

TRAVEL HISTORY CULTURE PEOPLE FOOD

ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE



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ON THE COVER:

Il Duomo di Atri, or Basilica di Santa Maria Assunta. Photo via StockAdobe. Read the story on page 15.

LEFT:

Atri. Photos by Anna Lebedeva. Read the story on page 15.

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Editor's Note

We're back from our summer break with a slightly longer issue packed with fresh stories. August has slipped away, and Abruzzo's small towns are growing quieter as families and holidaymakers head home. Yet some, held fast by the region's spell, decide to stay. That feeling is echoed in the growing interest from property buyers, with Abruzzo drawing attention from Milan and abroad. Recent statistics even place **Atri (TE)** at the top of the list (see page 3). But our focus on Atri this month isn't just because of the record property sales. With nearly three thousand years of history, remarkable landmarks and outstanding food, it's a town worth exploring. Read about it in our main feature Walking Through Time in Atri on page 15 and in our mini-guide for foodies on page 29.

In this issue, we look at the history of Campo 78 in **Sulmona (AQ)**, a prisoner-of-war camp that remained in use through both world wars. A major funding has recently been allocated to restore and redevelop the site, and we hope that it will soon be easier to visit for people from around the world.

Almost every household in Abruzzo once had a *coperta abruzzese* – a colourful traditional blanket. Many families still treasure them as keepsakes from their nonnas. What was once a thriving industry sustaining entire towns has almost vanished, with wool mills swept away by globalisation. We explore the tradition of the *coperte abruzzesi* on page 9. Do you have one passed down from your mother or grandmother? I'd love to hear from you at editor@abruzzissimo.com, as we're launching a photo project to remember the vanished industry and the family heirlooms it left behind.

Enjoy the September issue!

Anna Lebedeva
Founder & Editor

DIGEST OF RECENT REGIONAL NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS FROM ABRUZZO NEWSPAPERS



CONTROVERSIAL GAS PROJECT AT LAKE BOMBA

The Ministry of Environment has given the green light to LnEnergy, an Italian private energy company, to tap into Italy's largest onshore undeveloped gas field beneath **Lake Bomba (CH)** in the Collesanto area. The reserves are said to match the entire Abruzzo region's yearly gas needs.

But the decision has sparked a storm: Legambiente, WWF Abruzzo, and the municipality of Paglieta condemn the move as dangerous for a seismically fragile area, recalling past rejections of the same project. LnEnergy, meanwhile, insists it's sustainable and low-emission.

ABRUZZO STARTS TO ATTRACT TOURISTS YEAR-ROUND

Abruzzo welcomed 474,081 tourists from January to May 2025, up 5.6% from the same period in 2024, with visitors staying longer, reaching 1,370,044 nights in total, a 20.4% rise, according to the **Abruzzo Regional Tourism Report**. Growth extends beyond seaside destinations, with more visitors exploring cities, national parks, and mountain areas, reflecting a shift toward year-round tourism. New flight connections and the summer campaign are boosting arrivals, while B&Bs and other small accommodations are expanding. The report didn't include summer statistics, but it looks like Abruzzo might have had a record-breaking season.

ATRI TOPS INTERNATIONAL BUYERS' LIST IN ABRUZZO

Atri (TE) is the most sought-after destination for foreign property buyers in Abruzzo, according to Gate-away.com's 2025 report. Buyers are drawn to Atri for its winding historic streets, timeless charm, and sweeping views of the Adriatic. Other rising hotspots include **Fraine (CH)**, **Castelvecchio Subequo (AQ)**, **Roccaspinalveti (CH)**, and **Penne (PE)**. Independent and country homes are the most popular, with average prices around €159,000. Buyers come mainly from the USA (27%), the UK (19%), and Germany (6%), with growing interest from Sweden, France, and the Netherlands.



GROCERY PRICES HIGHEST IN PESCARA

Shopping is costing more, and **Pescara** leads the region in price increases, according to Federconsumatori. From 2022 to 2025, the average cost of groceries rose 18.3%, with some items up over 50%. A complete daily meal now costs €5.54 per person, up from €4.68, translating to around €660 monthly for a family of four. More than 55% of Abruzzo taxpayers earn under €20,000 annually, nearly a quarter live on less than €7,500, and the middle class is shrinking, making rising food costs increasingly unsustainable.

ABRUZZO FEELS THE BITE OF NEW US TARIFFS

Abruzzo could take a hit from the new 15% US tariffs, with almost one in six of its exports heading across the Atlantic – well above Italy's 10% average. The region's pharmaceutical industry leads the way, making up 57% of this trade, followed by electronics, food, and machinery. In 2024, Abruzzo shipped over €1.6 billion to the US, with **L'Aquila** and **Chieti** contributing €1.13 billion and €291 million. While a big slice of Abruzzo's exports goes across the Atlantic, most of Italy's US-bound shipments come from Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, and Tuscany.



HONEY FESTIVAL IN TORNARECCIO

On September 27–28, **Tornareccio (CH)** transforms into a buzzing hub for *Tornareccio Regina di Miele*, a two-day festival celebrating honey and local specialties. The historic streets fill with stalls offering tastings and products crafted by local producers, from sweets and cosmetics to award-winning honeys. The town has earned the title of Abruzzo's honey capital as it is home to some of Italy's finest honey, produced by skilled local beekeepers. While there, you can explore the town's open-air gallery of beautiful bee- and honey-themed mosaics on the buildings. The full programme is available on the event's [page](#).

DID YOU KNOW?

THE WORLD'S LARGEST UNDERGROUND LAB BENEATH GRAN SASSO



Shielded by over 1,400 metres of mountain rock, between L'Aquila and Teramo, lies the world's largest and most advanced underground research facility: the Gran Sasso National Laboratory (LNGS).

Carved into the flank of the 10 km long *Traforo del Gran Sasso* motorway tunnel (read more about it in the July-August issue), the laboratories operate under constant rock cover to shield delicate experiments from cosmic radiation.

Funded by Italy's National Institute for Nuclear Physics (INFN), the labs were conceived in 1979 by physicist Antonino Zichichi. Excavation began in 1982, leading to the construction of three vast experimental halls, each the size of a cathedral. Inside, scientists from 30 countries work on around 20 high-precision experiments in astroparticle physics and nuclear astrophysics (solar and supernova neutrinos, dark matter particles, and rare nuclear reactions).

There are three main barrel vaulted experimental halls, each approximately 20 m wide, 18 m tall, and 100 m long. Despite the near-freezing natural temperature and high humidity of the Gran Sasso massif, the research spaces are carefully insulated and ventilated, drawing in 35,000 cubic metres of fresh air every hour.

Thanks to the low levels of natural radioactivity in the rock, this subterranean environment allows researchers to investigate phenomena otherwise impossible to detect at the surface.

For more details see the LNGS' [website](#).



WARTIME MEMORIES OF SULMONA'S CAMP078

By Linda Dini Jenkins

There are places that leave an indelible mark on a people's history and cultural memory. Located just on the outskirts of Sulmona in an area called Fonte D'Amore, the prisoner-of-war camp known as Campo78 is one such place. It lies at the foot of Mount Morrone, not far from what would later become the Gustav Line during the Second World War.

Campo PG 78 (for *prigionieri di guerra*) was a prisoner of war camp that, at its peak, held more than 3,000 people and was in service throughout the two world wars. Its construction dates back to the early months of 1916, when it was established to house prisoners from the first World War (1915 – 1918). According to Carmine Di Benedetto, president of the *Associazione Culturale Una Fondazione per il Morrone*, it was built there because it was very far from the front lines. “When the prisoners tried to escape, it was difficult to reach their allies or rejoin their armies,” he says.

Of the 108 internment camps scattered across Italy, this one in Sulmona was assigned the number 78. It was one of the largest and, during World War I, housed Hungarian prisoners who were put to work reforesting the Morrone, tending fields, and helping to rebuild wells that supplied drinking water to the former Celestinian abbey (the Abbey of Santo Spirito al Morrone) and the surrounding homes.

Photo: Archive photo of Campo78 in Fonte D'Amore, Sulmona

Conditions for the prisoners in that period were harsh. The Spanish flu epidemic in 1918-1920 claimed the lives of more than 400 prisoners held here – their remains now rest in a solemn ossuary within the walls of Sulmona's cemetery.

WAR, AGAIN

After World War I, the site had various uses, but some 20 years later, Campo 78 was once again operated as a prison, this time during World War II. Between 1940 and 1943, most of those held at Fonte d'Amore were now Allied soldiers – mainly British, American, and ANZAC fighters – who had been captured in the North Africa campaigns. Rows of long, skinny barrack buildings contained bunk beds stacked three bunks high – up to 100 in each building. Despite being a prisoner-of-war camp, Campo 78 was remembered by many as one of the more decent camps in Italy. "Living conditions were better here than in many other camps," says Carmine Di Benedetto, who notes that the association has collected some letters written by former prisoners describing life inside. Rations

consisted of soup and bread, with cheese and fruit (in season) provided by the locals, augmented by deliveries from the Red Cross. In the camp, there was a small library, a theatre, a band, and even a handwritten English-language newspaper produced by a group of prisoners.

Among the activities recorded in the newspaper – now faded but partially legible – was football. "There was a football pitch where they played. Some well-known English footballers were among the prisoners," continues Di Benedetto. A faint mark of a football is still visible on one of the barracks walls. There are also drawings and graffiti left by thousands of men, in some cases still bearing names, national crests, and battalion insignia.

