

TRAVEL HISTORY CULTURE PEOPLE FOOD

ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE



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Morino. Photos by Anna Lebedeva.
Read the story on page 16.

LEFT:

Morino. Photos by Anna Lebedeva.
Read the story on page 16.

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Editor's Note

Fierce winds tear the bright leaves from the trees, olive presses are busy turning out the new season's oil, and the air smells of wood smoke. The seasons are shifting, and Abruzzo enters what was once called *Capetiempe* – "the head of time." This period, spanning the first half of November, marked the close of the agricultural year and culminated in the **Feast of San Martino**, Abruzzo's own Bacchus, celebrated with young wine and roasted chestnuts. Read more about the region's traditions honouring the beloved saint on page 9.

Anyone who loves Abruzzo will know of the *briganti*. Bandits or heroes, their story is woven into the region's history. We explore the violent movement of the 19th century and speak with explains Fabrizio Fanciulli, an author who has devoted his life to researching the *briganti* in **Pretoro (CH)** and beyond.

Have you heard of **Morino (AQ)**? Its location – by a waterfall and beneath towering mountains – makes it a striking place to explore. The old *borgo*, **Morino Vecchio**, is one of my favourite corners of Abruzzo, and I take you there to discover its past and present on page 16.

Did you know that Abruzzo has a dish created for the deposed King Faruq I of Egypt, who reportedly visited **Francavilla al Mare (CH)** in the late 1950s? We share the recipe on page 30 and invite you to try it at home. Let us know how it turns out!

We also explore simple, hearty bread snacks that were once a staple in Abruzzo, a stunning yet easy trail in **Bosco di Sant'Antonio**, and a fascinating, museum-like second-hand shop that can easily fill hours of browsing.

Enjoy the November issue!

Anna Lebedeva
Founder & Editor

DIGEST OF RECENT REGIONAL NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS FROM ABRUZZO NEWSPAPERS



EUROPE'S SATELLITE HUB IN ABRUZZO

Abruzzo is set to play a starring role in Europe's bid to challenge Elon Musk's Starlink. Leonardo, Airbus, and Thales Alenia have launched a €10 billion joint venture, codenamed Bromo, to build a European satellite powerhouse. With factories and operations in the region, including Telespazio's Fucino (in the photo) control centre, Abruzzo will be central to both civil and military satellite production for telecommunications and Earth observation.

The alliance comes as Europe seeks greater independence in space technology. If all goes to plan, the new company could be operational within 18 months, positioning Abruzzo and Italy at the forefront of the continent's rapidly expanding satellite market.

SHARP BIRTH RATE DECLINE

Abruzzo records sharpest drop in births across Italy. In the first seven months of 2025, births in Abruzzo fell by 10.2% compared with the same period in 2024, the steepest decline in the country, well above the national average of 6.3%, according to Istat's 2024 report on birth rates and fertility.

Istat points to two main factors: a shrinking population of women of childbearing age and economic uncertainty that discourages couples from starting families.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE TRADESPEOPLE GONE?

In just ten years, Abruzzo has lost 10,735 artisans, echoing a nationwide decline of nearly 400,000. Trades once at the heart of local life — plumbers, carpenters, mechanics — are thinning out, raising alarms for the region's economy. The figures are based on INPS (Italy's social security agency) and Infocamere/Movimprese (the business registry of the Chambers of Commerce).

Not all is bleak, though: hairdressers, tattoo artists, web experts, and food businesses from *gelaterie* to take-away pizzerias are on the rise, especially in towns with a strong tourist pull.



ABRUZZO IN THE SPOTLIGHT IN TIMES SQUARE

A commercial promoting the region's new approach to travel has appeared on the screens in New York City's Times Square. The campaign coincides with the launch of a new travel platform offering 200 tours and experiences across Abruzzo — from wine tastings and private *palazzo* visits to archaeological walks — and encourages year-round, slow travel as a new form of luxury for those seeking off-the-beaten-path adventures. Supported by the Region and the Municipality of L'Aquila, the platform provides small local operators with a unified digital showcase and will be shared with over 1,000 foreign tour operators and agencies to help attract visitors to the region. We especially like the final line of the video — “Come to Abruzzo, we'll feed you well” — which sums up the region's spirit better than any slogan ever could.



TRABOCCO COULD BECOME A LEGO SET

Andrea Lattanzio, one of the world's top Lego designers, is aiming to turn a symbol of the Abruzzo coast into an official Lego set. His latest creation, a detailed model of a *trabocco* — the iconic stilted fishing platforms of the Adriatic — could hit stores if it reaches 10,000 votes on the Lego Ideas platform.

Lattanzio already made history in 2022 by turning one of his designs, a mountain cabin, into a set. With over 3,800 supporters so far, the Adriatic *trabocco* is well on its way to joining his growing Lego legacy. All Abruzzo lovers can vote and support the project [here](#).

FRANTOI APERTI IN VALLE ROVETO

On November 8-9, San Vincenzo Vecchio (AQ) fills with the scent of new olive oil as the annual *Frantoi Aperti in Valle Roveto* festival returns. The town's oil presses open to the public, offering tastings of freshly pressed oil from the area's renowned Monicella olives. Visitors can also enjoy local dishes and wine in historic cellars, enjoy live folk music concerts, and take part in hands-on bread-making workshops by the renowned chef Lucia Tellone. See the full programme on the organisers' [page](#).

DID YOU KNOW?

EUROPE'S HIGHEST HOSTEL



At 2,115 metres above sea level, the Ostello Campo Imperatore holds a rare distinction — it is the highest in all of Europe. Perched on the windswept plateau of the Gran Sasso, it faces the kind of weather that tests both humans and structures. Gusts of 200 kilometres per hour are not uncommon here, freezing doors solid and forcing staff to wield blowtorches just to open them.

Linked directly to the Gran Sasso cable car station through an underground tunnel, the *ostello* occupies the terminal point of the old Gran Sasso cable car, decommissioned in 1988, whose arrival station has been transformed into both the hostel and a small museum. Inside, visitors can see the preserved machinery of the original *funivia* — including its motor, cabins, and archival photographs tracing the lift's story from its 1934 inauguration to its final journey more than half a century later.

The restored building combines its mountain-shelter spirit with state-of-the-art technology and a design that honours its rugged surroundings.

Inside, there are twelve rooms — some private, some shared — and a 100-seat restaurant where snowbound evenings often turn into impromptu gatherings. When winter storms cut off the road, the team that manages the hostel has enough supplies to sustain up to twenty guests for as long as two weeks in complete isolation.

In winter, guests step out of the door straight onto the slopes, skiing over a landscape that feels closer to the sky than the earth. Come summer, the snow melts into trails that lead across the high pastures of Campo Imperatore.



THE OUTLAWS OF ABRUZZO

By Teresa Mastrobuono

In the rugged hills of Abruzzo, rebellion once ran through the mountains like a hidden river. In the mid-1800s, bands of *briganti* challenged authority, evading capture and leaving behind stories that were hidden for generations. Today, their lives are being re-examined, revealing a history far more complex than legend or folklore suggests.

The *briganti* (brigands) were mostly men — though some women joined their ranks — who formed loosely organised bands to rebel against the unification of Italy. “Bandits, called *briganti*, were in fact peasants, shepherds, and woodcutters who rose up against authority and the newly unified Italy,” explains Fabrizio Fanciulli, author of *Papè. Storie di Briganti e Brigantesse*, who spent five years researching the subject in the State Archives of Chieti, Naples, and Turin.

They roamed the hills, towns, and mountains of Abruzzo in the 1860s and 1870s, driven by a sense of injustice, the mistreatment of the rural poor, and the harsh economic conditions that followed Italy’s unification.

Photo: Captured brigands posing for a photo. Archivio di Stato di Torino, raccolta Caviglia

THE ROOTS OF REBELLION

The background for *briganti* formation has long and twisted roots in the lead-up to the founding of the Kingdom of Italy. As late as the mid-1800's Italy comprised of separate geographical areas, each with its own political structure and even language. By the time of the unification, there were two major factions at work: the House of Savoy and its Piedmontese connection, and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, ruled by the Bourbon monarchy. These essentially existed along a north-south divide of the peninsula.

The defeat of the Bourbons and establishment of a unified Italy brought about major discontent in the south. The cultural and economic differences between a predominantly industrial north and agrarian south were exacerbated by the new rulers of Italy. There was a dramatic increase in taxes and shortage of basic goods, which led to widespread hunger and even famine in the south. Those loyal to the Bourbon monarchy viewed the Savoy and its Piedmontese supporters as usurpers and the cause of the suffering of their people. Many in the south wanted the Bourbon monarchy restored. They saw the new constitution of Italy as an attack on the sacred figure of the king. It helped that the Church of the time shared some of their beliefs. The rebellious groups saw resistance as the path to restoring the upheaval of their former way of life. The movement fought to push back against the Savoy army. The bands were made up primarily of former soldiers and loyalists of the Bourbon army, former prisoners, peasants, and farmers, although several well-educated persons were also among them.

