four). "It's a little less modern than we imagined," Joe admits, "but the outdoor space with twelve olive trees and tiered landscape more than makes up for it."



Joe Beltman and Els De Jong

The main house was liveable, but the ceilings proved too low for Joe — so one of their first tasks was raising them. They changed wooden doors to glass and grey steel to let in more light and kept the interior doors the original wood. Outside, they added terraces and a sitting area, installed solar, and built a garage for storage, all using local craftspeople.

They also have a second, smaller house on the property, which they've transformed into a holiday rental called [Casa Giulietta](#). As devoted dog lovers, they chose to open it specifically to guests travelling with dogs — a rare offering in Abruzzo, where most holiday rentals do not accept pets. Their decision has paid off: they've carved out a successful niche catering to travellers who don't want to leave their four-legged companions behind.

Joe and Els love being in Civitella Messer Raimondo. Their position between two valleys gives them a view of the snow on the Majella mountains.



Els and Joe's house; one of their dogs napping on a table in the shade of an olive tree

Nearby Fara San Martino – famous for its pasta as well as nature and outdoor activities – provides shops, restaurants, a post office, and a veterinarian.

“Our Italian is coming along,” says Els. “We’ve taken various courses and I study with an online tutor based in Perugia.” Communicating with local workers remains a challenge, however – especially when the builders speak in dialect and design preferences clash.

In the early months, they leaned on other expats for help with everything from setting up appointments to navigating local systems. It was occasionally frustrating, but as Joe puts it, “There are two or three hundred percent more things to enjoy than to get angry about.”

TAKING CARE

With two dogs of their own, they also foster rescues and have become quietly known in the area for their generosity and tireless care. “When people heard that we are big dog lovers they started dropping puppies off in boxes anonymously by our house,” says Joe with a sigh. The couple says that in rural parts of Abruzzo, cases of neglect and mistreatment are still common, though new laws against animal cruelty have recently come into force across Italy. According to Els, there’s a noticeable shift: the younger generation is showing far greater concern for the welfare of their pets than previous ones did.



When asked about the future, dogs are very much a part of their plans. “We’d love to set up an animal charity,” says Joe. “Our first step is something we’re calling ‘Garden Cinema’ evenings.” They plan to host outdoor film nights in their terraced garden, offering food and conversation, with all proceeds going to local animal shelters such as *Canile Rifugio di Lanciano* to help to purchase blankets, food, leashes, and medications for rescues.

This summer, they’ll be caring for Albert, a ten-year-old dog with a heart condition who cannot tolerate the heat. For Joe and Els, making space for dogs like Albert is part of a larger vision: to live more gently, give more generously, and continue championing the animals who need them most.

*Linda Dini Jenkins is a travel planner and author of several books. Her new book, *How Way Leads on to Way*, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press.*



FROM ROME TO ORTONA ON FOOT

By Teresa Mastrobuono

One early morning in April, Carmine De Grandis set out from St. Peter's Square in Rome with a small rucksack and 120 euros in his pocket. He was heading east, on foot, along the Cammino di San Tommaso, to his native region of Abruzzo.

The Cammino di San Tommaso is a 316 km route connecting Rome and the coastal Abruzzese town of Ortona. It is the only path in the world that joins places holding the remains of two saints — St. Peter in Rome and St. Thomas in Ortona. "I was experiencing a point in life where I wanted to re-focus," explains Carmine. "And I wanted to make a pilgrimage as a spiritual journey. The choice of the *cammino* was prompted by my background."

As a young man, De Grandis entered the seminary with the Comboni Missionaries. At 15, he was sent to London to complete his studies. But after some time, he felt the need to step away from seminary life. "I was just six months from becoming a deacon, but God had other plans," he says. He found a new path as a teacher, met his wife, and decided to stay in London.

At 54, Carmine had already walked thousands of kilometres across Europe. The Cammino di San Tommaso would take him through the Apennines, across mountain towns and green valleys, and ultimately back to his roots.