John Esmond Fox, writing in his memoir, *Spaghetti and Barbed Wire*, recalls, "The front of the camp was typical barracks style, with guard posts and offices . . . Now we were truly enclosed – by high walls and higher mountains, watched by armed guards in towers. There was a certain inevitability, and most of us resigned ourselves to spending the duration of the war there."

Campo78 during World War II. Photo courtesy of Una Fondazione per il Morrone/Facebook



He managed to escape the camp and was hidden by the Silvestri family in the hamlet of Cantone. In January 1944, he crossed the snow-covered Guado di Coccia and reached Casoli, where the Allies were stationed. Looking back years later, he mused, "It's strange how men from such different backgrounds – languages, beliefs, customs, races – imprisoned together by some cruel twist of fate, stripped of identity and reduced to the bare fact of their humanity, could cast aside pride and prejudice to form bonds of friendship, to find purpose and struggle against a common enemy. I believe that this is something that can only truly be experienced, sadly, under such grim circumstances. What a miracle it would be if this same camaraderie, this esprit de corps – call it what you will – could exist in everyday life. The world would be a step closer to the utopia we dream of."

HUMANITARIAN RESISTANCE

In his book *Escape from Sulmona*, Donald I. Jones – who was himself held as a prisoner at Campo 78 – recounts his experiences of life in the camp and his eventual escape: "The camp was ... surrounded by a high stone wall. As if that weren't enough, the Italian authorities had cemented shards of broken glass along the top and added two tall barbed-wire fences along the perimeter... [It] was divided into five sections: one for officers, one for sergeants, and the other three for the ranks... Thanks to the regular delivery of Red Cross parcels supplementing the [understandably] meagre Italian rations, we managed to stay in good health between October 1942 and September 1943." Jones eventually escaped the camp and, after months of wandering across Abruzzo – from the slopes of the Gran Sasso to the villages of the Tirino Valley – rejoined the Allied army.

It was from Campo 78, after the armistice of 8 September 1943, that many prisoners and others persecuted by the Fascist regime began their escape toward freedom. With the Italian government near collapse, there were rumours that the camp was about to be evacuated and, one morning, the prisoners awoke to find the Italian guards had deserted them. Prisoners in other camps had been given a "Stay put" order, but at Campo 78 it was, "Every man for himself." And so many of them fled, hoping to reach Allied lines and seeking temporary refuge in the villages of the Valle Peligna. "Families in Sulmona, Introdacqua, Pacentro and other nearby villages took in escapees, fed and clothed them, risking their lives



Campo78 during World War II

to help them evade recapture," says Carmine Di Benedetto. "Local partisans accompanied prisoners across the Gustav Line to join the Allied army. This clandestine effort was called here *resistenza umanitaria* – humanitarian resistance."

Once the German troops took over camp surveillance from the Italians, they quickly began reprisals and roundups against the many local civilians who helped the fugitives.

One morning in October 1943, German troops stormed the prison of the Abbey of Santo Spirito al Morrone and deported nearly 400 detainees to the Dachau concentration camp, aided by local Fascist authorities. From there, many were sent on to other Nazi camps across Europe. For the hardships it endured and the acts of courage carried out by its citizens the city of Sulmona was later awarded the Silver Medal for Military Valour by the Italian government.

PRESERVING THE CAMP

For many years, Campo 78 stood in neglect, its barracks crumbling and overgrown. Yet the site continues to draw children and families of former prisoners from all over the world. The volunteers of the *Una Fondazione per il Morrone* guide them through the camp and those visits stir memory and emotion. "When we accompany these visitors, we get emotional hearing their stories," says Di Benedetto. One such moment unfolded recently, when the son of a former prisoner visited the camp and spoke to a local school group.

He shared how, after escaping in September 1943, his father was helped by a shepherd who gave him food and civilian clothes. "Now, every year on the 8th of September, the day of the armistice, the family honours that event by eating tomatoes and grapes – the food the shepherd gave his father, which helped him survive."

In 2020, Campo78 was demilitarised as a prison camp and transferred from Defence Ministry control to the municipality of Sulmona. €950,000 have been allocated for a project to restore and redevelop the site, transforming it into a museum dedicated to prisoner-of-war and internment camps – a memorial park that will be accessible and open to visitors. "Currently, one of the barracks with the historic graffiti has already been restored," explains Di Benedetto. "Several others remain in a state of disrepair and are structurally unsafe. Our association continues calling to move ahead with the restoration."

Many, many stories have come out of the Campo 78 chapter of World War II, including a [video](#) from American television (A&E in 2019) which provides interviews of some of the British and Commonwealth survivors, as well as an Italian woman who helped to shelter them.

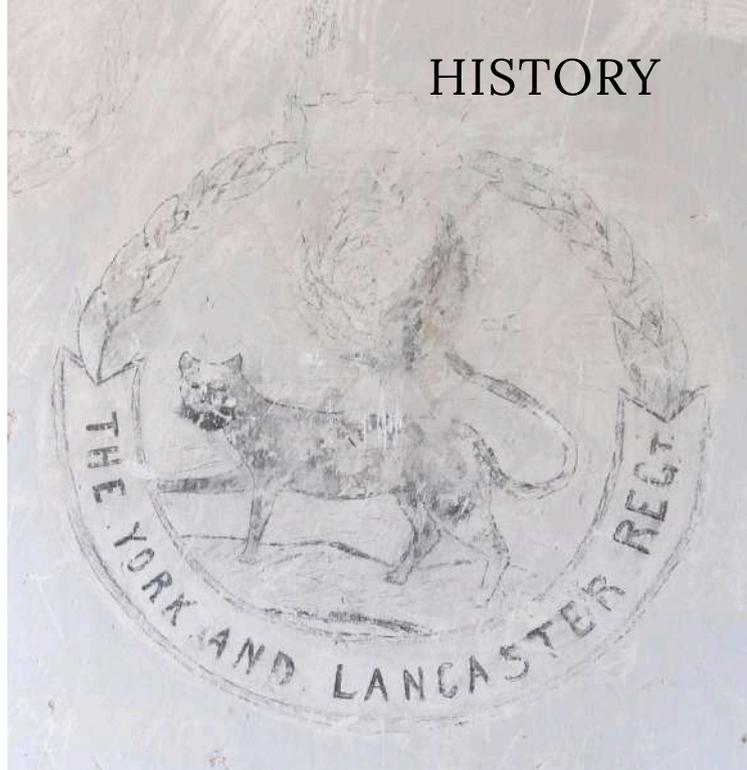
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IF YOU GO

Guided visits to Campo 78 in English can be arranged through the Comune di Sulmona or by sending a WhatsApp message (please, no calls) to Carmine Di Benedetto at 0039 3404741106. Be sure to allow plenty of time in advance to organise your visit. Follow *Una Fondazione per il Morrone* on [Facebook](#) for updates.

Every April, the [Associazione Culturale Il Sentiero della Libertà – Freedom Trail](#) organises a three-day trek along a 60-kilometre route through the Majella mountains. The trail follows the historic escape route taken by thousands of Allied prisoners and Italians after the armistice of 8 September 1943. You can take part in the organised group walk or explore the Freedom Trail independently (see description and technical details [here](#)).

Photos: (from top) graffiti on the walls in the camp; some of the barracks today. Photos by Linda Dini Jenkins





THE WOVEN HERITAGE OF COPERTE ABRUZZESI

By Eleonora Moreschini (in
conversation with Anna
Lebedeva)

I discovered my first traditional blanket made in Abruzzo, *coperta abruzzese*, in my grandmother's house. It was folded away in a chest, a heavy blanket with its design mirrored on both sides. This chance encounter became the starting point for my thesis at the Accademia Costume e Moda in Rome, and for a small clothing collection I later created using old *coperte abruzzesi* that I found in markets, shops, and private homes.

Over a six month period, I embarked on a journey across Abruzzo, piecing together the region's textile history through first-hand research. I visited Taranta Peligna, Lama dei Peligni, and Fara San Martino, speaking to former factory workers, shop owners, and local historians. I wanted to understand where these blankets came from, how they were made, and why production had disappeared. Alongside my thesis, I compiled a dedicated catalogue featuring photos of 84 blankets made in Abruzzo by historic wool mills.

Photo: detail of a blanket made at the Lanificio Merlino in Taranta Peligna (CH)

THE AVENTINO VALLEY

To this day, no formal studies or written records chronicle the precise origins or production timeline of the *coperta abruzzese*. Some say the first loom capable of producing them arrived in Taranta Peligna (CH) in the 1920s; others mention a reference to a loom in 1870 in Fara San Martino (CH). At the beginning, the *coperta abruzzese* was made entirely of pure virgin wool from the Merino sheep breed. The wool industry thrived in the Aventino Valley in the Bourbon era in the 1700-1800s when felted wool fabrics were made for military coats. The area had everything the industry needed: the river whose currents powered the *gualchiere* – fulling mills that softened and finished the wool – and centuries-old shepherding routes that brought Merino flocks down from the Apennines. The shepherds made the animals jump into the Aventino river to wash the wool before shearing. Local wool was once among the finest in Italy. For many centuries, water, wool, and skill converged here to weave not only blankets but an entire local economy.