DEFENDING THE POOR

While brigands operated in many parts of Italy, Abruzzo was home to some of the most active and prolific bands. Its rugged landscape favoured rebellion: the *briganti* could move and hide with ease among the region's caves, valleys, dense forests, and remote plateaus. From these natural strongholds, it was relatively easy to ambush the Savoy troops, who were unaccustomed to fighting in such terrain. It is no surprise, then, that some of the most notorious figures of the *brigantaggio* emerged here.



A 19th-century print depicting a brigand from Abruzzo

"When they needed to plunder a village, the bands would gather and carry out a raid," says Fanciulli. "They never harmed the poor. They targeted the homes of wealthy families — the mayor, the pharmacist, the doctor — and took what they could. In my village, Pretoro, for example, there was a raid on 6 June 1861, carried out by about fifty men led by Pasquale Mancini, a *brigante* from Pacentro. The villagers were ordered to stay in the church and left unharmed, while the bandits looted the homes of the local notables, taking oil, wine, bread, flour, clothes, coats — whatever they needed to survive."

The brigands, however, were far from peaceful. "During the Pretoro raid," Fanciulli continues, "a former Garibaldian soldier named Domenico Di Pietro, a member of the local National Guard, tried to resist and was killed. That same day, an elderly man returning home encountered the *briganti*. When asked *Chi vive?* — a question they often used to test whose side someone was on and which king they recognised — the expected answer was Francesco II of Bourbon. But many didn't know this. The old man, confused, replied, God,

the Madonna, and Jesus Christ... And who else? the briganti pressed. Vittorio Emanuele! the elderly man exclaimed, bewildered. They beat him savagely, leaving him permanently crippled. All these stories come from direct testimonies I found in the State Archives," says Fanciulli.

THE STRONGHOLDS OF THE MAJELLA

Cells existed in nearly every corner of Abruzzo, though the most active and renowned operated in the Maiella. Their leaders – both famous and infamous – included Angelo Camillo Colafella of Sant'Eufemia, Pasquale Francescantonio Mancini of Pacentro, and Nunzio Tamburrini of Roccaraso. Each was driven by different circumstances. Colafella, for instance, took part in an 1850 uprising against the looming unification of Italy and was imprisoned for "causing injuries." After his release, he struggled with poverty and, in 1859, broke into the home of a newly wealthy landowner, stealing a valuable object. Imprisoned once again, he escaped by digging a hole through his cell wall and fled to the mountains – thus beginning his life as an outlaw.

"The local population supported them," explains Fanciulli. "They supported them because the *briganti* were their husbands, brothers, brothers-in-law. When they took refuge in the mountains – the safest place for them – the families would bring them bread and wine and warn them if the National Guard was coming. They were, in a way, accomplices." Their loyalty came at a cost. The government responded with the 1863 law, which punished not only the briganti but anyone who helped them.

THE LEGEND OF NUNZIO TAMBURRINI

One of the most colourful and also one of the last of the brigands was Nunzio Tamburrini, a person who has attained almost legendary status among the many brigands. Born in Roccaraso, he spent his early life as a shepherd in the Marsican mountains. One of the eccentricities that defines his larger than life status is that he always carried with him a fine pen and notebook to keep track of his various exploits. He, like Colafella, attempted to resist what he saw as the conquering of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. He participated in the fight against Garibaldi's entrance into Naples, the



Nunzio Tamburrini, right, in prison; Museo Centrale del Risorgimento di Roma

Kingdom's capital at the time. This pro-Bourbon uprising was quelled after four days. Tamburrini was forced to flee. In 1861, shortly after the unification, he resurfaced in Abruzzo setting up his headquarters outside Rocca Pia (AQ) in an area known as Bosco Paradiso. This area was particularly inaccessible and inhospitable, but Tamburrini was able to survive by virtue of his previous experience roaming with flocks of sheep. The raids he undertook in service to what he perceived to be championing "common folk" took place in and around Sulmona, Avezzano, and Chieti. He evaded capture and was admired by many of his supporters for his crafty disguises. Tamburrini cleverly used the ruse of a humble friar or traveling musician. His clashes with the Savoy army became increasingly violent, however, placing more urgency on his capture. In 1864, he was declared "the worst gang leader infesting Abruzzo." A bounty of 4,250 lire (about €26,000 today) was placed on his head. The *brigante* once again fled - this time to Civitavecchia. He was captured there in 1865. His trial lasted three years, moving from L'Aquila to Teramo, where it was concluded. Tamburrini was

HISTORY

Tavola dei Briganti in the Majella mountains

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE *BRIGANTI*

For those who want to trace the paths once roamed by Abruzzo's outlaws, the ***Cammino dei Briganti*** offers an unforgettable experience. This 108-kilometre route winds through 18 villages between Abruzzo and Lazio where the brigands were known to operate, from remote mountain hamlets to hidden valleys. Hikers can choose to tackle the entire trail over several days or complete individual stages as day trips, each revealing landscapes that shaped the lives – and escapes – of these outlaws. Along the way, you pass through forests, rocky ridges, and small settlements, imagining the strategic hideouts and secret routes used to evade the Savoy troops. More information is available on the walk's dedicated website.

For a shorter excursion, the walk to ***Tavola dei Briganti*** offers a glimpse into the brigands' world in a single day. This 10-kilometre round trip begins at Rifugio Pomilio in the Maiella Mountains, passes the summit of Blockhaus – where Piedmontese soldiers once built a small fort, now in ruins, to control the mountains and suppress brigands – and leads to a rocky outcrop carved by shepherds and *briganti*. The most striking inscription reads: “In 1820 Vittorio Emanuele, King of Italy, was born. Before 1860 it was the kingdom of flowers; now it is the kingdom of misery.” See the details of the trail [here](#).

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THE FEAST OF SAN MARTINO: FIRES, WINE, AND CHESTNUTS

By David Ferrante

Outside, November's fog wrapped the bare trees, a damp and silent cloak spread across the brown fields. But inside, in the kitchen lit by the fireplace, it was another world. The warmth of the fire heated and illuminated both the stones and our hearts.

My grandfather came in while my grandmother was kneading *pizze de randigne* (corn bread) for dinner. “*Sande Martine!*” he said to his wife. Then he sat down by the fire next to me, placed some chestnuts on the embers that he pulled from his jacket pocket, and poured wine the colour of dark blood into his usual glass with a handle. And he began his story, which I listened to in a silence that felt sacred.

“*‘Ci sta lu Sande Martine!’* Did you hear how I greeted your grandmother?” he began, after taking hold of his glass. “It’s not just a saying. It’s a wish. Today is the 11th of November, Saint Martin’s Day, the feast of the harvest that ends and of the wine that begins; it is when grape must becomes wine. You see, inside the vats, the must is fermenting. It’s dying as must to be reborn as wine. A miracle, just like the one the Saint performed when he filled empty tubs with wine.”

His voice grew lower, confidential. “They say that Martin, when he was still a soldier, met a beggar half-dead from the cold. With one stroke of his sword, he cut his heavy military cloak in two and gave half to that poor man. That night, Jesus appeared to him in a dream, wrapped in that same piece of wool. That act of mercy made him a saint, and it’s said that God, to reward him, granted a few days of sunshine and clear skies in November: Saint Martin’s summer.



13th-century fresco of Saint Martin in the Oratorio di San Pellegrino, Bominaco

A CLOAK OF PROSPERITY

He took a slow sip, savouring it. “And we, here in Abruzzo, still wish for that abundance. That’s why we say ‘*Sande Martine*’ when we see a full pantry. It’s as if his cloak of prosperity shelters us through the winter — a blessing meant to endure.”

A chestnut burst open on the embers. He took it as a sign. “This night marks a boundary. And our ancestors knew it.” He peeled a chestnut for me. “That *pizza de randigne*... Every village had its own recipe. The pizza con *i quattrini* was made with cornmeal, walnuts, figs, and honey, and inside they hid a few coins. In Pettorano sul Gizio, it was prepared with *mostocotto* grape syrup and baked under a *coppo* covered with glowing embers. Afterwards, the women divided the focaccia, slipping a coin into each slice. Then it was our turn, the children’s,

to pick one and uncover the surprise. Our joy wasn't just for the money — it was a wish for a fruitful harvest. The children symbolised the seed of the future, protected by the dead: a pledge offered to the ancestors to earn their favour and thank them in advance for guarding the crops. *Li nipute arinnove lu nome de li nonne!* — “the grandchildren carry on the names and spirit of their grandparents.”

