

TRAVEL HISTORY CULTURE PEOPLE FOOD

ABRUZZISSIMO

MAGAZINE



**The Forgotten
Nativity of Lanciano**

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**Pescocostanzo: Baroque
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Special Supplement Inside:

**54 Christmas markets,
Nativities, and special
festive experiences
in Abruzzo**

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ON THE COVER:

Pescocostanzo/Getty Images. Read the story on page 15.

LEFT:

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

ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE

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Editor's Note

Every December, I look back at the year's ABRUZZISSIMO issues to see how many stories we have brought to you, how many places we have travelled through together, and how many people we have met along the way. Each time, I realise just how much remains untold. People often ask, "Don't you run out of things to write about?" Never. Abruzzo is so big, so layered in history, tradition and local genius, that we could fill thousands of pages and still find new paths, new voices, new wonders waiting for us.

As we turn the page on another year of discoveries, one story in particular leads us into the heart of Abruzzo's heritage. In the Franciscan Convent of Sant'Angelo della Pace in **Lanciano (CH)**, a magnificent seventeenth-century Nativity set lies in storage waiting to be brought back into the light. Giacomo de Crecchio and his son Gaetano rediscovered it fifteen years ago and say that the *Presepe* Antinori, with its 107 with exquisite details, is a rarity the public deserves to see.

In the spirit of the season, we make our way to **Pescocostanzo (AQ)**, long beloved by ski enthusiasts. After the recent snowfalls, the town glows like a life-size nativity scene framed by white peaks.

To add another touch of festive enchantment, we share the tale of Nicolas Gentile and the Tolkien-inspired Shire he built in **Bucchianico (CH)**, where visitors may enter only if they come dressed as Hobbits – a requirement that has never discouraged anyone.

Our premium subscribers will find a free supplement at the end of the issue, a tradition we continue every year, featuring seasonal recipes, 54 Christmas markets, Nativities, and special festive experiences across Abruzzo.

And if you are searching for a thoughtful present, remember that you can gift a [digital subscription](#) to the Abruzzo-curious in your life, inviting them to join this ongoing journey through a region that never stops offering new stories. You can also support our work with a small [gift donation](#), helping us continue to follow those paths and voices that make Abruzzo an endless source of discovery.

The next issue will be sent out on February 5, as we take a short break to recharge and plan the upcoming editions.

Buon Natale and Happy Holidays!

Anna Lebedeva
Founder & Editor

DIGEST OF RECENT REGIONAL NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS FROM ABRUZZO NEWSPAPERS



ABRUZZO COMEDY WINS AUDIENCE AWARD ABROAD

A World Apart (*Un Mondo Aparte*) has won the Audience Award for Best Narrative at the Teaneck International Film Festival in New Jersey, its first international accolade. The Italian comedy follows a teacher who leaves Rome for a remote Abruzzo mountain village, rallying the community to save their tiny local school from closure. Filmed in **Opi**, **Pescasseroli**, **Barrea**, and the ghost town of **Sperone**, the movie features local residents alongside professional actors and has been a box office hit in Italy. Watch for announcements on its upcoming English-language screenings in the U.S.

OVER 100 AND COUNTING

Abruzzo ranks sixth in Italy for centenarians, with nearly 50 people per 100,000 residents reaching 100, according to Italy's National Institute of Statistics' 2025 report. While trailing Umbria and Tuscany, the region boasts a notable longevity culture. For those over 105, Abruzzo falls to tenth, counting just 20, down from previous years. Chieti leads the province tally with eight supercentenarians, followed by **Pescara** (7), **Teramo** (3), and **L'Aquila** (2). Nationwide, Italy now has 23,548 centenarians, a sharp rise from 10,158 in 2009, with women making up 83% of this remarkable population.



LEARN, LISTEN, EXPLORE: ABRUZZISSIMO WEBINARS 2026

Next year, ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine will launch a series of free webinars offering a closer look at Abruzzo's history and traditions. Many readers have requested this, and we're excited to make it happen. Across several online sessions, we will invite local experts who will guide you through the region's dialect, remarkable traditions, and some fascinating historical events. The first webinar is set for January, so watch your inbox for dates and details. Have an idea for a webinar or want to collaborate as a host? Reach out to us at editor@abruzzissimo.com.