BLANKETS FOR A DOWRY

The earliest blankets featured the votive angel, a reinterpretation of religious iconography from Pescocostanzo (AQ). They were displayed on balconies during Corpus Domini, marking the passage of religious processions through the town.

Woollen blankets made at at the Lanificio Merlino in Taranta Peligna (CH)

The *coperta* is a Jacquard-woven blanket with a double face – its colours and patterns perfectly mirrored front and back with motifs such as cherubs or floral patterns to more geometric designs in later years. Two-colour combinations were traditional: red and black, red and green, red and blue. Later, with the arrival of acrylic yarns, the palette exploded into bright, even fluorescent shades. And while the blankets were woven by machines, I find it hard to call the production industrial because of the quality and the beauty of the traditional pattern, but also because as the final touch, hand-tied fringes were added to each *coperta*, each knot made by the women of Taranta Peligna, more than 2,000 per blanket.

In its heyday, the thick woollen or cotton *coperta* was more than a household object. In the 1950-60s the tradition of wedding dowries was still very strong in Italy. With an economic boom, demand for the blanket grew enormously as everyone wanted to give a traditional blanket as a wedding gift. Woollen mills in Taranta Peligna, Fara San Martino, Lama dei Peligni, Ortona, Teramo, Vasto, and Castel di Sangro thrived. Even outside Abruzzo, in Calabria and Lombardy, factories tried to imitate the designs. Factories in other regions, including Calabria and Lombardy, started producing the blankets by copying the original Abruzzese designs.

While cataloguing *coperte abruzzesi*, I realised that the ones produced in smaller, mountain towns were easier to identify as they're more isolated, with less outside influence. Each town and *lanificio* (woollen



mill) had its own distinctive designs, creating a real competition as many began developing their own patterns and colours.

The design of the blankets from Fara San Martino, for instance, while clearly drawing inspiration from the production in Taranta Peligna, was visibly different. The figure of the cherub reappears, as in the samples from the Quartullo woollen mill, but it was arranged in a different pattern, often combined with small birds or clusters of grapes. Another *coperta* design from Fara San Martino was unique for its circular shape rather than the usual square. Meanwhile, mills from L'Aquila presented different challenges in tracing their history, as their designs were less tied to local identity as a result of stronger outside commercial influences. Some blankets that I found during my research were impossible to link to any known mill, and their origins remain unknown. My ongoing research shows how design was the key to understanding each *lanificio's* heritage.

UNRAVELLING OF AN INDUSTRY

The decline came in the 1970s. Central heating reduced the need for heavy wool blankets, and synthetic materials made production cheaper elsewhere. Sheep farming, once the lifeblood of the region, began to wane as demand for wool waned. One by one, the mills closed. Today, these blankets are often found neatly folded in wardrobes, sold in second-hand shops or, sadly, sometimes discarded when clearing out an elderly relative's home.

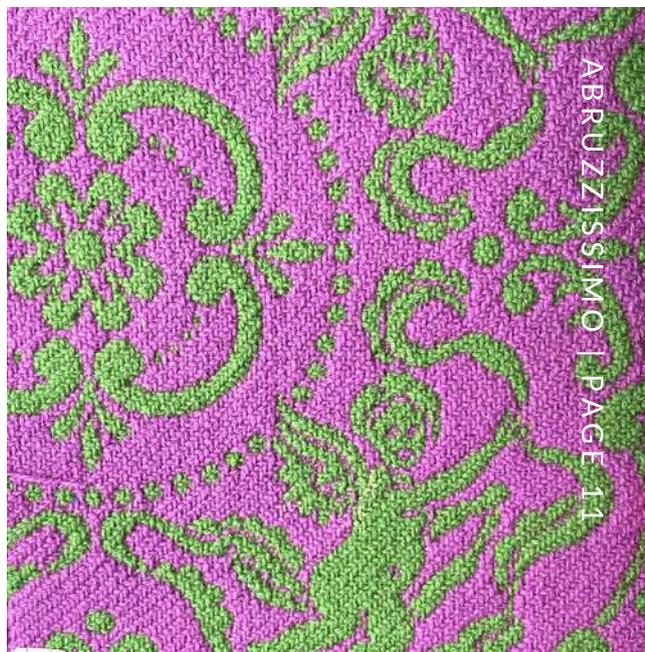
When I think of the *coperta abruzzese* now, I think not only of my grandmother's blanket but of all the people whose hands shaped its history – the weavers who read the patterns as fluently as a book, the women tying fringes in the low light of their kitchens, the shepherds moving flocks along the *tratturi* under open skies. For my graduation from the Accademia Costume, I created a small collection of clothing made from *coperte abruzzesi*, giving them a second life. I hope to publish my research in a book and create a catalogue of designs soon, to honour the generations of Abruzzese people who made these beautiful blankets.

Eleonora Moreschini is a recent graduate of the Accademia Costume e Moda in Rome and a researcher specialising in the history of coperte abruzzesi.

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ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine is launching a photo project to collect images and stories of inherited coperte abruzzesi. If you have one passed down through your family, we'd love to hear from you. Please get in touch via email editor@abruzzissimo.com.

**Photos: (from top) a coperta abruzzese on a bed;
blanket pattern details from the Lanificio Merlino's
catalogue**



LANIFICIO MERLINO: ABRUZZO'S LAST WOOLLEN MILL

At the end of 2024, Lanificio Merlino in Taranta Peligna—Abruzzo's last woollen mill—closed its doors, marking the end of a centuries-old tradition. Founded in 1870 by Vincenzo Merlino on the Aventino River, the mill oversaw the entire wool cycle: sheep washed, sheared, wool spun, dyed, and woven into blankets and thick *taranta* fabric for military coats of the Bourbon army.

At its height, the factory employed over 100 people and produced 300,000 blankets a year. The wool blankets were heavy, about four kilos each, warm, and bright, woven to last a lifetime and beyond. In the 1960s, the mill introduced its own signature motif with cherubs that became a hallmark of the Merlino brand.

Globalisation, shifting economies, and changing tastes closed most of Abruzzo's small wool mills, yet Gaetano Merlino, Vincenzo's great-grandson, kept the looms running—long after everyone else had stopped, the last man standing. But from 2000, after layoffs he worked mostly alone running the mill's machines for occasional orders. Gaetano took smaller commissions from independent international designers, alongside larger requests from established fashion houses. About ten years

**Photos: (from top) Gaetano Merlino in his *lanificio*;
original Merlino box used for packaging blankets**

ago, an extravagant order came in from Saudi Arabia: 100 cashmere blankets woven with traditional motifs.

A few years ago, a social media influencer launched the #Savethecopertaabruzzese campaign, sparking a wave of renewed interest. The looms at the lanificio were last set in motion in 2024 to fulfil a final bulk order of magnificent, pure wool coperte abruzzesi, using yarn sourced from a factory in Lanciano. That factory has since closed. Gaetano, now in his eighties, says his eyesight is failing and he has come to accept that the industry is gone. "The production chain that once existed is broken. It's over. The municipality wants to turn this place into a museum. We'll see what comes of it."

Vintage *coperte abruzzesi* made at the Lanificio Merlino occasionally surface in second-hand shops or online, often after families clear out a house following the death of an elderly relative—unaware of the historical or sentimental value of what they're discarding. Prices typically range from €80 to €350.



THE LOST COLLECTION OF RICHARD SOAR

By Antonio Bini

Those approaching our region from afar often notice aspects of Abruzzo's culture and vast artistic heritage that may escape local residents, which can give the impression that the Abruzzesi are not especially invested in preserving their own past.

One such observer was Colonel Richard Soar – an Englishman who, after retiring, chose to spend his “second life” in Abruzzo, dedicating himself with passion to tracing the region's last surviving wool industry. I met him in October 2008, through a mutual friend, Sue Cardwell, an Irishwoman who had been living for several years in a village near Sulmona. She had already told me about Richard and his interests. We met at a birthday celebration in the small village of Decontra di Caramanico: he was tall, austere, lean, and athletic. We exchanged a few words, with Sue's help – she knew Italian well. I complimented him on his research. He thanked me, but before we could talk further, the festivities carried us along, and I had the impression that he enjoyed himself.

Richard Soar had settled in a house near the Badia Morronese in Sulmona, where he moved after retiring. During those months, he devoted himself passionately to tracking down old local blankets – *coperte abruzzesi* – driven by an insatiable curiosity and an ever-deeper knowledge of the subject. He visited old factories, most of them already closed by then, as well as shops and markets – interested not only in recovering the blankets themselves, but also in understanding the meaning and symbolism of their designs, their ties to local culture, the production techniques, and the traditional dyeing methods once used. I believe he fully grasped the risk of this heritage slipping into oblivion – of a centuries-old tradition being forgotten.



Richard Soar

Wool-working, always tied to the region's pastoral economy (itself long in decline), was overtaken by several factors: the rise of synthetic fibres in industrial production, the global spread of low-cost manufacturing, and the automation of machinery, which allowed for vast production at a fraction of the cost of natural fibres.

In Abruzzo, even the transition from handlooms to mechanised production retained much of the trade's traditional character. The region's wool mills were small, and they continued to preserve the secrets of weaving, along with the designs and double-sided colour schemes, all handed down through generations. This kind of high-quality craftsmanship needed public support to survive the crisis and to find its place again in increasingly diverse markets.