HORNS AND PUMPKINS

His gaze grew more pensive. “There was also a fear of the future, and a need to confront it with noise and mischief, to banish evil from the present and safeguard what was to come. In Scanno, after the procession, they created an infernal clatter with cowbells and tin cans — to ward off malevolent spirits. Saint Martin himself was seen as a powerful exorcist.” He smiled. “When your uncle was a boy in Sulmona, he used to make *la morte cazzute* — hollowed-out pumpkins with carved eyes, a nose, and a grinning mouth, each holding a candle inside. In Pratola Peligna, people danced with ghostly pumpkins, their horns fashioned from two chillies. It was a carnival of the dead: a procession where laughter and chaos took the place of solemnity and prayer. In Ortucchio, the carved pumpkins were mounted on poles, and at night the candles inside were lit.

He looked at me, stroked my cheek, smiled at his wife, and went on. “There was also the custom of children going from house to house asking for gifts. And if the householders were stingy,” he said, “The children would leave shouting ‘*ruscicone*’! But if they got nothing at all, they cried ‘*cornutone*’!, ‘a big-horned one!’ Those horns were no random insult. The horned pumpkin goes back to an ancient world where horns symbolised fertility, like those of the bull — the closest link to the divine. The pumpkin represents the skull, death, but also a fruit that guards many seeds. With its horns, life triumphs over death. It was an irreverent blessing: anyone who refused the exchange that sustained the community was called a *cornutone*, someone unable to create prosperity for himself or others. They’re the same



Abbazia di San Martino in Valle in Fara San Martino (CH)

things you now do for Halloween — the ones we saw on television yesterday — but here in Abruzzo, they have been part of our traditions for a long time.”

He pushed a log further into the fire. “And the fires... the *Glorie di San Martino*, the great bonfires of Scanno... they hold the power of the sun and reach into the bowels of the earth to awaken the life that seems dead.”

For a few seconds he was silent. The only sound was that of the fire and the gentle thud of dough on the table where my grandmother worked. “It’s a night that speaks of the fear of death, but above all of the fierce joy of life that refuses to surrender. It’s the last day of *Capetiempe*, the days of the cult of the dead. The living honour their ancestors, and life teases the shadows and lights fires for a rich summer.”

He took the last chestnut into the palm of his hand. “That’s what Saint Martin’s Day is. A seed beneath the ashes. Just like this chestnut, which had to pass through fire before becoming sweet.”

David Ferrante is a writer, sociologist, and a passionate researcher of Abruzzo’s culture and traditions.

WHERE TO SEE TRADITIONAL SAN MARTINO CELEBRATIONS IN ABRUZZO

In Abruzzo, the feast of San Martino on 11 November marks the turning of the seasons – when autumn’s last warmth meets the first breath of winter. It is a day of faith and rural wisdom, when the new wine is tasted – as the saying goes, *A San Martino ogni mosto diventa vino* (On Saint Martin’s Day, every must becomes wine.)

This feast also concludes a more ancient period known as *Capetiempe* – literally “the head of time.” It spanned the first half of November, when the boundary between the living and the dead was believed to grow thin. Families honoured their ancestors, visited cemeteries, and lit fires to “warm the souls” of the departed – gestures that united remembrance with fertility and renewal.

The last day of *Capetiempe*, coinciding with San Martino, marked the passage back to life. Bonfires, chestnuts, and new wine symbolised the end of the shadowed days and the return of light.

Traces of the Saint’s cult remain in the region, such as the Abbey in the Gole di San Martino at **Fara San Martino (CH)**, where legend has it he split the mountain rock with the force of his hand.

Today, the ancient rites of San Martino are celebrated throughout Abruzzo with *vino novello*, roasted chestnuts, traditional fairs, blazing bonfires, and the boisterous “horned” processions.

GLORIE DI SAN MARTINO IN SCANNO

In **Scanno (AQ)**, at sunset on 10 November, the eve of the feast of San Martino of Tours, tall stacks of wood known as the *glorie* are lit all at once on the hills above the town. As the fire wanes, the revellers descend from the hills, parading through the village with bells and assorted instruments, closing the day with laughter and feasting. The celebration culminates in the playful gift of the *palancone* – the central ember of the winning bonfire – offered to the last bride of the village, who shares new wine and baked goodies with everyone. The programme is published on the municipality’s official Facebook [page](#).



Sfilata dei cornuti in San Valentino in Abruzzo Citeriore

See a photo essay from our archives about the glorie of Scanno on page 12.

CUCKOLDS’ PROCESSION IN SAN VALENTINO IN ABRUZZO CITERIORE

In **San Valentino in Abruzzo Citeriore (PE)**, a singular celebration unfolds each year in honour of San Martino, regarded as the protector of betrayed husbands. During the *Sfilata dei cornuti*, the most recently married man receives the *relléquiye* – a phallic-shaped relic – from the previous holder and parades it through the town. Accompanied mainly by men, the procession is a raucous spectacle: participants don horns, shake cowbells, beat old drums and pans, and sing the hymns of the *congrega dei cornuti*, (brotherhood of the cuckolds), referring humorously to men whose wives have been unfaithful. The procession begins at Largo San Nicola on November 10 at 19.30.

For more about the event see our article in the October 2025 issue.

FIERA DI SAN MARTINO IN NERETO

Each November 10-11, **Nereto (TE)** celebrates the Fiera di San Martino. Over two chilly autumn days, the town fills with music, roasted chestnuts, steaming vin brulé, and stalls of local produce. The highlight is the *Rievocazione storica del Taglio del Mantello*, a dramatic re-enactment of the legendary moment when Saint Martin shared his cloak with a beggar. It’s one of November’s most-loved festivals drawing thousands of visitors from across the region. See the full programme on the festival’s [page](#).

THE BURNING *GLORIE DI SAN MARTINO*

By Paolo Di Menna

On November 10, to coincide with the eve of the Feast of Saint Martin, the village of Scanno lights up *le Glorie di San Martino*, celebrating an ancient festival whose origins are lost in the mist of time.



The streets of the village fill up with a celebratory atmosphere as three main districts, La Plaja, Cardella, and San Martino, get ready for the evening.



Youngsters from each district gather by the fire to grill meat, roast chestnuts, and sip young new wine.



Kids smudge black soot over their faces, giggle, and discuss plans for the evening. The rituals echo the ancient tradition of celebrating the end of the agrarian year and a re-invocation of the hidden underground forces.

The exact origins of the festival are not certain, but as with all of Abruzzo's fire rituals, it is rooted in antiquity



In the preceding days, on the three mountains above the village, each district prepares a pyre





Four tall logs form a tower-like structure, *le glorie*, over 10 metres high, which is expertly filled with chips and wood collected under the supervision of local forest rangers



It takes hours of team work to assemble a pyre



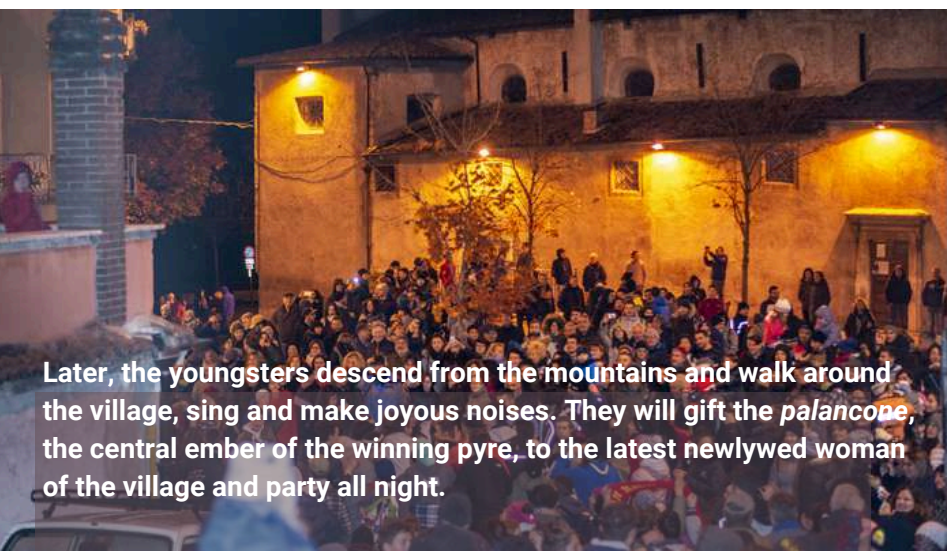
As the sun starts setting, each pyre is lit up by one expert youngster who has his own tricks and secrets for doing the job.



TRADITION



The three pyres will burn for hours on three mountains, observed by the villagers. The district whose gloria burns brighter, higher, and longer will be announced the winner – the decision will be made by the participants themselves.