Photo: Carmine De Grandis in Rome before starting the walk



The view from one of the mountain sections along the Cammino di San Tommaso in Abruzzo

"I had thought about the walk even before leaving the seminary all those years ago," Carmine explains. "I had this idea of walking home, to Tornareccio, where I grew up. It was also a way to explore Abruzzo more deeply, especially the parts I'd never seen." As a man of faith, walking during Lent in a jubilee year held special meaning for him.

There was an ascetic precision to Carmine's journey. He walked 50 to 80 kilometres a day, for 11 to 12 hours at a time, relying on what he found along the way in terms of food, water, and shelter. He deliberately avoided B&Bs, counting instead on the kindness of strangers, particularly fellow believers. "I wanted to let go of control and be open to providence," he says.

The journey took him through Sulmona, where he stopped briefly to greet a friend; then over the gravelled ridges of the Majella mountains, with the sea glistening on the horizon; and through the outskirts of Tornareccio where his family still lives.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF PILGRIMAGE

Carmine's pilgrimage is hard to define. Though shaped by faith, it wasn't strictly religious. Though solitary, it wasn't lonely. "I had been stopping at churches, hoping for advice or a place to sleep," Carmine recalls. "When I reached a church in Tagliacozzo, Mass had just ended. Exhausted, I asked if I could pitch my tent on the church grounds, but one parishioner warned me: 'There have been bear sightings. And wolves.'" After much discussion, the priest allowed him to sleep in a side storage room

filled with liturgical supplies. "I literally slept with Jesus that night."

In the parish of Torre de' Passeri, he met a priest who seemed familiar. After a brief exchange, Carmine realised it was the very first priest he had trained with in seminary.

He stopped for a special blessing at the Volto Santo in Manoppello, and visited the Eucharistic Miracle relic in Lanciano. But it wasn't only the religious sites that stirred something in him. During the long, silent stretches of walking through nature, it was the landscape that moved him most.

"It puts you in your place," he says. "But at the same time, even though you feel small, you realise that nature seems to be looking after you."

On the final day, driven to reach his destination, Carmine walked and ran for 14 hours straight, arriving in Ortona just before midnight on Good Friday. "It was pitch black around me," he remembers. "The quiet, the solitude. It felt sacred."

Although not his original aim, the constraints of his teaching schedule led to an unexpected record: he now holds the fastest self-supported time on the Cammino di San Tommaso — five days and 15 hours. But that was never the point. The pilgrimage — no matter how quickly completed — was about returning to his native land, Abruzzo.

You can follow Carmine De Grandis' outdoor journeys on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).

Teresa Mastrobuono is a professional actress, voice over artist and ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine's regular contributor. Originally from the US, she now lives in Abruzzo.

CAMMINO DI SAN TOMMASO

The Way of St Thomas is a long-distance walking route connecting Rome to the Basilica of San Tommaso Apostolo in Ortona, where the relics of the Apostle Thomas have been kept since 1258. The route spans approximately 316 kilometres and can be completed in around 16 days, with daily stages ranging from 18 to 30 kilometres.

This itinerary crosses two regions, Lazio and Abruzzo, traversing diverse landscapes that include mountains, hills, woodlands, and rural areas. It follows in part the route of the ancient Roman road Tiburtina Valeria and passes through five major protected areas: the Castelli Romani Regional Park, Monti Simbruini Natural Park, Sirente-Velino Regional Park, Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga National Park, and the Maiella National Park.

Along the way, walkers encounter archaeological sites from the Italic, Roman, and medieval periods,

as well as numerous villages and towns known for their historical and architectural interest. Key stops include Artena, Genazzano, Subiaco (with its UNESCO-nominated Benedictine monasteries), Tagliacozzo, Capestrano, Fontecchio, and Ortona.

Cultural highlights include castles, medieval churches, sanctuaries (such as the Holy Trinity in Vallepietra), Roman roads, ancient farm structures like the *pagliare*, and abbeys such as San Clemente a Casauria and San Liberatore a Majella, which are noted for their medieval sculptures and frescoes.