One of the last catalogues published by the Pagnanelli wool mill in Castel di Sangro – preserved by Soar – proudly claimed that its blankets, rugs, and tapestries echoed the textile art of the Samnites from the 2nd century BCE. Of that mill, like so many others, no trace remains today. And yet, an article titled *I tratturi della lana* in the national magazine *Artigianato* listed 19 wool mills still active in the provinces of Chieti and L'Aquila as recently as 1968.

UNFINISHED RESEARCH

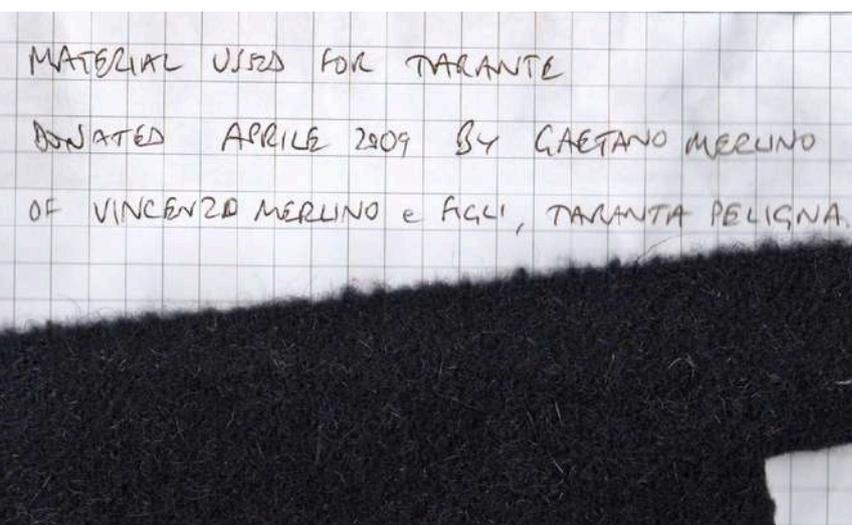
Richard was in the midst of his research when he passed away suddenly in his home on 31 May 2009. Sue informed me right away. In the weeks that followed, I asked her whether it might be possible to keep a few objects from his collection as a way of remembering him, and perhaps to donate them to a museum. She obtained permission from his daughter and urged me to visit soon – the house was already up for sale. She had the keys.

The colonel's Land Rover was still parked outside. We went in and found a large room filled with at least 100 *coperte abruzzesi*, table covers, tapestries, rugs, drawings, printing blocks, and samples of various kinds. I took three blankets and some samples, though what truly caught my attention were the catalogues and scattered papers.

Lacking specific expertise in the field, and more accustomed to working with written sources, I chose to take a few catalogues – some of which existed in multiple copies – and some of Richard's notes. It's not uncommon, in moments like this, for documents and papers to be lost, dismissed as unimportant.

Much of his research had focused on the Santarelli wool mill in Sulmona, the Pagnanelli mill in Castel di Sangro – both long since closed – and Merlino in Taranta Peligna. Among his notes, he had jotted down a reminder for the *Fiera dell'Artigianato* in

Photos: (below) A piece of *taranta* fabric with a note by Richard Soar; (right) a hand-drawn design from Lanificio Santarelli, Sulmona, from his collection



Guardiagrele, traditionally held in August, where he undoubtedly planned to go in 2009. That year's edition was to include a section dedicated specifically to *coperte abruzzesi*.

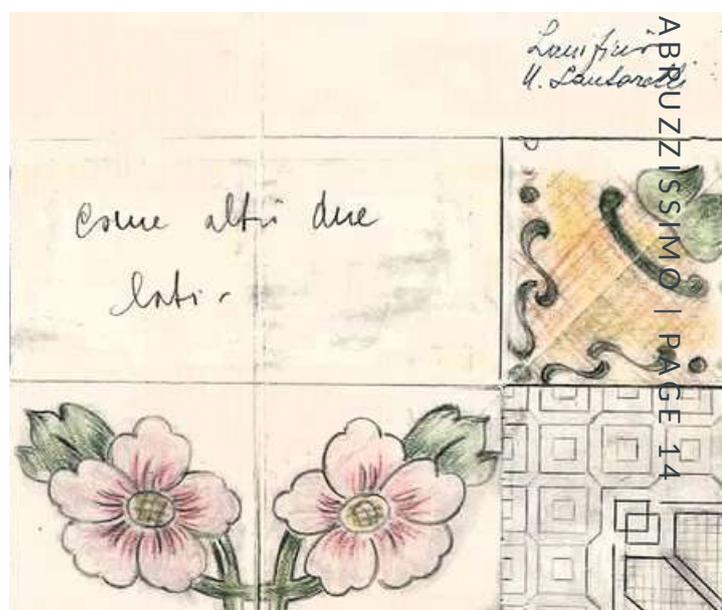
It's worth remembering that Abruzzo was facing a deeply difficult time then, still reeling from the earthquake in L'Aquila. Hoping to entrust the material to someone both passionate and knowledgeable, I had considered giving it to the master weaver Assunta Perilli of Campotosto, who had plans to create a small museum. But the devastation of the town made that impossible. In the months that followed, Sue also left Italy, moving to New Zealand, and we lost the chance to explore other possibilities together.

More recently, I learned that a law firm handling the sale of Richard's home had also been instructed by Richard's daughter to donate his collection to a museum. I have emailed them hoping to find out what happened but haven't yet received any response. As far as I can tell, after making inquiries, no donation has been made, either to the *Museo delle Genti d'Abruzzo* in Pescara, nor to the *Museo del Costume e della Transumanza* in Sulmona.

With this article, I wish to remember Richard Soar and thank his daughter for authorising the use of his photograph.

If any reader has any information about Richard Soar's important collection, please let us know via email to editor@abruzzissimo.com.

Antonio Bini is the author of several books on history and traditions of Abruzzo and a regular contributor to ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine.



WALKING THROUGH TIME IN ATRI

Text and photos by
Anna Lebedeva



The cloister of the Basilica di Santa Maria Assunta (Il Duomo di Atri)

Atri rises on a green hill between the Adriatic coast and the Gran Sasso, its streets layered with almost 3000 years of history: from Roman mosaics and medieval walls to Renaissance *palazzi* and Baroque churches — each era left its mark on the town's architecture.

Together with the Venetian town of Adria, Atri stakes its claim as the source of the Adriatic Sea's name, a measure of how prominent this ancient settlement once was. As one of Abruzzo's oldest and historically most significant cities, its origins are debated and partly shrouded in legend. The most widely accepted theory is that Hatria — later Hadria, now Atri — was founded in the 8th century BCE by a mix of settlers from the eastern Adriatic and southern Italy who established the town. The very name Hatria, which shares its root with Hatranus, a Siculi deity worshipped in southern Italy in the pre-Roman era often depicted alongside a dog. "Ancient coins discovered here carry the image of a crouching dog, symbol of the god Hadranus.

Through this, scholars trace the continuity of cult and language from Sicily and Dalmatia to the shores of Abruzzo," says Roberto Ricci, historian and vice-president of the Deputazione di Storia Patria in Abruzzo.

In ancient times, Hatria thrived as a centre of trade, exchanging wine and olive oil with the Etruscans, the Umbri, and even distant Greece. Wealth and taste were reflected in the city's goldsmithing, both a symbol of local luxury and a sought-after export. Exquisite jewellery, some believed to be Etruscan, others of local origin, has been uncovered here and today can be seen in the National Archaeological Museum of Campi and in the British Museum in London.

ROME'S LOYAL ALLY

In the Samnite wars, Atri allied with Rome, securing a place in the Latin federation. By 89 BCE it was a *municipium*, and in 27 BCE elevated to the rank of Roman colony with its own seaport. "The port lay at the mouth of the river now called Vomano, between modern Pineto and Roseto degli Abruzzi, where today's Torre di Cerrano stands," explains Ricci.

The Roman footprint is visible still in Atri. Beneath the cathedral lies a quadrangular pool with a beautiful dolphin mosaic, evidence of baths that once served the town. Remains of paved roads appear between the churches of Sant'Agostino and San Francesco; a cistern hides beneath the Palazzo Acquaviva; there are the outlines of ancient kilns and, most impressively, a Roman theatre. The surrounding countryside, known as the *Ager Hatrianus*, extended north to the Vomano river, and south to the Saline (the modern day area of Città Sant'Angelo) reaching westward to the slopes of the Gran Sasso. It was fertile land, often supplying Rome with grain, provisions, and soldiers – loyalty that earned Atri a place in a senatorial decree honouring the cities that had safeguarded the Roman Republic.