CASOURIA EARNS DOCG STATUS

Abruzzo has a new DOCG, the highest Italian wine classification, with Casauria now officially recognised for Montepulciano d'Abruzzo. Already featured on the labels of wines from this year's harvest by nine wineries, including Guardiani Farchione, Nic Tartaglia, Pasetti, Castorani and several other, the designation spans 18 communes in Pescara province, from **Bolognano** and **Castiglione a Casauria** to **Torre dei Passeri** and **Turrivalignani**. It joins Colline Teramane and Tollo as Abruzzo's top-tier DOCG wines.

Made in Abruzzo

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine has gathered a new collection of thoughtful presents, from handcrafted jewellery and artisanal ceramics to Italian language courses, an eBook, unusual perfumes, and sustainable wool knits made from Abruzzo's own sheep.



SULMONA IN A SCENT

Confetti are a sweet treat in Sulmona, and for Barbara Traficante – born and raised in the city, and enchanted by confetti as a child – they became the inspiration for a fragrance to savour. In 2008, she brought her childhood dream to life with **Sulmona Essenza**, a perfume rooted in her city's historic *confetti* tradition.

Delicate notes of almond, icing sugar, jasmine, and orange blossom mingle with Tahitian vanilla and musk, creating a subtle, harmonious scent that evokes the nostalgic sweetness of Sulmona's *confetti*. The perfume can be ordered [online](#).

WOOL WITH A STORY

After a decade in the fashion industry, Benedetta Morucci moved to the Abruzzese mountains to found **Lamantera**, a company that transforms local sheep wool – often discarded – into luxurious, sustainable knits. She oversees every stage, from shearing to spinning, and works exclusively with Italian mills that use slow, low-impact processes.

The [Lamantera collection](#) includes hats, scarves, cosy socks, bed throws, baby blankets, and yarn for knitters, with colours in either the natural tones of the wool or subtly dyed with plants. Every piece is made from 100% sheep wool sourced from local Abruzzese flocks.



ONLINE ITALIAN LESSONS

Know someone who wants to learn Italian? A new online language course kicks off in January with Barbara Summa, Abruzzese-born teacher, author, and regular contributor to Abruzzissimo. Her Italian classes combine grammar and conversation with real-life vocabulary about home, Abruzzese cuisine, and community life, with stories about the region making them the perfect gift for anyone dreaming of moving to Abruzzo or feeling truly at home in Italy. The lessons are scheduled to fit comfortably across multiple time zones (Europe, East Coast, and West Coast). See Barbara's website for [details](#).



JEWELLERY INSPIRED BY ABRUZZO'S PAST

Abruzzese artisan Dantina Grosso of **Artidealab** creates silver jewellery that draws inspiration from the region's rich history. Her pendants, earrings, bracelets, and necklaces feature motifs such as ancient chimeras, letters from the Oscan-Samnite alphabet, and ornamental elements uncovered in excavations across Abruzzo's Samnite territories. Many designs are modelled on archaeological treasures held in museums like those in Chieti, Alfedena, and Campobasso, as well as unique local carvings such as the wooden dragon in one of Pescocostanzo's churches. Each piece is crafted using ancient almost-forgotten silversmithing techniques. Dantina's creations can be purchased in her shop in Civitella Alfedena (AQ) (Via Nazionale 5) or browse her [online catalogue](#) and order at +39 3397023672.

A CHRISTMAS BAUBLE WITH A TWIST

Evandra De Rosa's **Pallina di Natale Imbottigliata** turns the classic Christmas bauble into a treat twice over. Each hand-painted ceramic sphere is filled with Abruzzo's finest flavours, from artisanal liqueurs and ratafia to rich olive oil, gin, and creamy infusions. Once the contents are enjoyed, the magic continues. A metal hook inside the box transforms the bauble into a decoration for the tree, and its patented design allows it to stand upright and serve as a room diffuser with wooden sticks and essential oils.