Later, the youngsters descend from the mountains and walk around the village, sing and make joyous noises. They will gift the *palancone*, the central ember of the winning pyre, to the latest newlywed woman of the village and party all night.

If you plan to go to see *Le Glorie di San Martino in Scanno* check the detailed programme beforehand on the *Proloco di Scanno* [Facebook page](#).

Paolo Di Menna works in the police force in Sulmona and devotes his spare time to photography. You can follow him on [Instagram](#).



MORINO: OLD AND NEW STANDING TOGETHER

Text and photos by Anna
Lebedeva

Morino is a town divided by time. Above the valley, Morino Vecchio's ruins tell of centuries past, while life continues steadily in the modern town below.

After a sharp bend, the road began to climb and narrow, its asphalt softened by a thick carpet of yellow autumn leaves that muffled the tires' hum. The air smelled of damp earth and fallen pine needles, carrying a hush that seemed older than the forest itself. At the next curve, I left my car in a small clearing beneath the trees and continued on foot, the crunch of leaves beneath my boots echoing faintly.

Through a clearing of brambles and moss-covered stones, Morino Vecchio appeared. Its bell tower rose above the crowns of the trees, standing watch over the valley below. To the left, a massive stone wall, ten metres high, ran along the trail, a mute testament to lives lived long ago. Abandoned over a century ago, the town's stories linger among the leaves and brambles. Its history echoes that of many mountain villages in Abruzzo.

Photo: Morino (AQ) in the Roveto Valley

ORIGINS

Little is known about the origins of Morino Vecchio, but historians believe that, like other towns in the Roveto Valley, it was built on a steep hill at an altitude of 583 metres by an Italic tribe seeking to defend itself from neighbouring communities and armed groups travelling along the Liri River below.

On the land once occupied by this ancient fortified settlement, archaeologists have uncovered fragments of roof tiles, pottery, black-glazed ware, and coins. Some scholars suggest that the hill of Morino may have served as an acropolis for the villages that later developed in the valley, and even hint at the possible presence of an Italic-Roman sanctuary on the site.

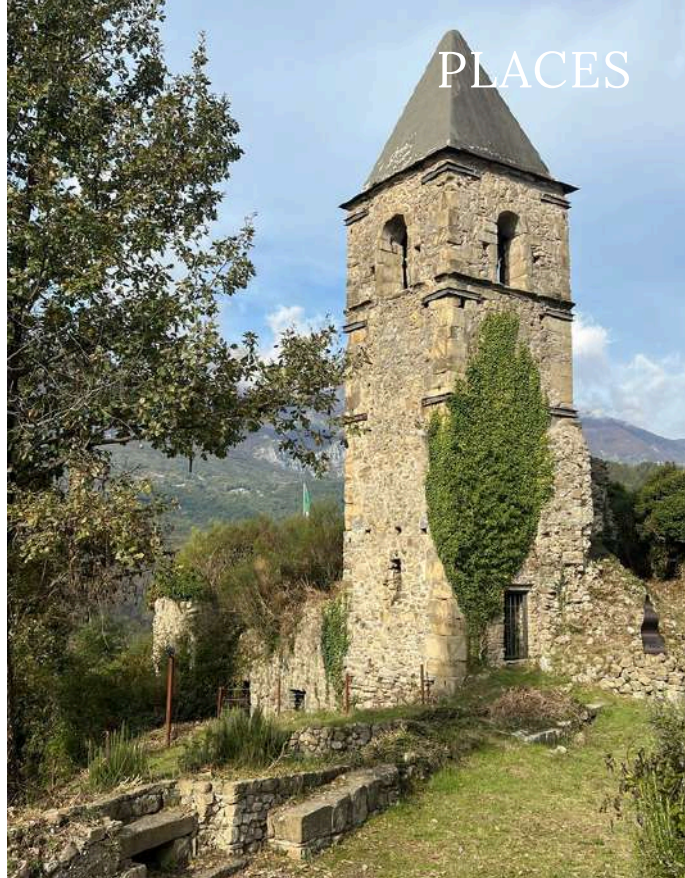
“The town stood above an important ancient Roman road leading to Alba Fucens, which ran where today’s Strada Statale 82 Avezzano–Sora now lies. The name Morino appears for the first time in a donation document concerning the hermitage of San Pietro di Morino to the Abbey of Monte Cassino, around the year 1100,” explains Giancarlo Rossetti, President of the Comitato Morino Vecchio, which has researched the abandoned borgo’s history and works to preserve its ruins.

THE OLD BORGO

By the 12th century, the territory had become the northern frontier of the newly formed Kingdom of Sicily. It was divided into several counties and incorporated into the Principality of Capua. A document from that period mentions the castle of Morino with 380 inhabitants which, in times of war, was required to provide six horsemen, twelve infantrymen, and an equal number of squires.

From 1497, Morino came under the Val Roveto barony of the Colonna family, within the Duchy of Tagliacozzo and Albe, where it remained until the abolition of feudalism in 1806. The Colonna rule is still evoked in the column depicted on the seals and coat of arms of the municipality. From the 14th century onwards, the town’s history was marked by frequent territorial disputes with neighbouring fiefs, prompting the castle to expand and strengthen its defensive towers.

Photos: (from top) the bell tower in Morino Vecchio; a cross beside the church of Santa Maria Bambina; fragment of a doorway in the ruins



THE TURNING CENTURY

Alongside traditional subsistence farming – constrained by the poor fertility of the soil – the modern era brought new trades, including charcoal production, made possible by the vast surrounding woodlands, and milling along the small river.

In the late 1800s, the town thrived: it had an *osteria*, an oil press, communal bread ovens, a wine cellar, and a convent with a girls' school – the only one in the area. The population boom at the end of the 18th century was largely driven by the establishment of an ironworks in Morino by the Bourbon government, powered. Powered by the waters of the Schioppo stream, it produced a considerable quantity of iron and provided steady employment, fuelling a rise in population that reached its peak of 2,430 inhabitants in 1921.

A few families in Morino Vecchio – notably the Facchini and the Ferrante – held both economic and social power, owning half the land as well as the olive press and the mill. According to historic documents, others served the community through administrative or public roles: the rural and municipal guards, the postman, the road overseer, the carpenter, the midwife, the teacher, and the gravedigger. The majority, however, depended on farming and herding, their livelihoods tied to the landowners' estates.

Photos: (below) the date “1909” on a ruin in Morino Vecchio; (right) the remaining barrels of a wine cellar

The earthquake of 13 January 1915 was a devastating blow for Morino: much of the town was destroyed, and 110 people lost their lives. “The old town was abandoned after the earthquake because a royal decree – a law enacted for reconstruction – prohibited rebuilding on the site where the previous houses had stood and been destroyed. This left very little space available for new constructions, limited to the small square at the entrance to the town. Based on these conditions, it was decided to move everyone down to the valley. Thus, two parts of the new town emerged: Morino, the main centre, inhabited mainly by the bourgeoisie, and the higher part, Grancia, where farm labourers and peasants lived,” says Rossetti. Morino Vecchio's final abandonment was driven by the steady outflow of people seeking work, and by the wish to live closer to the railway and the main road through the Liri Valley.

NATURE RESERVE

As in centuries past, Morino's true wealth flows from its land – from the forests, springs, and mountains that have long sustained it. Above the town, from a steep limestone cliff, bursts Zompo lo Schioppo, the highest natural waterfall in the Apennines, plunging 130 metres in a thunderous drop.

In 1987, the 1,000 hectares surrounding the waterfall were declared a nature reserve, and since then the area has become a popular destination, with a large campsite and over 35,000 visitors each year.

Yet few linger in the town itself, which lacks notable architectural landmarks. Although there are bars,



several restaurants, shops, and a weekly market, Morino remains tranquil for most of the year.

“Unfortunately, the decline in the resident population is not just a problem for Morino — it affects the entire valley,” says Rossetti. “People tend to move to larger towns like Avezzano for study, work, or other reasons, leaving the smaller villages behind. And there are no longer the births there once were — families no longer have three or five children as they used to. It’s a serious issue: the drop in birth rates is a major problem, and so is the lack of work.”