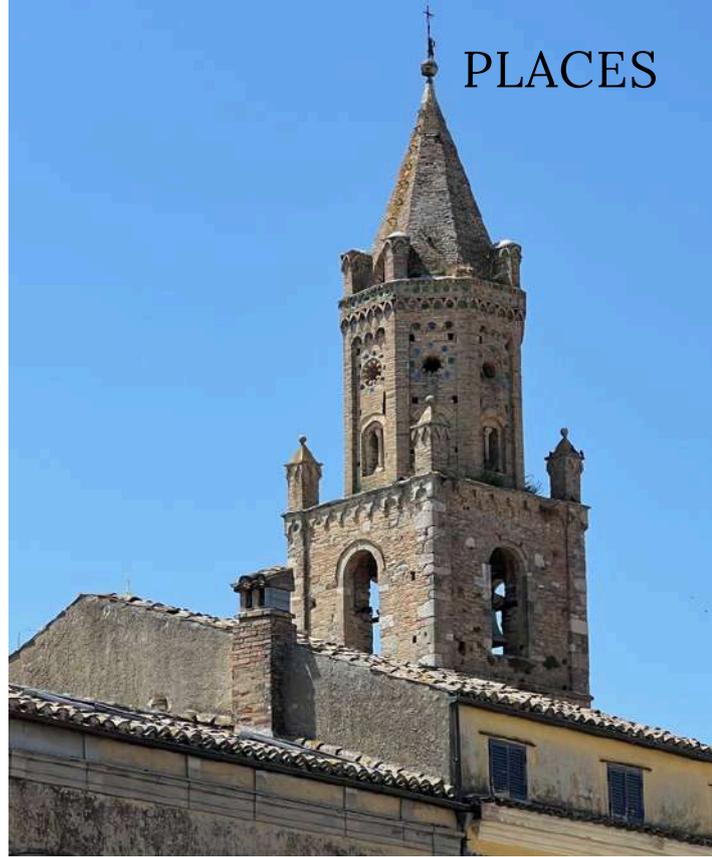
The decline of the Roman Empire and the turmoil of invasions left Atri in shadow. Under the Lombards it belonged to the Duchy of Spoleto; later it passed to the Counts of Apruzio. Fragmentary records suggest little prosperity until the 13th century, when Atri chose the papal side in the conflicts between the Hohenstaufen and Rome. For its loyalty, Pope Innocent IV in 1251 granted Atri the creation of its own diocese and recognition as a free commune. Its citizens enjoyed autonomy, exemption from feudal duties, and the right to administer justice within their own territory.

THE ACQUAVIVA ERA

A new chapter began in 1395, when Atri was sold to Count Antonio Acquaviva. "Under his family the city flourished for nearly four centuries," says Ricci. Andrea Matteo Acquaviva, a Renaissance humanist, gathered poets and artists at his court, founded a private printing press, and built a celebrated library. Another of the family, Cardinal Giulio Acquaviva, had as his chamberlain none other than Miguel de Cervantes, author of *Don Quixote*.

"From the dukes of Acquaviva we still have so many beautiful testimonies here in Atri," Ricci reflects. "In the cathedral, the frescoes of Andrea De Lizio, commissioned by Andrea Matteo III – extraordinary, Abruzzo's own Sistine Chapel. Then there is the Chapel of Sant'Anna, once the mausoleum of the Acquaviva, and of course the Ducal Palace itself."

Photos: (from top) in the streets of Atri; Torre di Cerrano, once the site of Atri's ancient port



ROOTS OF PROSPERITY

Atri's prosperity was long intertwined with the fertile soils of its surrounding hills. Apart from olive oil and wine, one of the town's most celebrated products was liquorice, whose roots thrived in the clay and limestone of the *calanchi* gullies surrounding the town. From the Middle Ages onward, Dominican monks harvested and processed the plant, not merely for local consumption but for trade that extended across Abruzzo and well beyond. By the 19th century, industrial-scale production had taken root, establishing Atri as a hub for high-quality liquorice. This trade helped sustain Atri's economy, providing livelihoods for artisans, merchants, and local families. The industry endures today through the Menozzi De Rosa factory, founded in the 1800s, which continues to produce liquorice products for markets across Italy and abroad.

Photos: (below) a sign at a local shop; one of the town's oldest neighbourhood, Capo d'Atri



MODERN DAYS

Centuries of prosperity have given Atri the character it retains today: a town of churches, noble *palazzi* and elegant squares. Many buildings are weathered and await restoration, yet Atri remains one of the most attractive and liveable towns in Abruzzo. With around 10,000 inhabitants, it offers reliable public transport, schools, a hospital, green spaces, bars and restaurants, all framed by sweeping countryside views. Just half an hour from the Adriatic coast, it has in recent years become one of the most sought-after destinations in the region for international buyers (see our *News and Events* section on page 3).

Gilbert Barnoush and Shannon Nonna first bought a holiday house for short breaks but soon made it their permanent home. "After living in Dubai for over a decade, we decided to make a big move three years ago and settle down here," says Gilbert. "The town has everything we need and is family-friendly. There is a hospital, schools, and living is easy here."



Since then, the couple have had a baby, launched a property management business for expats, and purchased a larger home with land and wide views. Like many other newcomers, they see Atri not just as a place to visit but as a place to build a future.

The real estate agency Majellacase has a number of interesting properties in Atri 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.

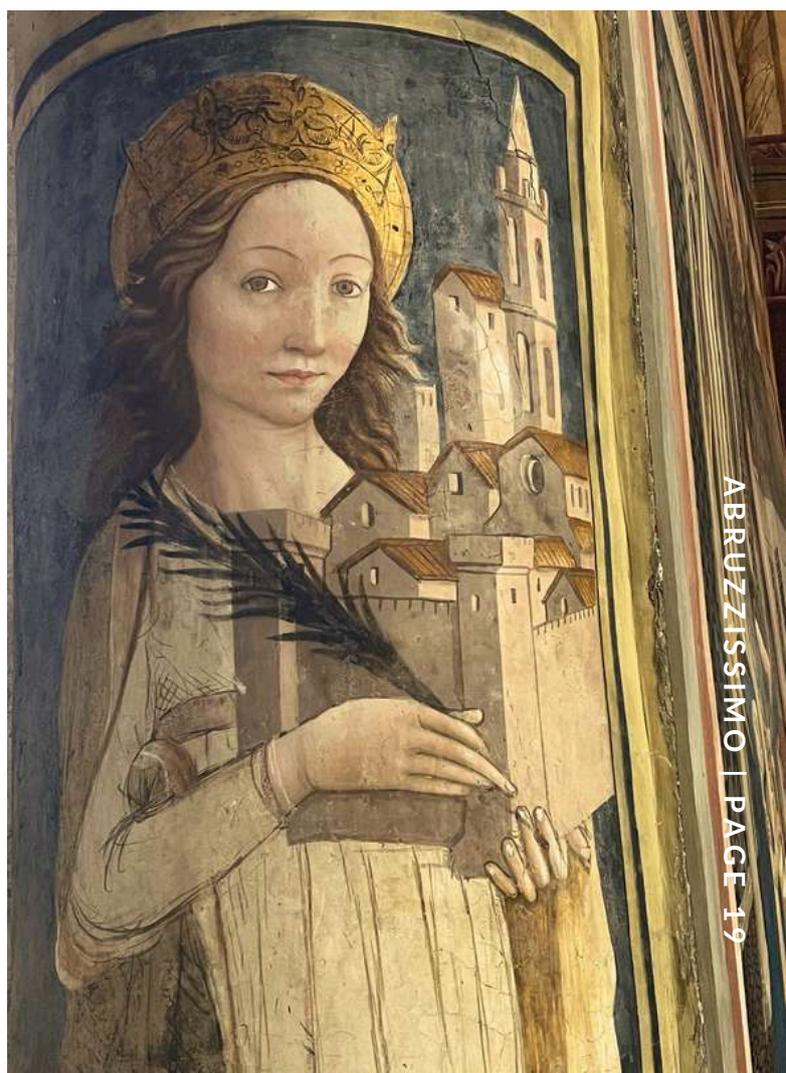
WHAT TO DO AND SEE IN ATRI

ADMIRE THE FRESCOS IN THE DUOMO

Begin your exploration of the old town at the magnificent Duomo di Atri (Basilica di Santa Maria Assunta), where you could easily spend hours admiring frescoes spanning the 13th to 18th centuries. The most famous work in the Duomo, which draws countless visitors and scholars, is the series of frescoes that adorn the walls, columns, and vault of the choir, created by Andrea De Lizio, painted between 1460 and 1481. Comprising 101 panels, they depict the life of the Virgin Mary, Saints, and the Evangelists, yet they are far more than a sacred narrative. Nobles appear in sumptuous costumes, townsfolk carry out daily tasks, children play, and the landscapes include views of old Atri and the former Porto di Cerrano. The frescoes blend local Abruzzo scenery with hints of the painter's homeland of Lecce nei Marsi, offering a vivid window into 15th-century society and culture while standing as one of the crowning achievements of the Renaissance in central Italy.

One of the cathedral's quirkiest features is the *acquasantiera* on the right side near the entrance, known locally as *la trucculette*. This 16th-century limestone sculpture shows a barefoot woman in

Photos: frescoes in the choir by Andrea De Lizio



traditional Atri dress carrying the holy water basin on her head. Her lifted skirt and loose hair suggest movement and practicality, while her once-striking face, now mostly worn away, hints at pride and purpose. Controversial in its day for its sensuous pose and open neckline, the figure even had its face and a lotus flower removed under clerical orders, yet it remains a fascinating glimpse of Renaissance Atri and its traditions.

VISIT MUSEO CAPITOLARE DI ATRI

You can access the Capitular Museum through a door in the left nave of the Duomo. One of Abruzzo's oldest museums, it was founded in 1912 and is housed in the upper rooms of a 12th-century Benedictine monastery. Its ten galleries showcase treasures from the 13th to the 20th century, including frescoes, altarpieces, and sculptures by masters such as Silvestro dell'Aquila, Carlo dell'Aquila, Antonio Solario, and Luca della Robbia. Highlights include rare manuscripts, liturgical objects, a remarkable collection of ceramics spanning the 16th to 20th centuries, and even a 2nd-century Roman cistern that once supplied the city's thermal baths. Tickets: €8. Opening hours change with the season, so check the museum's [page](#) before you go.