The route is part of Italy's growing network of slow tourism and spiritual travel itineraries. Walkers can carry a Pilgrim's Credential (Carta del Pellegrino) to collect stamps at various points along the way. Accommodation options vary by location and may include B&Bs, hostels, parish spaces, or basic refuges.

Maps, GPS tracks, and stage details are available on the official [website](#), along with information about points of interest and services along the route.

The map of the Cammino di San Tommaso starting in Rome and finishing in Ortona



QUICK STOP

EREMO OF MADONNA DELL'ALTARE IN PALENA



Located at 1,272 metres on the slopes of Monte Porrara in **Palena (CH)**, the **Eremo Celestiniano della Madonna dell'Altare** was built in the 14th century by monks of the Celestine Order, close to the cave where Pietro da Morrone — later Pope Celestine V — lived in seclusion for three years around 1235. The hermitage, enclosed on three sides by walls and open to the Aventino Valley, was designed as a self-sufficient monastic community, complete with church, convent, storehouses, and gardens.

The monastic complex remained in the hands of the Celestines until 1807, when the order was dissolved following the Napoleonic edict. After the friars' departure, the baronial Perticone family turned the convent into their summer residence. During the annual celebration for the Madonna dell'Altare, the barons would often allow pilgrims to sleep within the complex, especially as groups arrived from nearby villages to pay homage. They donated the hermitage to the town of Palena in 1972.

Past the entrance, visitors find a small, single-nave church displaying the Madonna dell'Altare, whose feast is celebrated on 2 July.

The *eremo* is easily reached by car (enter "Eremo di Madonna dell'Altare" in your navigator). Shaded picnic tables make it a good stop for a summer picnic. Guided tours (€5 per person) can be booked via the hermitage's [website](#) or Facebook [page](#), and it's possible to extend the visit with an easy walk to the cave where Pietro da Morrone once lived (€10 per person).

EASY TRAILS

FROM VILLALAGO TO LAKE SAN DOMENICO AND ITS HERMITAGE



- **Length:** about 4km
- **Time:** 2 hours
- **Starting Point:** Piazzetta Arapezzana at the top of the town. Park along Via Ugolino lafolia.

This scenic hike begins in the small town of Villalago, where a convenient car park marks the trailhead. From here, a well-trodden path winds through shady woodland, offering a cool and peaceful route even on the hottest summer days. With an elevation gain of around 200 metres, the descent is gradual and manageable at a relaxed pace, making it ideal for casual walkers or families.

The trail leads directly to the hermitage of San Domenico, where the 11th-century Benedictine monk is said to have lived in solitude and prayer. The sanctuary, built on the spot where he once retreated, now stands quietly reflected in the man-made lake created in the 1920s.

Along the way, several panoramic points open up over the Sagittario Valley, with sweeping views of Villalago's clustered rooftops and the still, emerald waters of Lake San Domenico below.

While many visitors simply stop on the road to Scanno to snap a photo, those who take the trail are rewarded with a much richer experience and a striking arrival at the lakeshore where they'll find picnic tables scattered near the water and a small kiosk selling coffee, cold drinks, and simple panini. For more about Villalago, read our mini-guide in the December 2024 issue of ABRUZZISSIMO. See the map of the trail on the Riserva Naturale Villalago [website](#).

LEGUMES WITH ALTITUDE

By Anna Swann

In Abruzzo, pulses have long been more than a food source – they’ve been a foundation of daily survival and local economy. Cultivated since at least the year 998, when monastic records from San Vincenzo al Volturno mention legumes grown in the Tirino Valley, these crops have adapted to the region’s high altitude, poor soils, and short growing seasons.