Crafted in her workshop in Isola del Gran Sasso (TE), Evandra's bauble/bottles can be order via her [website](#) (delivery Italy only).



A FESTIVE READ FOR FOOD LOVERS

For anyone drawn to the warmth of holiday traditions and dishes with a past, **The Taste of Christmas in Abruzzo** makes a thoughtful gift. Written by Marianna Colantoni, a regular contributor to ABRUZZISSIMO, it brings together 34 authentic festive recipes along with the stories, memories, and ingredients that define this time of year. Inside, you'll find dishes such as *maccheroni alla chitarra* with tiny meatballs, *brodetto alla vastese* for Christmas Eve, and *pecora alla callara*, a dish that reflects the region's pastoral roots. Available as an English-language [ebook](#) or as an Italian [paperback](#).



THE FORGOTTEN NATIVITY OF LANCIANO

By Giacomo de Crecchio

Hidden for centuries in a dusty storage room of the Franciscan Convent of Sant'Angelo della Pace in Lanciano (CH), the 17th-century Presepe Antinori is one of Italy's most remarkable nativity sets. After years of bureaucratic obstacles, this cultural treasure remains in storage, making it increasingly urgent to find a proper solution that lets the public view and safeguard this extraordinary collection.

Fifteen years ago, nothing in my research had prepared me for what we found in a storage room inside the Franciscan Convent of Sant'Angelo della Pace in Lanciano. The room had the stillness of a place rarely entered, its objects dulled under a thick layer of dust. Several chests were stacked one over the other, their fabrics worn, their locks stiff. Among them, one covered in orange velvet, fixed with gilt studs, caught our attention. It was heavy, its hinges protesting as we lifted the lid. Inside, wrapped in faded cloths, laid figures from what would reveal itself as the Presepe Antinori, one of the most important nativity sets in Italy.

Photo: Presepe Antinori figures found in a chest in Lanciano. Photo by Gaetano de Crecchio

FROM DUST TO LIGHT

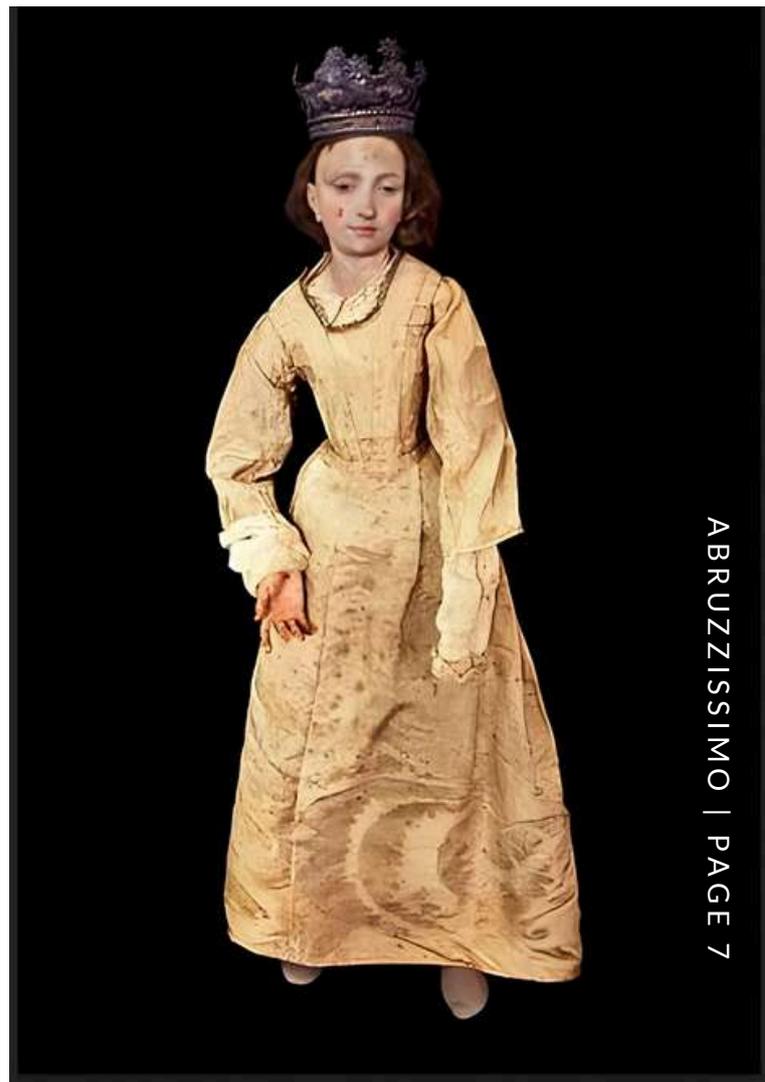
That first opening felt like breaking a long silence. My son Gaetano and I could not yet grasp the significance of what we were handling. Only later, with patient work, did we confirm that the complete set amounted to 108 pieces: 84 human figures and 24 animals, some in carved wood, others in papier-mâché. All were articulated, their limbs designed to bend through tiny internal mechanisms. Their clothes, hand-sewn in damask, silk, wool, and lace, spoke of refined craftsmanship. The tiny leather shoes held shaped stockings; some figures displayed signs of goitre, a reminder of nutritional deficiencies in certain regions at the time they were made. It was evident that this was not a simple devotional nativity, but an extraordinary artistic and social document from the end of the 1600s.