JOIN THE FESTIVALS

Atri's calendar brims with festivals drawing big crowds of locals and tourists into the streets in every season. The most evocative is *I Faugni*, held at dawn on 8 December. Rooted in an ancient pagan ritual, it has long since merged with the Catholic feast of the Immaculate Conception. Tall bundles of reeds, bound with twine, are set alight and carried in procession to Piazza del Duomo, where they are heaped into a great blaze before mass. The celebration then continues with the dances of the *pupe*, giant papier-mâché figures animated by hidden performers and illuminated with fireworks, together with concerts, open museums, and late-night gatherings in cafés and bars.

The Feast of the Assumption in mid-August is marked by a solemn historical *corteo*, the opening of the Porta Santa of the cathedral – a ritual that dates back to the 14th century – and days of



The *acquasantiera* known locally as *la trucculette*.

medieval performances. On August 15 during the *Maggiolata*, flower-decked ox-drawn carts parade through the streets to folk music and dancing. Another popular event is *Atri a Tavola*, a sprawling food festival that stretches across the historic centre in July and August. More than a hundred producers from Abruzzo and beyond fill the main *corso* and piazzas with regional flavours and traditional crafts.

For updates about the festivals keep an eye on the municipality's [page](#).

WALK IN THE CALANCHI

Just beyond the town, where Atri faces the mountains, the *Riserva Naturale Calanchi di Atri* protects 600 hectares of dramatic landscape, with deep clay gullies (*calanchi*) sculpted by water and wind. A 5.4km loop trail follows the edge of the natural canyon, offering striking views of the slopes, home to a rich variety of flora and fauna. Visit early in the morning or at sunset, as the trail offers little shade. For more information see the reserve's [website](#).

CATCH A SHOW AT THE THEATRE

The *Teatro Comunale* in Piazza Duomo opposite the Basilica di Santa Maria Assunta opened in 1881. With its exterior façade inspired by La Scala in Milan and inside by Naples' Teatro San Carlo, this 300-seat "little jewel" is famed for its exceptional acoustics. Today it hosts plays, operas, operettas, and classical concerts. The programme for the new season is published each October on the municipality's Facebook [page](#).

SEE THE PALAZZO DUCALE

The town's main street will bring you to the Ducal Palace. Built in 1395 and until 1760 served as the residence of the Acquaviva d'Aragona, Dukes of Atri, it has housed the Town Hall since 1917. In 1707 Austrian troops of Charles III of Bourbon ravaged the building during battles with the Spanish to reclaim the kingdom: interiors were stripped, frescoes ruined, and paintings by Titian

In the Riserva Naturale Calanchi di Atri

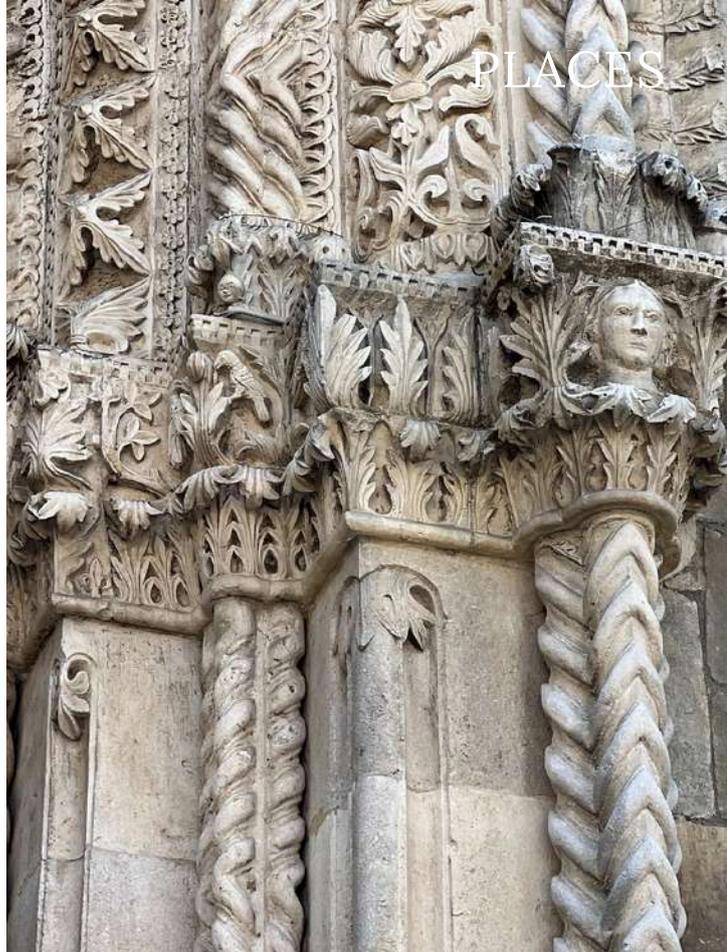
and Veronese were stolen and taken to Germany. The palace stands over Roman structures, and beneath it lie cisterns that formed part of a wider urban water system of large reservoirs placed on high and strategic points to store water for prolonged use. Inside, you can still see advanced Roman building techniques such as *opus signinum* and *cocciopesto*, a low-permeability mortar tinted pink by ground terracotta. Every summer, contemporary art exhibitions are hosted in the cisterns' vaulted chambers. The palazzo can be visited for free during office hours. The cisterns are open in summer during the *Stills of Peace* exhibitions (see the programme and the dates [here](#)) and for group visits in Italian with [CulTurA'](#) guides.

DESCEND INTO ANCIENT CAVES

From the old town, follow the hill down to the *Li Muri* caves (search "Grotte di Atri" on Google Maps). They are less than a 10-minute walk from the central piazza and reached via a steep staircase. Believed to be once rock-cut homes of



the area's earliest inhabitants, they were later adapted in Roman times, possibly as a massive linen-soaking tank or as part of a water storage system, evidenced by the use of *opus signinum* and other hydraulic techniques. The underground complex spreads over three levels and roughly 700square metres, with narrow tunnels leading to chambers of varying size. Visitors can still see features typical of Roman cisterns, including drainage channels and low-temperature storage design. Local legend adds a touch of mystery: the five entrances and exits are said to represent the hand of Saint Reparata, holding the city of Atri steady during a catastrophic earthquake. The caves are free to visit and open year-round, though [CulTurA'](#) offers regular guided group tours in Italian.



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WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ATRI?

See our [mini-guide to Atri for foodies](#) on page 23.

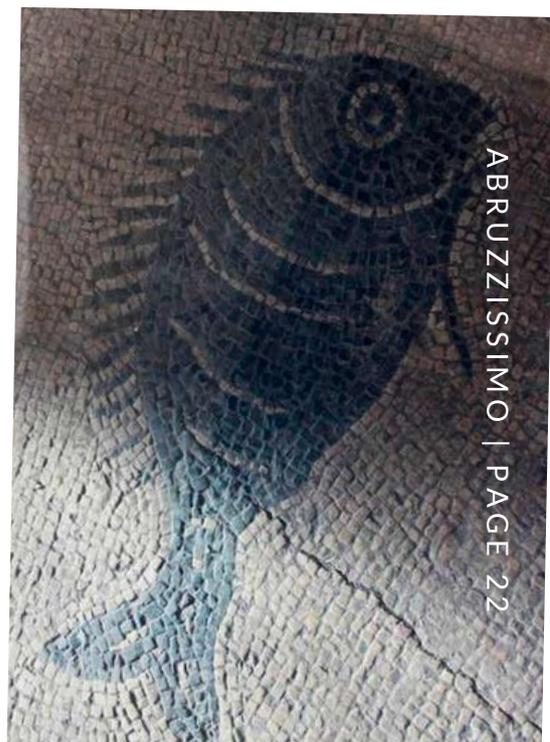
Over the years we have published the following articles about Atri that you can read in our archive issues:

The stone of Saint Paul – a story about a mysterious healing stone in the calanchi di Atri (July-August 2025 issue available [here](#))

The return of Atri's black hen – an ancient heritage breed that still survives today ([May 2024 issue](#))

Pecorino cheese from Atri ([February 2023 issue](#))

Photos: (clockwise from top) carved details on the façade of Atri's Duomo; an exhibition inside the cisterns beneath Palazzo Ducale; a Roman mosaic in the Duomo; Li Muri caves



PALAZZO SORRICCHIO IN ATRI

Atri's streets are lined with *palazzi* that once broadcast the wealth and status of its noble families, and Palazzo Sorricchio is among the most remarkable. Originally an extension of the ducal Acquaviva palace, today's municipal building, the palazzo became the home of the Sorricchio family after the Acquaviva line ended. It was occupied by the family until the early 20th century, when it was abandoned and left to the slow passage of time. Within its walls, a significant library of rare manuscripts – compiled from the late 18th century onwards by Nicola Sorricchio and later his nephew Luigi – once chronicled the history of Hadria and the surrounding area. Today, these priceless documents are preserved at the family villa in Silvi.

In 2021, local entrepreneur Piero Pavone took on Palazzo Sorricchio, launching a careful restoration to turn it into the headquarters of his company, Hadrianum Srl.