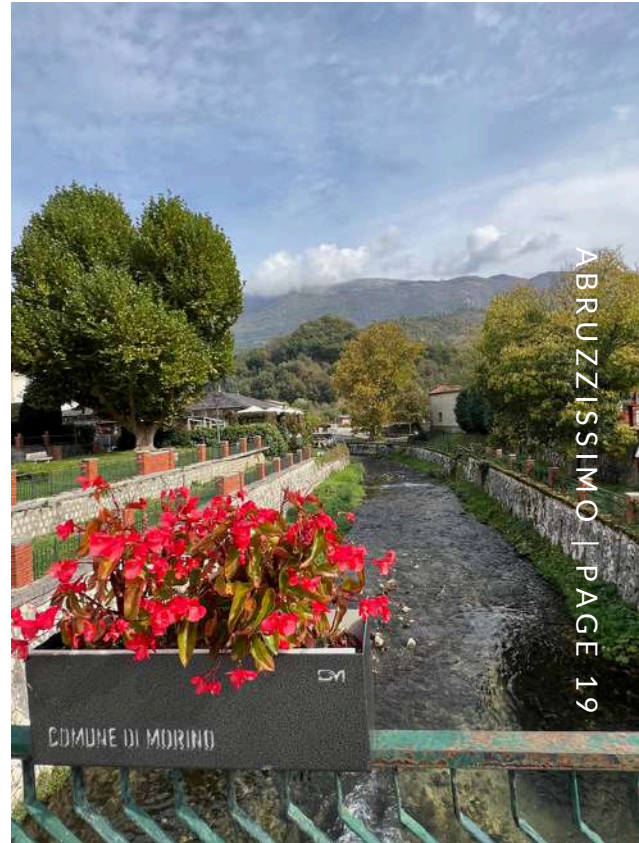
HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

Standing beneath the weathered bell tower in Morino Vecchio, I gazed out over the mountains and the town below. Neither the old borgo nor the modern town are bustling nor abandoned — but both refuse to surrender. Several architectural projects have been proposed to the municipality to restore the old borgo, but all proved too costly. The bell tower was restored about twenty years ago, and while ivy and brambles stubbornly climb over the crumbling ruins, the old streets are regularly cleared by volunteers, allowing visitors to wander through and, with a little imagination, picture the life that once filled them.

In recent years, a municipal social cooperative has taken on the care of the old *borgo*. Every summer, small cultural events are held in its main *piazza*. Significant funds have been allocated to improve the access road to the abandoned village. The hope that the old hamlet where generations once lived will rise again has never been stronger. Below, in the modern town, the younger generation has reopened the communal bread oven, and festivals mark the passing of the seasons — signs that Morino’s story, though changed, is far from over.



Photos: the new part of Morino



WHAT TO DO AND SEE IN MORINO

VISIT THE OLD BORGO

There are several signs along the road indicating the way to the old *borgo*, but one of the easiest routes is to follow Via Cimara, park at the end of the paved road, and continue on foot. Before reaching the high stone wall, take the path on the left that climbs up the steps to the lower part of Morino Vecchio, where you can see the impressive ruins of Palazzo Facchini with its enormous wine barrels. Return to the main path beside the wall and you'll come to the gaping arches of a massive building that once housed the *borgo's* osteria and wine cellars. To the left runs an old street leading to the communal bread oven and the 15-metre-tall bell tower – the only surviving part of the once beautiful church of Santa Maria Bambina. Continue along the trail to reach Piazza San Rocco, where two dramatic fragments of the church that gives the *piazza* its name still stand above the arches of the ancient crypt, where the town's dead were buried until the mid-19th century. From the piazza, you can take in sweeping views of the valley and the Ernici, Càntari, and Serra Lunga mountains.

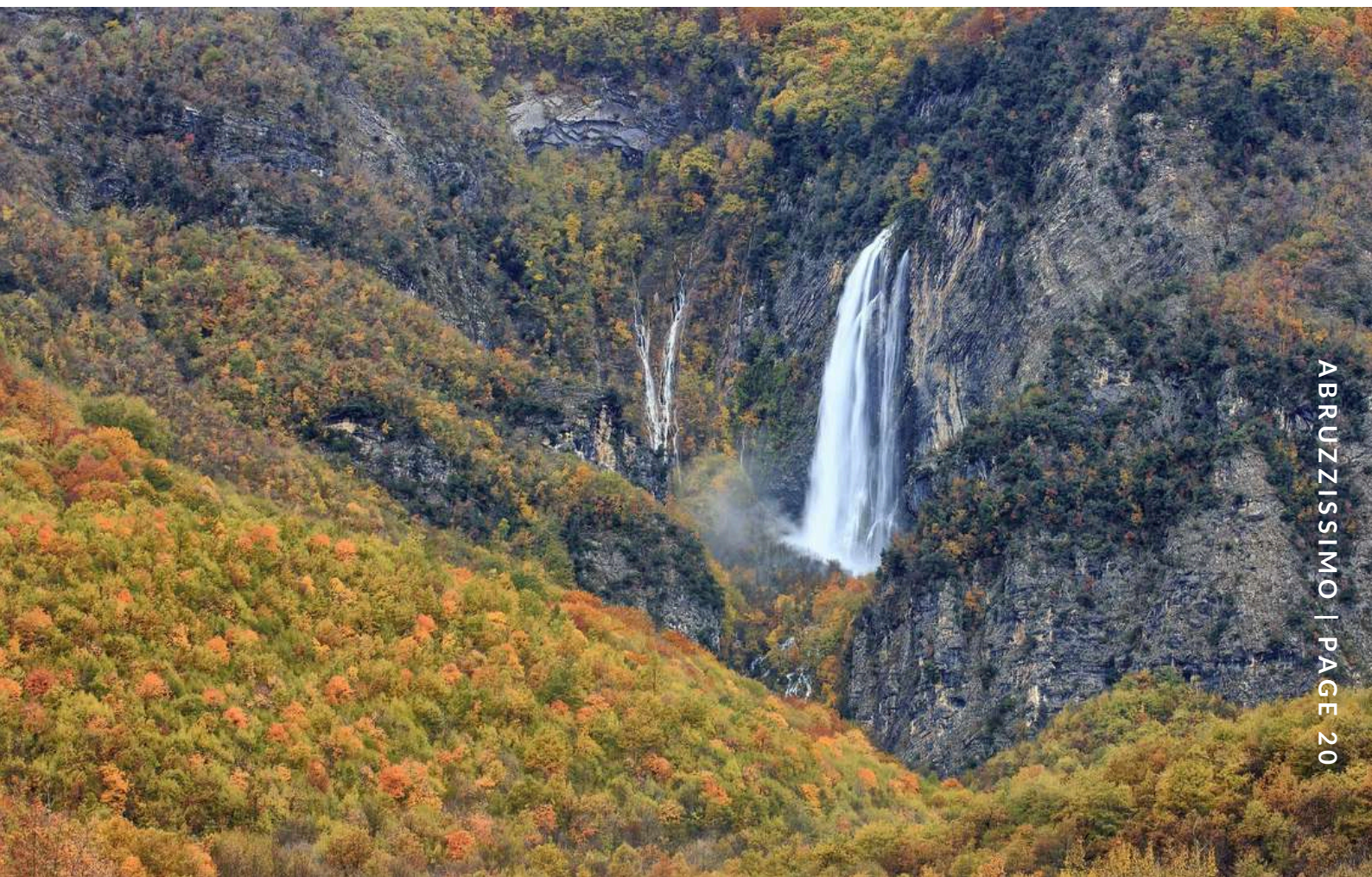
Photos: Zompo lo Schioppo waterfall. Photo courtesy of the Zompo lo Schioppo Nature Reserve

JOIN THE FESTIVALS

Despite its small size, the town's calendar of events is packed throughout the year. This is the land of *Roscetta* chestnuts, and in October and the first week of November, Morino and Rendinara (part of the same municipality) host small yet lively chestnut festivals. In April and September, the patron saints are honoured with religious processions, marching bands, concerts in the main piazza, and fireworks. October also brings *Note d'Autunno – Rassegna Cameristica*, a music festival featuring bagpipe and guitar concerts. In June, Rendinara celebrates the *Festa della Pastorizia* with traditional music, local food, and live cheesemaking demonstrations. For event announcements, keep an eye on the [Comitato Feste](#) and [Zompo Lo Schioppo](#) pages.

ADMIRE ZOMPO LO SCHIOPPO WATERFALL

The Zompo lo Schioppo Nature Reserve, home to the highest natural waterfall in the Apennines, is a popular summer destination. Within the reserve, you will find numerous walking trails, a campsite, and picnic areas. Admission costs €4 per person during the summer. For more information, visit the reserve's [website](#) or Facebook [page](#).



HIKE IN THE MOUNTAINS

The mountains around Morino are crisscrossed with numerous hiking trails. One of the easiest is a two-kilometre loop below the waterfall. Most of the others range from medium to difficult. You can find details on the reserve's [website](#) or on hiking apps such as Outdooractive.

Several mountain huts offer overnight accommodation. The most comfortable is **Rifugio Lo Schioppo**, only a 15-minute walk from the reserve's car park. In summer it operates as a restaurant, but it is open all year and provides beds, heating, and a fireplace. For prices and further information, contact the [Cooperativa Dendrocopos](#), which manages the refuge.