The history of the chest and its contents unfolded gradually through archival work. The collection had belonged to the Antinori family of L'Aquila. One of the oldest and most distinguished Italian families, they originated in Tuscany and were renowned for their wine production as early as 1385. Less known, but no less significant, was their role as patrons of the arts. They supported Renaissance workshops, cultivated artistic talent and surrounded themselves with objects that reflected their cultural and intellectual standing.

THE ANTINORI

The Antinori nativity reached Abruzzo through a long and intricate family journey. An 1833 inventory compiled by a notary in L'Aquila listed 145 pieces, including 90 shepherds. The story begins even earlier with Orazio Antinori, who left Florence at the end of the 17th century and settled in Bologna. One branch of the family remained there, while another, with his son Giacinto, moved to L'Aquila shortly before the earthquake of 1703. Giacinto, entrusted with overseeing food supplies and salt-tax controls, travelled frequently to Naples. There he married and

Photos: Figures from the Antinori Nativity. Photos by Gaetano de Crecchio



raised numerous children. The eldest, Antonio Ludovico Maria, would become Archbishop of Lanciano and a respected historian. The youngest, Gennaro, would be the one to maintain the family line through his children Egidia Caterina, Giacinto, Agnese and Giuseppe.

AN INHERITED TREASURE

How did the presepe arrive in L'Aquila and then Lanciano? A decisive clue emerged from a letter written by Gennaro on 16 December 1768 to his cousin Luigi in Bologna. With Christmas approaching, he asked him to "send over the approximately 130 figures, each two palms high, and other shepherds, and the entire procession of the Magi with 12 horses and more", items worth "about 600 scudi". This document confirmed that a significant portion of the nativity had travelled to L'Aquila at Gennaro's request. Years later, his son Giuseppe would determine the set's fate. We found a deeply personal letter he wrote to his sister Egidia Caterina on 18 June 1833, shortly before his death. In it, he explained his wish to leave the nativity to Egidia's son, Luigi Stella Maranca of Lanciano, noting that their ancestor Giacinto had always guarded the set with special care. Luigi honoured that wish. After Giuseppe's death, he travelled to L'Aquila to collect what we now call the Presepe Antinori and bring it to Lanciano.

The Presepe Antinori in the chest when it was found.
Photo by Gaetano de Crecchio



Restored figures from the Presepe during the exhibition in 2017. Photo by Nicola Borgia

From that moment on, the nativity's history intertwined with the Stella-Maranca family and Lanciano. When the last descendants, Marianna and Assunta, received assistance from the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in Lanciano, they left all their possessions to the institution, including the nativity. It was later entrusted to the Friars Minor of the city, who remain its custodians today. This long chain of inheritances, transfers, and forgotten rooms explains why such a treasure could lie unseen for decades inside a dusty convent storage space.