The restoration was carried out entirely with private funds, without any public money, and followed a conservative approach, as most of the rooms were

Photos: (below) a room in Palazzo Sorricchio; (right) detail of a ceiling fresco in the palazzo



already in good condition. Only the main hall required significant work due to a roof leak. The current entrance, formerly the palazzo's chapel, still has the altar, a bell used to ring for mass, and other liturgical features. The main hall is decorated with late 18th- and early 19th-century tempera paintings attributed to Giuseppe De Dominicis, featuring the Muses of Apollo in a central chain dance, flanked by scenes from historical myths. A fresco, likely from the early 17th century, was discovered in the conference room during restoration after decades of being concealed by plaster. Original 18th-century terracotta floors and doors remain throughout the building, preserving its historic atmosphere.

The palazzo's garden occupies the site of a public Roman-era gymnasium, and beneath the surface, an original Roman herringbone pavement may still exist. Its most striking features are three century-old beech trees, unusually tall for this area since they typically grow in the mountains, as well as the garden's vast extent, which marks its historic layout that once included stables for the Acquaviva family's prized horses. After decades of neglect, Hadrianum Srl is reviving the garden and aims to reopen it for public visits and events, although bureaucratic obstacles have slowed progress.

You can book a private small-group tour and wine tasting at Palazzo Sorricchio by contacting Vinum Hadrianum via email info@vinumhadrianum.com or through their Instagram [page](#).



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KEEPING THE HEART OF SAN GIOVANNI LIPIONI ALIVE

By Linda Dini Jenkins

In her adopted hometown of San Giovanni Lipioni Gaydene Brierley is working to fulfil a vision for the local hangout, Bar del Borgo, which she describes as the heart of the local community.

A primary school educator, Gaydene spent seven years teaching in her native South Africa before relocating to the U.K., where she retrained and continued teaching until taking early retirement in 2018. Together with her partner Owen they spent many hours discussing an affordable European location for their retirement that offered a pleasant climate and a warm community. A holiday driving along the Adriatic coast convinced her that Italy was the perfect place to settle. It didn't take long to discover properties within their budget in Abruzzo, a region she knew nothing about at the time.

The couple embarked on a property search in Abruzzo and visited San Giovanni Lipioni, a small town in the province of Chieti with population just over 100. "The village instantly charmed us with its idyllic, quintessential Italian mountain setting," she says. "Despite a somewhat shy initial welcome, the sincerity and warmth of the residents were unmistakable."

OH, ITS A PROJECT . . .

The house they chose offered the best of both worlds – being quietly tucked away from the main piazza, yet just a three-minute stroll to the Bar del Borgo for socializing. According to Gaydene, "We made an offer right after seeing it and completed the purchase in October 2017, just two months after we began our search in earnest." But it was not move-in ready.

In fact, the house had been empty for around 40 years, so it was quite a project – there was no running water or electricity, and some rooms were entirely without windows. After she left her job, Gaydene and her partner's first Christmas here was spent sleeping on a mattress by the fire which, she



Gaydene Brierley with her dog Alice

says, really helped them bond with the locals. "They were wonderfully respectful and amused by our situation, and their incredible kindness and hospitality truly blew us away," she says. "The house is also fantastic for parties, especially since our older neighbours are a bit hard of hearing," she giggles. "So we don't worry about making too much noise."

WHY THIS HOUSE?

"Our mantra was, 'You can build a house, but you can't build a view,'" she says. The couple enjoy stunning mountain views in three directions which, at night, create a truly magical scene. The landscape is mostly natural, with indigenous terrain in beautiful greens and scattered olive groves. The abundance of local wildlife is remarkable, Gaydene muses, and the evening flights of the large birds of prey are downright mesmerizing.



Photos: (above) the central square in the town; (right) San Giovanni Lipioni

“In fact, the setting was so impressive that my son and his wife decided to hold their wedding ceremony in our front garden,” she reports. “Afterwards, a procession of 70 guests walked to the *piazza* for the reception. This was a first for the village, and I believe it helped the local people see San Giovanni in a whole new light.”

SMALL TOWN, BOLD PLANS

San Giovanni Lipioni is home to one of the oldest populations in Italy – until recently it held the national record with an average age of over 66. Against this backdrop of demographic decline, 50 locals came together to set up an association to find ways to reimagine the future. By mapping abandoned houses – nearly 80% – and bringing together scattered owners, the group launched shared condominium projects for restoration. With the help of engineers and builders tied to the village, and funding through the national Superbonus scheme, they completed a €2.7 million renovation of the central piazza’s housing block in 2023, fitted with solar panels. A new cooperative is working to turn restored homes into spaces for visitors and new residents, a tangible sign that even in one of Italy’s oldest communities, “something can be done.”

THE BAR DEL BORGO CHALLENGE

Walking her dog, Alice, has led Gaydene to discover scenic village trails, a cool pine forest and picnic benches, and an old town that is especially photogenic. But it’s Bar del Borgo that is central to the village, and also the focus of her activities these days. “This cosy



bar is run by two close friends who took it on despite knowing the challenges of a declining population and post-Covid difficulties,” explains Gaydene. “Winter revenue has dropped sharply, and at times they keep the bar open more out of kindness than profit.” Fortunately, the bar also sells some basic supplies, to augment the twice-weekly visits from the cheese and vegetable man.

Gaydene writes on the [GoFundMe page](#) she created, “The Bar del Borgo is our social fabric, vital to the long, happy lives our residents enjoy. It’s the vibrant centre keeping our town thriving.”

Just two years ago, Catia and her partner Alessandro moved from Parma to take over the bar. Catia manages in a tiny kitchen with tough conditions, and staffing is both hard to find and to afford. The mission of Gaydene's GoFundMe campaign (called "Grow the Bar, Grow Our Italian Village") is to improve the kitchen and expand into the next building, aiming to create a cosy restaurant that generates income year-round and attracts not only the local townspeople but neighbouring villagers and tourists as well. "A local restaurant is often something my visiting English and American friends always ask for, and it would be a welcome addition to the town," she reports.

LIFE IN SAN GIOVANNI LIPIONI

While the village may be small, it does not lack for things to do. The Sangiovesi (as they call themselves) community holds great pride in its annual *Festa del Majo*, an event planned meticulously each year which attracts visitors from all over Italy and beyond. Like many festas around Abruzzo, this two-day celebration is a unique blend of pagan and Christian traditions.

On the first day, wild flowers are collected from the surrounding countryside. After a communal lunch, the community gathers to decorate the *lu Majo* cross. The following morning, on May 1, it is carried to every house in the village, accompanied by a large procession singing along the way. Refreshments are generously provided, contributing to an increasingly festive atmosphere as the procession advances.

In October, the village celebrates the *Sagra de li Scurpell*, when local women spend the day preparing these leavened dough fritters, crisp outside and soft within. In the evening, the town gathers to enjoy them in both sweet versions with sugar or honey and savoury ones with cheeses and cured meats, all paired with generous amounts of beer or red wine. Music, folk dancing, craft markets, and culinary workshops add to the festivities.



The Festa del Majo celebrations in San Giovanni Lipioni

HELPING OUT

While Gaydene and Owen are the only permanent English speakers in the village, they enjoy socializing with their Italian neighbours and are starting to pick up the local dialect, which, she admits, is challenging. Some of their English friends have even bought holiday homes here, and it was an American with roots in San Giovanni who alerted Gaydene to the whole GoFundMe process as a way to support the community.

She sums it up this way: "I'm dedicated to doing my part in keeping our town's traditions alive and finding ways to help it grow and adapt."

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. Photos courtesy of Gaydene Brierley.

If you want to support the Bar del Borgo fundraiser please donate [here](#).

QUICK STOP

THE MONUMENT TO THE SHEPHERD AT CAMPO IMPERATORE



Driving through **Campo Imperatore** from the Vado di Sole entrance, it's hard to miss the white statue near **Fonte Vetica**, not far from the famous **Ristoro Mucciante**: a man with two children and a dog faces a woman with outstretched arms, several metres away. The sculpture tells the story of Pupo Nunzio di Roio, a shepherd who died with his family in a sudden snowstorm in October 1919.

That autumn had been unusually mild, and while other shepherds had already moved their flocks to lower ground, Pupo Nunzio stayed behind to graze his 5,000 sheep on Monte Bolza. On 16 October, the weather turned. By the next morning, snow was falling fast, the wind howling. Pupo Nunzio, his sons, their dog, and the sheep tried to reach Calascio but were caught in the storm. His wife, worried by their delay, set out to find them – only to vanish in the blizzard herself. Estimates put the amount of snow that fell in three days at 1 ½ meters.

They were found the following spring, after the snow had melted.

The monument, sculpted in 1987 by Vincentino Michetti of Calascio, honours not only the Nunzio family but all shepherds whose lives have been shaped – and sometimes claimed – by the mountains.

To visit the monument, see this [location pin](#) or enter “Monumento al Pastore Pupo Nunzio” in your Google Maps navigator.