VISIT A MEDIEVAL HERMITAGE

Perched at 1,173 metres, the **Eremo della Madonna del Cauto** dates back to the 12th century and was once home to Benedictine monks. Built from rough-hewn stone, the hermitage consists of a small chapel and a crypt that served as living quarters. Faded frescoes depicting scenes from the life of Saint Catherine of Alexandria can still be seen on the back wall. The [trail](#) to reach it is of medium difficulty, taking around six hours with an elevation gain of 830 metres.

SIT ON A BIG BENCH

In the small hamlet of **Rendinara**, within the municipality of Morino, stands a [Big Bench](#) – part of a nationwide art project that installs oversized benches in scenic spots to inspire a childlike sense of wonder and invite visitors to admire the landscape from a new perspective. Its enormous size makes you feel like a child again, feet dangling in the air, with the sweeping views of the Roveto Valley unfolding below. Enter “Panca Gigante Rendinara” into Google Maps and be ready for a drive along a few narrow streets. Park by the roadside, then walk uphill for about ten minutes; sturdy hiking shoes are recommended, as the path is rocky.

Photos: (from top) Eremo della Madonna del Cauto; frescoes inside the hermitage; the Big Bench above Rendinara



OUR LIFE IN GABBIANO

By Sandra Thompson

A casual suggestion sets the author on a journey from Colorado to Abruzzo where days unfold to the slow rhythm of village life.

My love affair with Italy began when I was a child. It rubbed off on my husband, Lester, and together we spent many happy vacations exploring the beautiful country from top to bottom. In 2017 we decided we needed to buy a second home there. But where?

A friendly concierge in a hotel in Rome overheard us talking and suggested we look in Abruzzo. "It is the most beautiful area in the whole of Italy. I am from Pescara. I only come to Rome for work," she told us. We decided to take her advice, and soon the search began.

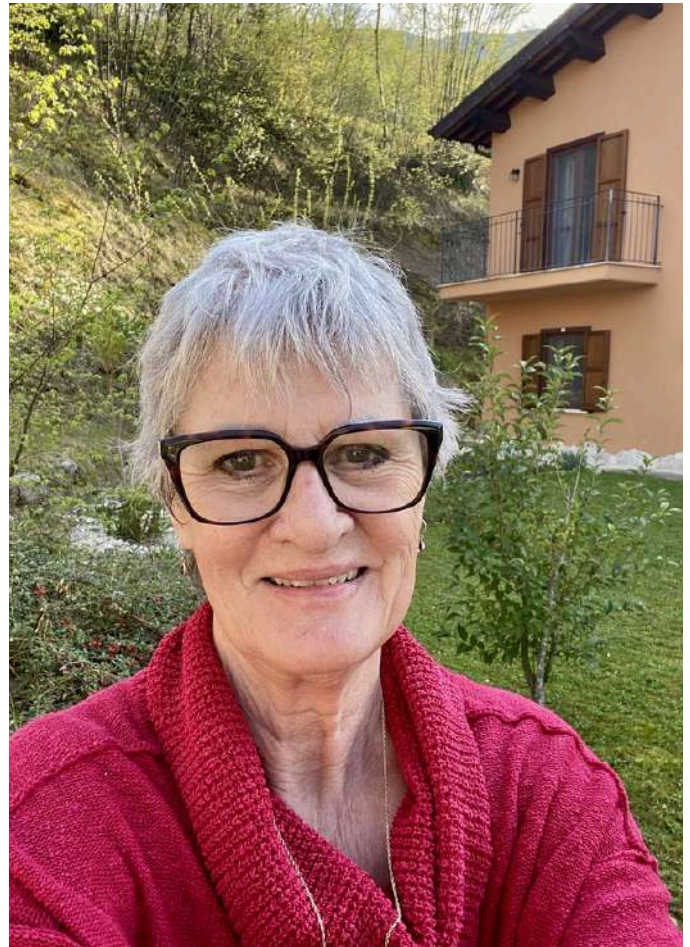
THE SEARCH FOR A HOME

Although hubby and I are British, we'd lived in Colorado since 1995, so flying to Italy was a major event, and not something we could do in a weekend. I began my research online and narrowed my viewing list to five homes.

That August, only two weeks after returning from vacation, I flew back to Italy, with my daughter, Joanna, to look for a house. "Don't come back without one." Hubby told us, and he meant it.

It was an exhausting five-day trip, but we fell in love with a three hundred-and-fifty-year-old converted Olive Mill in the beautiful hillside town of Colledimezzo (CH). We made an offer immediately and closed the deal in November 2017.

Fixing up that old house was a labour of love, but it was worth it, our vacations in Colledimezzo were precious. During our absence, we left our key with a kind local gentleman, called Nino. He paid our bills and took care of anything that needed to be done. His lovely wife Vittoria filled our fridge with home-made sweet treats, and snacks to welcome us when we returned. Nino and Vittoria made us feel like family.



Sandra Thompson in her garden in Gabbiano

FULL-TIME LIFE

It soon became clear to us that vacations in Colledimezzo were not enough, and in summer of 2020 (yes, the dreaded year of COVID), we retired and made it our permanent home...or so we thought.

We spent two happy years in that beautiful village, and even became local tour guides for English speaking visitors (see my article about the town in the September 2021 Issue of ABRUZZISSIMO). Unfortunately, after falling on the stairs and breaking my wrist, I realized our beautiful old house, in the historic centre of the village, would become a problem as we got older. The steep, winding marble staircase was beautiful, but difficult to manoeuvre.



The view at a sunset from Sandra and Lester's house

Also, with no parking close by, we had to walk a long way with groceries and logs for the fire. Not wanting to leave the area, and with the help of the locals, we searched for another house close by, but it wasn't to be.

ON THE ABRUZZO-LE MARCHE BORDER

Our Colledimezzo home sold in less than a month, making our search to find a replacement even more urgent. We expanded our perimeters, and eventually found a house with a garage, a garden, and a magnificent view. Perched at 580 meters, on the side of a small mountain, the property overlooked the valleys of Le Marche, the seaside town of San Benedetto del Tronto, and the beautiful Adriatic. It was just what we were looking for. The only downside was it was a two-hour drive from our friends in Colledimezzo. We'd be starting over...again.

Our new home lies between the villages of Gabbiano and Piano San Pietro, on the border of Abruzzo and Le Marche. Our tranquil country home is set among hills and fields, yet surrounded by lively towns and villages. The beautiful town of Ascoli Piceno is just a fifteen-minute drive away, while the Adriatic coast can be reached in half an hour.

SLOW RHYTHMS

Life here follows a gentle rhythm. On a typical day I rise at 6:30 and, after a cappuccino, spend some time in the garden if the weather allows, chatting with neighbours as they pass by on their early morning walk. We are the only English-speakers in the area, so these friendly exchanges offer a perfect chance to practise Italian.

Later in the day, the quiet road outside our gate becomes part of a wider hum of movement. Our home sits along a popular bike route, and in summer, cyclists glide past on their way to Monte Piselli and San Giacomo. In 2024, the *Giro d'Italia* even came within a kilometre of the house, bringing a brief, thrilling gust of energy.

We spend many evenings on the terrace watching the cyclists, and hikers go by. Many stop to chat. As it turns colder, trucks loaded with firewood rumble by to make their deliveries. Sometimes, in winter, the slopes above us are peppered with snow.

Dino, the local shepherd, along with his Border Collies and Abruzzese sheep dogs, walks his herd of sheep and goats to pasture daily, passing our house on the way. One morning, I'd left the gate open and found a baby goat munching on my rose bushes...so cute, but my beautiful roses were destroyed.



Photos: (above) the view from the house; (right) Sandra with Lester and their daughter Joanna

Beyond these daily encounters, life's essentials and small pleasures await in nearby Villa Lempa, just a five-minute drive away. Every Friday it hosts a market, where I buy fresh veggies and enjoy chatting with the locals and stall holders. Fresh seasonal vegetables are my favourite ingredients for any dish. Villa Lempa has several bars, restaurants and shops, as well as a fantastic bakery/café, pharmacy and several doctor's surgeries.

FRIENDSHIPS AND FESTAS

Gabriella, and her amazing mum, are our closest friends. We've enjoyed many meals together. They take us foraging in the forest above our house, which is a blast...especially during mushroom season. We have lots of good friends in the neighbouring villages, who invite us into their home to sample local homemade treats. We return the favour and introduce them to British food...who'd have thought they'd love Cottage Pie?

Hubby has become the notorious for his DIY projects. It started with planter boxes, and tables for my garden. When our neighbours saw them, they wanted some too. His latest project was an outside, tiled dining table for our friend Gabriella...news travels fast in small villages, and we wonder what he'll be building next.