In 2012, when I wrote a book about our discovery, I counted 84 shepherds and 23 animals in the convent; a few years later, in the cell of a friar who had passed away some time before, we found a horse figurine from the presepe. It is reasonable to assume that, over the centuries, certain figures slipped out of sight. Whether they were misplaced or taken, we do not know.

LONG RESEARCH

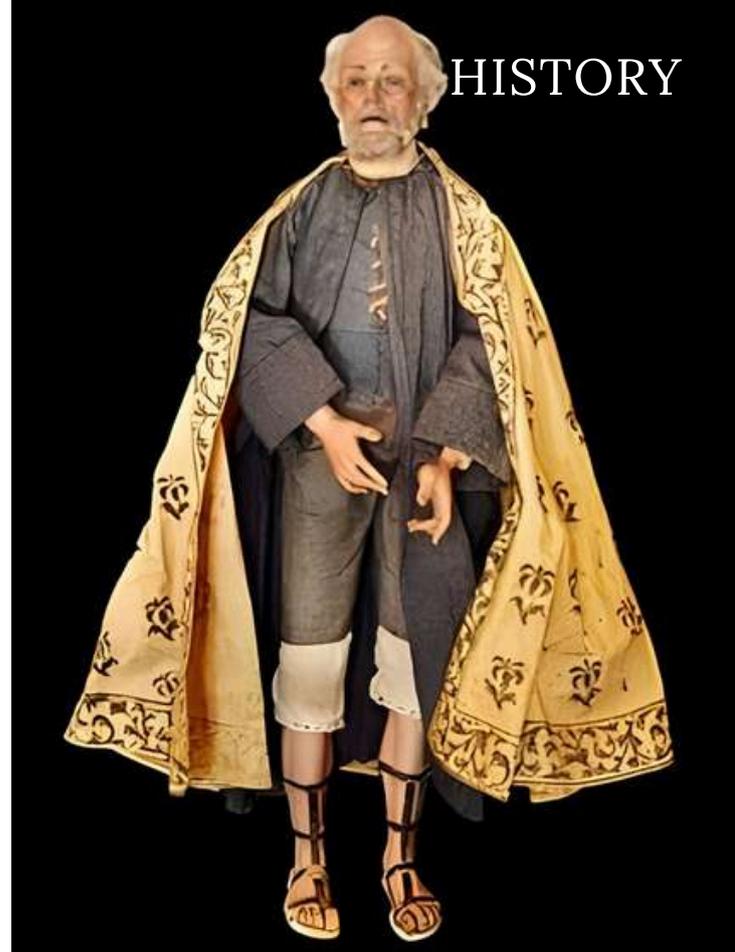
With patience, we reconstructed the nativity's full story using the archives of the convent once known as Sant'Angelo della Pace. The documents offered a fragmented trail, but through careful analysis we were able to retrace the movement of the figures from L'Aquila to Lanciano. We dedicated two years to this research, photographing every figure, documenting clothing and posture, and studying the signs left by artisans whose names are unknown. The result was our book, *I pastori che dormono. Il Presepe Antinori in viaggio da Aquila a Lanciano*, through which we hoped to return these figures to the attention of scholars and the community.

The workmanship of the set remains extraordinary. Each figure is carved in wood with detailed anatomical accuracy. They can be repositioned like small artistic mannequins thanks to their internal joints. Their garments are real textiles, embroidered with gold and silver threads, embellished with coral necklaces, macramé lace, and even tiny undergarments. Some figures once held silver accessories, now lost. The group of Magi, with their 21-figure entourage, 12 horses, 20 sheep, the Madonna, Saint Joseph, and the Christ Child, dressed in damask and silk velvet — each element is impressive. It is an object that belongs not only to local heritage but to a broader Italian cultural tradition.