Perhaps the most famous and sought after by international gourmet chefs is the ***lenticchia di Santo Stefano di Sessanio*** (in the photo), grown between 1,000 and 1,600 metres in the southern Gran Sasso area. These lentils are small – 2 to 5 mm – dark in colour, with hues ranging from brown to violet, and highly nutritious. Thanks to their thin skins, they require no soaking and cook quickly. Their flavour is robust, which makes them ideal for simple preparations like soups with *farro* grain, garlic, bay leaf and olive oil. Though easy to cook, they are hard to harvest. Due to the steep terrain and the plants’ low growth, the work is mostly manual and often mirrors ancient methods. After cutting the plants by hand, they are left in small bundles to dry, sometimes for up to two weeks before threshing. You can buy locally grown lentils at a small shop on Piazza Medicea, 13 in Santo Stefano di Sessanio, supplied by **Ettore Ciarrocca’s farm**. They’re also available in the nearby village of Barisciano from the **Santavicca family** (Via Aldo Moro, 2). Most restaurants in Santo Stefano di Sessanio serve a traditional lentil soup.

Another important pulse is the ***cece di Navelli***, grown in the plain below the medieval hill town of the same name. Here, chickpeas thrive in light, stony soils at 700–800 metres. Two types survive: the more widely sold pale cream variety, and the smaller, wrinkled red chickpea, traditionally used for family meals. Sown in spring and harvested by late summer, they’re often celebrated in local festivals, especially in recipes like *ceci in umido* or paired with local saffron. The red type has a firmer skin, is more floury, and needs longer cooking, making it perfect for hearty winter soups, such as the traditional chickpea and chestnut



stew served on Christmas Eve. **Azienda Agricola Noletti Nunzio** cultivates the white *cece di Navelli*, while at the **Antica Taverna restaurant** (Via dell’Osteria 16, Navelli) you can try an excellent soup made with the red variety.

Moving east, in the fertile alluvial lands along the Tavo River, farmers cultivate the ***fagiolo tondino del Tavo***. Small, round, and ivory in colour, this bean is late-ripening and particularly digestible thanks to its very thin skin. Traditionally grown without chemical herbicides and harvested manually, it’s often enjoyed simply boiled and dressed with olive oil or cooked with pumpkin in seasonal dishes. Its revival in the 1950s is credited to a local chef who recovered the seeds from elderly farmers after the variety had almost disappeared. Family farm **Azienda Agricola Di Luzio Alessandra** cultivates and sells excellent *fagioli tondini del Tavo*. You can find a list of restaurants that serve dishes with the legume on the consortium’s website.

Finally, the ***cicerchia of Castelvechio Calvisio***, though less known, remains a part of local food culture. Grown in mountainous fields over 1,000 metres, this legume is valued for its ability to withstand poor soils and drought. After soaking, it’s often turned into a purée or added to soups and pasta dishes, especially *sagne*, the region’s hand-cut ribbons. **Azienda Agraria La Buona Terra di Marco Matergia** (address: Via delle Scalucce, Barisciano (AQ); tel.: 0039 392 2527992) cultivates small quantities, about 600kg per year, of organic *cicerchia*.

PANZANELLA SPEZIATA CON IL PILIERO

By Anna Swann

The Tuscan *panzanella* — a rustic salad of stale bread, ripe tomatoes, red onions and basil — is one of Italy's best-known summer dishes. In Abruzzo, a similar preparation exists under the name *ciaudella*, often made with garden vegetables and fresh herbs. But in the small hamlet of Casali di Aschi, in the municipality of Gioia dei Marsi, this humble dish takes on a distinctly local identity: here, it becomes *panzanella speziata con il piliero*.

Piliero is the dialect name for *Mentha pulegium*, or pennyroyal mint — a wild, aromatic herb that grows in abundance in the surrounding mountains. Every year, in summer, volunteers gather the herb to prepare for the *Sagra del Piliero*, a food festival that has become a regular fixture in the local calendar. The event centres around dishes made with *piliero*, but its most emblematic preparation is *panzanella*, where the mint flowers replace the more common basil. More pungent and herbaceous than basil, *piliero* is the defining feature of the local *panzanella*, giving it a sharp, fresh flavour.