The surrounding towns and villages hold different sagras throughout the summer, and their music livens up our evenings. We can't attend them all, but we do enjoy the truffle festival in Campovalano and the *Sagra della capra alla Neretese* in summer.

There have been many occasions when we've laughed out loud while navigating the bureaucracy here in Italy, none more so than when we went to change our residency from Colledimezzo to Civitella Del Tronto and an official informed us that our marriage certificate was too old to be valid. After nearly fifty years of marriage, that one truly made us smile. Thankfully, a phone call to the municipality of Colledimezzo solved the situation for us. They vouched for our credibility.

Life here provides no shortage of such comic moments. My husband was once mistaken for a priest because his shirt resembled that worn by the clergy. Someone approached him, requesting his services. This wouldn't happen to just anyone, but hubby is Jamaican, and there are currently many clergy in Italy of African origin — an easy mistake to make.

The people of Abruzzo never cease to amaze me with their kindness, and generosity. Also, their patience as we stumble to pronounce Italian words correctly. While leaving our daughter in Colorado was difficult, and learning a new language is challenging, we are so glad we made the move.

*Sandra Thompson writes a [blog](#), and has just published a book, *Speak Slowly, Please...* I'm English (available on [Amazon](#)), about moving from America and living in Abruzzo.*

A FAMILY STORY AT THE FOOT OF THE MAJELLA

By Anna Lebedeva

When love meets geography, stories like this take root. What began as two young professionals – one from the hills of Atri, the other from a mountain village beneath the Majella mountains – grew into a family business shaped by place, patience, and pride. From their century-old farmhouse, Paola and Lino have built more than an agency: they’ve become guides for those seeking a new life in Abruzzo, helping newcomers find not just a house, but a home.

Paola Savini grew up among the artichoke fields near Atri, a landscape of red earth and sea winds. Her parents were farmers, people of the soil, who taught her the discipline of hard work and the pride of small things done well. Trained as a *commercialista*, she spent years working with numbers – until love and circumstance rewrote her path.

She met Lino Ciccotelli, a young man from Scagnano, at a disco. Lino, who was learning the craft of a *geometra*, would later spend years drawing up plans, measuring old walls and new dreams.

When they married, Paola left Atri for Scagnano. The distance made her old job impractical, and little by little, she began helping Lino – first with accounts, then with paperwork, and soon with everything to do with houses. “It happened almost naturally,” she recalls. “One thing led to another, and before long, I realised I wanted to do this professionally.” In 2008, she passed her exams with the Chamber of Commerce and became a licensed estate agent.

A HOUSE WITH STORIES

Their office isn’t a showroom or a glass-fronted branch. It’s the house where Lino was born, a Majella-stone farmhouse that has belonged to his family for over 150 years. Once, it was his grandfather’s cantina, where local men came to drink a glass of wine and



Paola Savini (right), Lino Ciccotelli, and their daughter Irene

exchange stories. Later, it became a family home. Today, its ground floor has transformed into Majellacase headquarters.

There are eight people working here now, a small hive of steady activity: phones ringing, the rustle of deeds, the whirr of the printer, and always, the comforting toll of the church bell nearby. Outside, the village dog, Cimi (or Biscoff, depending on who you ask), sunbathes by the door. Lino keeps a special bag of dog food for him, and even Paola – despite her allergies – admits to being fond of him.

Life here flows between work and community. When the bakery truck honks its arrival, Paola and her colleagues join their neighbours to buy bread or peaches from the back of a farmer’s car. At lunchtime, they often cross the road to the local



Lino's family home; Cimi snoozing in front of the office

trattoria, where the owners feel like extended family. "Their grandson sometimes runs straight into the office," Paola smiles. "Lino just scoops him up and takes him back over the road." Once a year, the local priest blesses the office, and Majellacase staff join in the village festas and parades. This is not just where they work — it's where they belong.

ITS ABOUT THE FAMILY NAME

Majellacase was born with a clear sense of place. "We chose the name because at first all our properties were around the Majella mountains," says Paola. "And perhaps," she adds thoughtfully, "we put in a bit more heart, a bit more care, because it's the family's good name. We all feel responsible for making sure everything goes well."

That shared sense of purpose now extends to a new generation. Their daughter Irene, who recently graduated, has joined the business, bringing what Paola calls "a fresh breeze of ideas." "She made us realise that people don't just want to see houses," Paola says. "They want to understand the villages, the rhythm of life, what each place offers. That's what led to the idea of our house-hunting tours."

NOT JUST THE HOUSES

Majellacase Experience Tours (MEXT) are not the quick dashes from one property to the next typical of the industry. Instead, they invite clients to walk through



old town centres, to pause for a coffee in the square, to feel what it's like to live there, pop in for a cooking class with a local chef, taste wines in a small family-run cantina. "We realised that many people asking about houses didn't really know Abruzzo yet," Paola says. "They would ask about homes in completely different places — Caramanico Terme, Pineto, L'Aquila — without understanding how varied the region is. That's when we thought: instead of just showing them houses, why not help them discover the territory too?"

"It's not a bus tour where we take thirty people to see every house on the market," Paola explains. "Each tour is personal — two, maybe four people at most. We plan everything around their needs: budget, lifestyle, and the kind of community they're looking for. Some want a small village with a cosy bar, others prefer somewhere with more services or a hospital nearby. The tour helps them understand what truly suits them."

The tours have proved remarkably effective. Many clients who joined one return months later with a clearer vision of where they want to live. "Just today," Paola says, "someone who had been on our tour is signing an offer."

THE EVOLVING MARKET

Abruzzo's property market, she explains, has changed in recent years. Buyers are better informed and often come with a stronger sense of what they want. "A few years ago, many preferred



Photos: (top) Majellacase clients on an experience tour; one of the locations visited on during their tours

complete ruins to restore. Now, they still want authenticity — the exposed brick, the Majella stone — but many prefer homes that are already habitable.”

The region’s allure lies in its geography: “Where else can you have mountains, hills, and the sea all within an hour’s drive?” Paola asks. “And then there’s the hospitality — people here truly welcome newcomers.” MajellaCase has helped find homes in Abruzzo for clients from over 15 different countries. Among their international clients, Americans now make up the largest group, followed by northern Europeans and Britons drawn to the balance between quality of life and affordability. They have also had a few Chinese buyers.

BEYOND THE SALE

Majellacase’s work doesn’t stop at signing the contract. They help clients navigate the maze of Italian bureaucracy — applying for tax codes, transferring utilities, even paying local property taxes on their behalf. They ensure every document checks out before any deposit changes hands. Their in-house geometras go further than most, cross-referencing cadastral maps with local planning records to ensure no hidden surprises. It’s this sense of thoroughness — and family pride— that keeps clients returning, recommending, and writing messages of gratitude.

For more details about the three types of Majellacase Experience Tours — short, five-night, and personalised — visit the agency’s [website](#).

QUICK STOP

A MERCATINO YOU WON'T RUSH THROUGH



The Banca dell'Usato is a sprawling *mercato* on Corso Umberto, its entrance marked by a 1960s Volkswagen camper van. Inside lies a labyrinth of curiosities – antique cameras, vintage phones, Coca-Cola vending machines, old magazines and vinyl records – and, as its pièce de résistance, a collection of historic cars: early-model Cinquecentos, a 1930s Mercedes, and a sleek yellow 1950s Fiat convertible.

Founded in 1995 by Vincenzo Gentile, the shop was inspired by his childhood years in a *collegio*, an institution for children whose parents couldn't care for them. "I used to find the football stickers other boys threw away and trade them for what I needed," he recalls.

Over the years, Gentile has travelled across Italy in search of rare, whimsical, and mechanical treasures. Among them, he says, is a camera once used by Federico Fellini. The store spans a vast warehouse filled floor to ceiling with objects from every imaginable era: ceramic figurines, typewriters, jukeboxes, and furniture that seems to hum with the memory of old households. There's a particular pleasure in wandering without aim, spotting objects that echo your own past – a record sleeve, a toy car, a coffee tin like the one that once sat on your grandmother's shelf.

With its ever-changing stock, the Banca dell'Usato feels part museum, part memory vault. Just don't expect to leave quickly.

Address: Corso Umberto I, 263, Montesilvano. For more information, Signore Gentile can be reached via WhatsApp at 0039 335 445000 or 335 444460.

EASY TRAILS

ADMIRE THE FOLIAGE IN BOSCO DI SANT'ANTONIO



- **Length:** about 3.5 km
- **Time:** 1 hour
- **Starting Point:** Piazzale Scuola Sci di Fondo Bosco di Sant'Antonio

In autumn, Bosco di Sant'Antonio transforms into a vivid tapestry of colour, where beech, maple, and oak leaves shift from green to amber, gold, and crimson. Walking its loop trail feels like moving through a living painting, with ancient trees shaped by centuries of careful pruning into towering candelabra forms.