EASY TRAILS

MONTE PALLANO AND ITS CYCLOPEAN WALLS



- **Length:** about 4km
- **Time:** 1-1 1/2 hour
- **Starting Point:** at the top of Monte Pallano (enter “Cima Monte Pallano), park along the road

A gentle walk on **Monte Pallano** – a plateau rising in the municipalities of **Tornareccio (CH)** and **Bomba (CH)** – offers more than just views over the Sangro Valley; it is a journey through millennia of history. Start at the summit, where parking is easy, and follow the path down towards the mura megalitiche, the imposing walls built by Samnite tribes between the 5th and 4th centuries BCE. Once stretched for some 4 kilometres, today, only about 165 metres remain, rising 5 metres high and 4–4.5 metres thick. The irregular fitting of the massive limestone blocks, placed without mortar, showcases a remarkable construction technique. Known as cyclopean walls, they were so called by the ancient Greeks, who believed only the mythical Cyclopes could move stones of such size. While the most famous examples are in Argos and Mycenae, in Italy these megalithic fortifications can be found across several regions of the south and central parts of the country.

Further down the trail, are the ruins of a settlement, *città di Pallanum*, that flourished between the 4th century BCE and the 2nd century CE. At its heart was a large rectangular forum, once lined with columns and adorned with marble statues. Archaeologists have found remarkable terracottas here, exquisitely crafted and among the finest ever discovered in Abruzzo.

For more information, see the **Tornareccio** municipality's [website](#) and this [map](#) for other easy trails in the area.

TASTE OF ATRI: A BRIEF GUIDE FOR FOOD LOVERS

By Anna Swann

In Atri, art and history come with a side of exceptional food and wine, so you can experience the town and its countryside through taste. Here is an itinerary with some of my favourite places, along with suggestions on what to eat and drink in Atri.

Begin exploring the town through its historic flavour: liquorice. In medieval times, Dominican friars started extracting liquorice juice from the roots of the plants growing in the clay-rich hills surrounding the town. The oldest factory, **Menozzi De Rosa**, has been producing liquorice extracts, sweets, and liqueurs since 1836, using traditional infusion methods and following a formula that hasn't changed for generations. Many shops in Atri stock their products, but **La Bottega della Liquirizia** (in the photo) is where I always find something new to try. This family-run shop, open for 35 years, offers around 30 different kinds of liquorice treats – from classic *Tabù* pastilles and pasta-shaped chewy sweets (black spaghetti or fusilli, anyone?) to liquorice roots and even local ricotta flavoured with liquorice. (Address: Corso Elio Adriano, 93).

While you are in the town, taste the iconic *pan ducale*, a cake invented in Atri in the 14th century. Once a delicacy reserved for the nobility, today it is produced at a local factory, **Pan Ducale Di D'Amario Danilo** and distributed across the world. You will find the classic and more recent flavours in their shop (Viale del Risorgimento, 1 bis). Or try to make it at home following our recipe on page 31.

Atri's clay hills are dotted with vineyards that produce some of Abruzzo's best wines. **Cirelli** is a 22-hectare organic farm where Francesco Cirelli crafts wine with minimal intervention. Some vintages are aged in terracotta amphorae, a nod to Roman practices. **Vinum Hadrianum** also make excellent spontaneous fermentation wines. Both wineries offer tastings for small groups. If you're in the mood for something more classic, stop by **Azienda Vitivinicola Ruggieri**, where fiery Ada greets every visitor like an old friend, her passion as bold as the Montepulciano she makes.



Cheese, naturally follows, and Atri has a centuries-long tradition. The *pecorino di Atri* is a semi-hard cheese made from sheep's milk and ripened from three to 24 months. The **D'Amario e Feliciani farm** makes it using raw milk and natural rennet, like in the old days. Their small flock grazes freely on wild herbs, while hay is harvested between May and July, when the grass is the most fragrant; their pecorino remarkably carries the aroma of the Atri's hills with summer breeze folded into each wheel. You can buy their cheese directly from the [farm](#).

There are two excellent restaurants where I stop for lunch or dinner when visiting Atri. **Più Tosto Gastro Bottega** – a 25-square-metre space in front of the town's cathedral – is good for a quick lunch or *aperitivo* and offers dishes that fuse Abruzzo's traditions and the world. Their menu changes frequently, with surprises like *maritozzo*-style *panino* filled with pulled pork or with *pecora alla callara* (slowly cooked sheep meat). For a full Teramo-style feast, book a table at **Hostaria Zedi**. With its riot of coloured chairs and generous servings, this is where tradition comes home: fried cheese, meatball-studded *pasta alla chitarra con pallotte*, liver *arrosticini*, and the hearty farm pork dish *ciffe e ciaffe*. Their signature dessert – tiramisù made with *pan ducale* – is excellent.

Between sightseeing, pause at **Bar Fuori dal Comune**, just across the square from Palazzo Ducale, and enjoy a refreshing *gelato* crafted by **Magrini**, a historic producer in Roseto degli Abruzzi since the 1930s. Try the brightly coloured watermelon flavour or a sharp lemon popsicle served on a liquorice stick.

LENTIL AND HEMP PALLOTTE

By Teresa Mastrobuono

Did you know that Abruzzo was once among the world's leading producers of hemp (*canapa*)? Its cultivation especially thrived in the Tirino River valley, around **Capodacqua (AQ)**. Although large-scale production has long since disappeared, the tradition has been revived in recent years on a smaller scale by a handful of farmers.

I first became intrigued by hemp in the kitchen after attending a dinner at **Domus Agriturismo in Bisenti (TE)**, where every course featured canapa in one form or another – oil, flour, or seeds. Hemp flour, with its earthy, nutty flavour and slightly grassy undertone, lends depth to both savoury and sweet preparations. One memorable dish paired artichokes with delicate hemp “meatballs” (*pallotte*). The recipe that follows takes inspiration from that meal, with lentils forming the base for these flavourful little bites.

These lentil and hemp *pallotte* are delicious on their own, with a crisp salad of mixed greens, or simmered for a few minutes in a simple tomato sauce and served with rice.

INGREDIENTS

Makes 10 *pallotte*

- 100g lentils
- ½ onion, finely chopped
- 2 Tbsp hemp flour
- 3 Tbsp breadcrumbs
- 1 Tbsp tomato paste
- 1 glass of beer
- ½ chili pepper, finely chopped
- 3 Tbsp of olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Optional: 15g hemp seeds to add a little crunch



PREPARATION

Rinse the lentils thoroughly under cold water. Place them in a pot with plenty of water (no salt at this stage) and boil for about 40 minutes, or until tender. Drain well.

In a large pan, heat a drizzle of olive oil. Add the onion and chilli pepper and sauté gently until the onion softens.

Add the cooked lentils to the pan and let them brown for about 5 minutes, stirring often.

Stir in the tomato paste and pour in the beer. Let the mixture simmer until most of the liquid has evaporated. Remove from the heat and leave to cool slightly.

Transfer the lentils to a bowl. Add the breadcrumbs, hemp flour, and hemp seeds (if using). Mix thoroughly until the ingredients come together into a firm mixture. Adjust with a little more flour or breadcrumbs if too soft.

With damp hands, shape the mixture into small balls, about the size of a walnut.

Arrange the *pallotte* on a baking tray lined with parchment paper. Bake in a preheated oven at 180°C for about 30 minutes, turning once halfway through, until golden and firm.

PAN DUCALE FROM ATRI

By Anna Swann

The origins of this recipe go back to 1352 when the citizens of Atri offered a traditional sweet almond bread to the Duke of Acquaviva upon his arrival to the city. The nobleman liked it so much that he ordered that a loaf be served to him every day, and it was named *pan ducale*, the Duke's bread. It is made with simple ingredients from the local peasant tradition: flour, eggs, sugar, water, candied citron, and almonds. In the 19th century, chocolate became popular in Europe and was added to many dessert recipes, including *pan ducale di Atri*. Today, you can still find chocolate versions of this delicious bread. A local factory, **Pan Ducale Di D'Amario Danilo**, makes pan ducale with lemon and one filled with chocolate, as well as the classical version.

INGREDIENTS

- 3 large eggs
- 70g wholegrain flour
- 70g white flour
- 90g almonds, finely chopped
- 130g brown sugar
- 90g dark chocolate, roughly chopped
- 40g candied citron (cedro; optional)
- 70g unsalted butter, melted
- 9g baking powder
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- A pinch of salt
- Zest of one orange

PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 180°C (160°C fan).

In a large mixing bowl, crack in the eggs and add the sugar. Using a hand whisk or an electric mixer, beat the two together until the mixture becomes pale in colour and light in texture.

Melt the butter in a small saucepan over a low flame or in the microwave. Once melted, set it aside for a few minutes to cool slightly – it should be warm, but not hot, when added to the eggs.



Stir the cooled butter gently into the beaten eggs and sugar. Add the zest of one unwaxed orange. Fold in the flour, baking powder, and a pinch of salt. Do this gradually, using a spatula or wooden spoon to keep the mixture light and to avoid overworking the gluten.

At this point, add the finely chopped almonds and dark chocolate, followed by the ground cinnamon. If you're using candied citron, stir it in now.

Grease a standard loaf tin with butter or line it with parchment paper. Pour the mixture into the tin and use the back of a spoon or a spatula to level the surface, making sure it reaches all corners evenly.

Bake for 40 to 45 minutes, or until the top is golden and a skewer inserted into the middle comes out clean.

Once baked, remove the tin from the oven and set it on a cooling rack.

This cake keeps well for several days, and its flavours deepen over time. Serve it as it is, or with a dusting of icing sugar for a simple finish.

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



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