WHY THIS NATIVITY MATTERS TODAY

Much remains uncertain. Over 15 years of research, I have encountered scholars who argue that the figures do not belong to a Neapolitan workshop. Some suggest Ligurian or Tuscan origins; others point to Emilia Romagna. The truth may lie in a combination of influences, but the enigma only adds to the nativity's significance. What is evident, however, is its rarity. Experts confirm that, despite the fame of later Neapolitan nativity sets, the Antinori collection stands out for its age, workmanship, historical details and depth.

Some years ago, the first 18 figures underwent careful stabilisation treatment at the Soprintendenza BSAE in Naples, in the workshop of Antonio Cantone, one of the foremost specialists in the field. In 2017, the restored pieces were shown in an exhibition in L'Aquila. This was



One of the restored figures. Photo by Gaetano de Crecchio

an essential first step, but much remains to be done. The Friars Minor, who guard the nativity today, bear a considerable responsibility. They cannot be expected to manage such an immense, expensive conservation effort alone. The risk is that, without collective support, the Presepe Antinori will once again be forgotten, stashed away in a chest.

My hope is clear. I would like to see the nativity displayed in Lanciano in a dedicated space, protected and studied, accessible to all. It is too important a cultural heritage to remain hidden, and too fragile to endure without timely intervention. Through continued research, responsible restoration and public interest, we can ensure that the Antinori nativity does not return to the silence of that forgotten storage room but continues to speak to future generations.

Giacomo de Crecchio is a researcher and co-author of I pastori che dormono. Il Presepe Antinori in viaggio da Aquila a Lanciano.



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CONTEA GENTILE: FINDING MAGIC IN BUCCHIANICO

Nicolas Gentile in conversation
with Anna Lebedeva

In the rolling hills of Bucchianico, a small town in the province Chieti, a Tolkien-style Shire comes to life where magic isn't about escape, but in everyday rural life, complete with hobbit-like houses and costumes.

Since I was a child, I've always escaped into imaginary worlds. While others let go of those fantasies as they grew up, I kept holding on to them. I became obsessed with *The Lord of the Rings* – the films, the books, everything I could get my hands on to feed that imagination. But after a while I grew tired of pretending to live in that world through games, cinema, and pages. I wanted something real.

I thought about it all the time, but I never had the courage or the strength to take the first step. Then something happened that shook everything: I was diagnosed with leukaemia. I was terrified. But that fear became a sort of spark. I told myself that whether I had one year, ten years, or 100, I had to do the most beautiful thing I'd always carried within me.

Photo: Nicolas Gentile with his children in the Contea Gentile

FROM ILLEGAL DUMP TO IMAGINARY VILLAGE

So I rolled up my sleeves and bought a piece of land in Bucchianico, my family's town. At the beginning it was just a plot, nothing more. Later I discovered it had even been used as an illegal dump, so the first thing I did was clean it completely. I wanted to save that patch of earth before anything else. When it was finally restored, I built a small house – tiny, really, just something to begin with – so I could start organising a few events. At first the project was called “My Hobbit Life”, until I learned the word “Hobbit” couldn't be used because of copyright. That's when the name changed, and La Contea Gentile truly began.

When I first suggested buying the land, my family looked at me as if I'd lost my mind. It cost more than we could afford. We had to take out a mortgage. And all of it for... what, exactly? A dream shaped like an imaginary village?

But they knew me. They knew that when an idea takes hold of me, I follow it. And today my wife, Alice, and our children are at the heart of the Contea. My 70-year-old parents cook for thousands during our events and welcome visitors as if they were stepping straight into our own home, because hospitality has always been part of

our family's way of living. For as long as I can remember, my family has opened its doors to everyone – friends, relatives, friends of friends, even people we didn't know – to eat with us, to spend time with us. It's simply who we are. We simply enlarged the table.

SIMPLE LIFE

Then 2020 arrived and the pandemic turned everything upside down. While the rest of the world was shutting itself indoors, something different happened to us. In a strange way, it became one of the best moments of my life. My wife, my children, and I would slip out of the house – even though we weren't supposed to go anywhere – and head to the Contea. That place saved us. Surrounded by greenery, by huge ancient trees, with the little house we had already built, we could breathe again. And people saw that it was possible to live in a beautiful, almost magical way, in a natural way, with very little – that is how the idea behind the Contea Gentile became clear.