Once considered a *lucus*, a sacred grove devoted to Jupiter in classical times, it was dedicated to Saint Anthony in the Middle Ages. Covering 550 hectares, the forest was historically protected from logging to provide shelter for livestock. This, combined with the traditional pruning method known as *capitozzatura*, has allowed the trees to grow to monumental sizes, their branches forming striking candelabra shapes.

The trail weaves among ancient beech, maple, yew, oak, and wild pear trees. White-backed and Dalmatian woodpeckers flit through the canopy, while the undergrowth may hide traces of wolves, foxes, and deer. Walkers follow a beech-dominated section before arriving at the beautiful hermitage of Sant'Antonio. Along the way, educational panels highlight the forest's ecology and history. There are picnic tables along the way where you can stop to soak in the autumn spectacle.

It is a popular trail throughout the year and can get busy on weekends. The well-marked trail follows a gentle loop and is suitable for families.

TRADITIONAL BREAD SNACKS

By Barbara Summa

Today, most Italians (if they have breakfast at all) often grab it at the café: a quick *cappuccino e cornetto*. But in the villages of Abruzzo, the older generations had (and some still have) a very different habit: breakfast was bread.

Almost every village in Abruzzo had a communal oven where people brought their loaves and cakes to bake. Of course, this was also a social occasion for women to check on each other's health, family affairs, pregnancies, children and extended families – and to exchange plenty of gossip. Not for nothing the bakery is still considered the place where you hear the juiciest news in the village.

Bread was baked only once a week, when the communal oven was fired up. Thanks to traditional flours and slow fermentation, those rustic loaves lasted a long time, especially if wrapped in a clean cloth to keep them fresh.

In the *Trattoria della Pace* of my great-grandmother Annina, in Ofena (AQ), which she managed from 1910, there was a *camera del pane*. It was a room dedicated exclusively to storing flour in large wooden chests (*madie*) and to making the dough. This room was next to Annina's bedroom so that, at any time, day or night, she could check how the dough was rising. She baked not only for her family of nine girls and the guests of the *trattoria*, but from 1925 also for the Colonia Frasca – a boarding school between Ofena and Castelvechio that hosted orphans after the First World War. Just around the corner from her home in Ofena was the *Vicolo del Forno*, the alley with the local oven. The girls would bring the loaves on large planks, covered with cloths, balancing them on their heads.

My father Ennio, like many Italians, never ate breakfast except for a quick coffee, so as not to spoil his appetite for lunch. But whenever he returned to his village, he would go have breakfast with his childhood friend Antonio. They also did it when Antonio and his



family came to Tortoreto (TE) – where we lived and my parents had a hotel – for their summer holiday. Then Antonio would bring a pot of herbs from the mountains, and those breakfasts were always based on bread.

Bread, olive oil, and *savetrejje*

On the Aquila side of the Gran Sasso, the most typical aromatic herb is *savetrejje*, or wild thyme. A slice of bread drizzled with olive oil, a pinch of salt, and a few leaves of this mountain herb made a wholesome start to the day.

Pane c' lla pummadore strusciate

A quick way to soften stale bread was to rub it with a halved tomato, add a drizzle of olive oil and a pinch of salt – sometimes with a few leaves of *savetrejje* for flavour.

Panonde

When bread grew too hard, it was sliced and fried in olive oil until golden and crisp. Often served with garlic or chilli, it made a rustic meal alongside soup, salad, or cheese.

Sweet fried bread

Children enjoyed a sweeter version: slices of fried bread sprinkled with sugar or drizzled with honey. A humble but joyful snack that turned leftover bread into something special.

Barbara Summa, born in Abruzzo, is an interpreter, language teacher, and author who divides her time between Amsterdam and Ofena. She writes about food and wine.

SPAGHETTI ALLA FARUK

By Teresa Mastrobuono

I stumbled across the mention of this recipe while listening to a podcast by an American with Abruzzese roots. She remembered having it as a child at a restaurant in Francavilla al Mare (CH). The non-Italian name intrigued me, so I looked it up. Its history also intrigued me. It was invented by Narciso Bonetti in honour of King Faruq I of Egypt. Deposed after the 1952 Egyptian Revolution, the king departed into exile aboard his royal yacht. He first settled in the Principality of Monaco before arriving in Italy, where his journey took him to various places including Naples — and even to the coastal town of Francavilla al Mare, in the province of Chieti where he visited Bonetti's restaurant.

Since then, the dish bearing the king's name (ending with a "k" instead of a "q") has become something of a local classic. It remained on the menus of many restaurants around Francavilla for years, often in simpler and more affordable versions, with curry or turmeric replacing saffron.

The sauce was unlike anything I'd encountered in Abruzzo, so I decided to try it. My version includes a few small tweaks, but one note is essential: use large shrimp. I went with smaller *gambero rosso*, though a meatier variety would have worked better. The original recipe called for *chitarra*, but since the local pasta shop was out, I used *fettuccine* — and was glad I did. The wider noodles carried the sauce beautifully.

INGREDIENTS

Makes 2 portions

- 200g *fettuccine*
- 100g shrimp, shelled and cleaned (gross weight before shelling, about 200 grams)
- ½ large shallot, chopped
- 1 tsp curry powder
- ½ tsp turmeric powder
- 125 ml (1/2 cup) cooking cream
- Juice of ½ lemon



- 2 tbs brandy or wine of choice (I used my homemade limoncello. Not bad!)
- 1 ½ tbs butter
- Extra virgin olive oil as needed
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Several stalks of chives for garnish, chopped

PREPARATION

Bring a pot of water to a boil while you prepare the sauce.

Sauté the shallot in olive oil and butter until golden, then add the shrimp and brandy (or wine, or even homemade limoncello). Lower the heat and cook until the alcohol evaporates and the shrimp have absorbed the flavour. Remove them from the pan and set aside.

Stir lemon juice and cream into the pan, mixing over low heat. Add the curry, stirring until the sauce turns a warm yellow-ochre, then season with turmeric, salt, and pepper.

Cook the *fettuccine al dente*, timing it so the sauce is ready just before it's done. Add a few spoonfuls of the pasta water to the sauce to keep it creamy.

Return the shrimp to the pan, toss in the drained pasta, and mix until well coated. Serve hot, topped with chopped chives.

ZUPPA DI FARRO E CICORIA

By Anna Swann

As the weather turns colder, many *agriturismi* and rural restaurants in Abruzzo add *zuppa di farro e cicoria* to their menus. Before moving to the region nearly 15 years ago, I had never tried it, but it has since become one of my favourite comfort foods.

Farro is one of Abruzzo's most traditional and ancient ingredients. The term "*farro*" actually refers to three types of ancient wheat: einkorn, emmer, and spelt. Emmer and spelt have been cultivated in the mountains of Abruzzo for thousands of years. In the 20th century, modern high-yield wheat largely replaced farro, and its cultivation almost disappeared. In recent years, thanks to the Slow Food movement and European Union support, farro has seen a revival in the region.

With its nutty flavour and chewy texture, *farro* forms the heart of the soup. Chicory, a wild green traditionally foraged in rural areas, can also be found in supermarkets, fresh or frozen. It adds a bold, slightly bitter note; if you can't find it, kale makes a good substitute.

If you want a heartier soup, add some *pancetta*. It deepens the soup's flavour. A few cubes stirred in while the *farro* simmers enrich the broth, giving it a comforting, savoury depth. The combination of the nutty grain, slightly bitter greens, and salty *pancetta* creates a balance of flavours that warms both the body and the soul. This simple yet satisfying dish embodies the rustic, homegrown character of Abruzzo's cuisine.

INGREDIENTS

Makes 4-5 portions

- 250g *farro* grains (spelt or emmer)
- 200g chicory leaves, chopped



- 150g *pancetta* (optional)
- 1 ½ litre vegetable broth (alternatively, you can use water)
- Some olive oil
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 1 medium carrot, finely chopped
- 1 small celery stalk, finely chopped
- Some grated pecorino cheese
- Salt and black pepper to taste

PREPARATION

In a pot, lightly sauté the onion, carrot, chicory leaves, celery, along with the *pancetta* if you are using it, until the vegetables soften and the *pancetta* begins to release its flavour. Add the *farro* and enough water to cover the ingredients, then bring to a gentle simmer. Cook for 35–40 minutes, keeping in mind that cooking time can vary slightly depending on the type of *farro*.

Check occasionally, and add more water or broth if the soup becomes too thick, but remember it should remain hearty and dense rather than watery. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Serve the soup hot, with a generous drizzle of extra virgin olive oil and a sprinkling of pecorino cheese.



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