Like many rural recipes, *ciaudella abruzzese* varies from house to house. The essentials remain the same: stale bread, soaked briefly in water until softened, then tossed with fresh seasonal vegetables — often including the *tortarello abruzzese*, a pale green, thin-skinned cucumber grown mostly in home gardens. It's prized for its crunch, sweetness, and low seed count. The dish is dressed with extra virgin olive oil, a touch of vinegar, and fresh herbs. But it's the *piliero* flowers that give this version its character — adding a bright, minty intensity that cuts through the softness of the bread and elevates the salad from simple to unmistakably local.

If pennyroyal is hard to find, spearmint or another type of mint can be used as a substitute. I prefer the fleshy, juicy local *Pera d'Abruzzo* tomato variety (read more about it in the September 2022 issue of ABRUZZISSIMO) for this *panzanella*.



INGREDIENTS

Makes 2 servings

- 3 slices of stale bread
- 2-3 large ripe *Pera d'Abruzzo* tomatoes
- ½ red (or white) onion
- 1 large cucumber
- Extra virgin olive oil, to taste
- Salt and pepper
- A splash of vinegar
- ½ teaspoon fresh pennyroyal mint flowers, finely chopped (or spearmint if unavailable)

PREPARATION

Dice the tomatoes and put them in a large bowl. Peel and slice the onion into thin rings, and add that as well. Peel the cucumber, cut it into small cubes, and add it to the mix.

Quickly rinse the stale bread under cold water, just enough to soften the surface without making it soggy, then cut it into bite-sized chunks and mix it with the vegetables in the bowl. Season generously with extra virgin olive oil, a splash of vinegar, salt, and pepper.

Add the chopped pennyroyal mint flowers and stir well to combine.

Cover the bowl and let the salad rest in a cool place for 30 minutes before serving, allowing the flavours to meld.

ZUCCHINE ALLA SCAPECE

By Emilia D'Angelo

In our family, *zucchine alla scapece* is everyone's favourite summer side dish. I learned to make it from my mother, Rita. Though it has Neapolitan origins, a similar dish exists in Molise, which used to be part of Abruzzo, but *capece molisana* is made with skate, octopus, or squid – floured, fried, and marinated in vinegar and oil.

At its heart, *scapece* is a method born of necessity. Before the age of refrigeration, marinating fried vegetables or fish in vinegar and oil was a practical way to preserve food during the warm months. Thinly sliced and fried until golden, the courgettes are then marinated in a dressing of wine vinegar, extra virgin olive oil, garlic, parsley, and a touch of fresh mint.

Zucchine alla scapece is best served at room temperature as an appetizer on bruschetta or as a side dish alongside fish.

For the best results with this recipe, choose courgettes that are not too large, but fresh and firm.

Emilia D'Angelo lives in Canada and has supported ABRUZZISSIMO as a subscriber for many years.

INGREDIENTS

Makes 4 portions

- 500 g courgettes
- 50 g white wine vinegar
- Extra virgin olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves
- 2 sprigs of mint (can be substituted with thyme or parsley)



PREPARATION

To make *zucchine alla scapece*, start by washing and trimming the courgettes. Cut them into slices about 3 mm thick to ensure they cook evenly and absorb the dressing well.

Heat oil in a pan over medium-high heat and fry the courgettes in small batches; if the oil is hot enough, they will crisp up quickly, usually in just a few seconds.

As the courgettes slices turn a golden colour, remove them and drain thoroughly on paper towels to eliminate excess oil.

While the courgettes cool slightly, prepare the dressing: slice the garlic thinly and roughly chop the fresh mint leaves. In a bowl, combine the garlic and mint, then season with extra virgin olive oil, white wine vinegar, and a pinch of salt.

Use a fork to whisk the mixture vigorously until it emulsifies, creating a blend of sharpness and freshness. Toss the fried courgettes gently in the dressing to ensure each piece is coated evenly. Cover the bowl and refrigerate for at least two hours to allow the flavours to meld fully.

Serve chilled or at room temperature with fried or grilled white fish or as an appetiser on *bruschetta*.



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