La Contea Gentile was born from the idea of creating a village – a real place that will soon become a kind of *agriturismo*, something like a small *albergo diffuso* made up of several hobbit-like houses. But the real purpose isn't the buildings themselves. It's to connect people: those who love The Lord of the Rings and those who know nothing about it. I want to show that you can live a fantastic, almost magical life with very little – simply by being together in nature, sharing food, experiences, stories, and the simple pleasure of each other's company.

Contea Gentile in Bucchianico



THE MAGIC OF SMALL TOWNS

When I was in my 20s, Abruzzo felt too small for me. I escaped to Rome, partly to do my master's degree in geology and partly because I kept telling myself: "In Rome I'll find more opportunities; there's a whole world waiting for me." I thought I was destined for great things, and Bucchianico, my little town felt tight, limiting.

But once I arrived in the big city, I realised that all those fantastic worlds I had imagined were things I already had but never noticed. All those hobbies and passions I believed existed somewhere else had always lived within me; I just hadn't looked at them with the right eyes.

So I came back to Abruzzo like a prodigal son. I returned to Bucchianico and started working at my family's pastry shop. I understood that small towns in Abruzzo, these tiny social worlds, are far more magical and full of wonder than a big city where everything is chaotic, people don't even have the time to talk to you, and everyone seems angry. Back home I knew everyone, and everyone knew me, and it felt remarkably similar to Tolkien's Shire, the one from the books and the films that I loved so much.

Nicolas with his friends during one of the events

That's when my perception of reality changed. Reality can be far more magical and extraordinary than we think, if only we shift our point of view. Now everything I see feels like part of a fable. It might sound a bit mad, but it's really just about recognising the beauty in what you already have – and that's what I want to share with others.

One of the goals of the Contea is to create hobbit-like houses and let people live a "hobbit-style life," which, at its heart, is just the life of an Abruzzese farmer – a little more playful, but essentially the same. In fact, if you look closely, the farmers around the Contea are much more "hobbity," in a way, than I am. They have the land, they work it, they care for animals, and they gather for small village festivals. Everything Tolkien describes about hobbits has already existed here. So, what we are doing isn't so strange after all – it's simply seeing the magic in a life that has always been lived in Abruzzo. And that, for me, is a very beautiful thing.

FUNDING THE DREAM

The budget to complete the Contea Gentile is quite high – around a million euros – though we've already managed to carry out much of the work we had planned. In 2021, I launched a crowdfunding campaign, raising about €40,000 – not as much as I had hoped,



but enough to get us started and begin the first works at the Contea.

This year, we received a national award for an innovative agricultural project. Through the Contea, we show that returning to the roots can be playful and imaginative – and this award was a very welcome recognition.

BENEFIT FOR THE COMMUNITY

At first, there was some scepticism locally. People in the village didn't really understand what I was doing. Most of the visitors came from outside Abruzzo, from other regions of Italy. But gradually, word spread. Today, many people from Abruzzo visit regularly, even when no events are taking place. It's encouraging to see the people of Bucchianico supporting the project, helping however they can. Even the local administration is now assisting with the bureaucracy, allowing us to build the hobbit-style houses – underground, with round doors and windows – which have been complicated to construct and required navigating a lot of legal hurdles. Step by step, it's becoming clear that hobbits aren't so strange, and that what we're doing is not only beautiful, but also benefits the community.

Photos: (below) guests during one of the events in the Contea Gentile; a hobbit-style house in the Contea

Today, the Contea is a place where you can see the world a little better than it really is. I tell people: I can't change the whole world, but I can change a small part of it – the Contea. And if everyone did what I did – changed their life even a little, their work, the way they approach others – each person could save a small corner of the world. If everyone did that, the world would become a better place. Because if everyone set out with the intention of improving their own life, as I have with the Contea Gentile, and shared it with others, the world could change for the better, quickly.

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For event announcements follow the Contea Gentile on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) or check the [website](#). The family pastry shop, Pasticceria Gentile, is located on Bucchianico's main piazza (address: Piazza Roma, 15).

Photos courtesy of Nicolas Gentile.





PESCOCOSTANZO: BAROQUE SPLENDOUR AND SKI RUNS

Text and photos by Anna
Lebedeva

Pescocostanzo has watched centuries pass from its strategic perch near the *Via degli Abruzzi*, an important high-Apennine route connecting northern and southern Italy. Its wealth, built on sheep farming and skilled artisans, shaped elegant streets, palaces, and churches. Today, the town draws visitors year-round with crisp mountain air, lively ski resorts, and a rich Baroque heritage.

The first written trace of Pescocostanzo appears in 1108, in a document recording its transfer from the monastery of San Pietro Avellana to a lay nobleman from the Valva line. Even then, the settlement occupied a strategic position along the high Apennine corridor known as the *via degli Abruzzi*, a route that connected Florence and Naples and carried merchants, shepherds, and ideas between northern and southern Italy. Through the Angevin period, traffic along this elevated spine fostered prosperity and, at times, turmoil. Armies marched across the plateau below the town in campaigns for the Kingdom of Naples, leaving the community in the path of shifting powers.

Photo: Piazza Municipio in Pescocostanzo/Getty Images

TOWN PLANNING

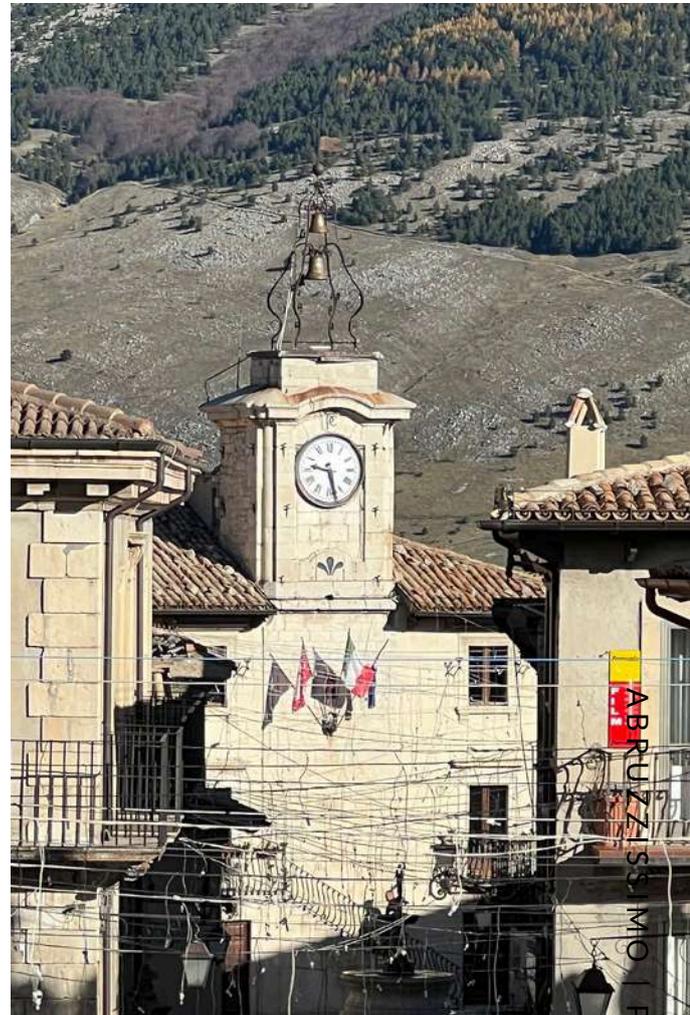
The earthquake of 1456, which devastated much of southern Italy, set in motion a remarkable reconstruction in Pescocostanzo. Contemporary accounts describe the town as largely collapsed and its medieval church damaged beyond repair, but reconstruction began swiftly. Lombard artisans arrived from the north, attracted by wealthy local patrons, shaping the town's appearance. Their techniques, their vocabulary, even their rituals took root in this corner of Abruzzo, leaving traces in local surnames, in the tradition of bobbin lace-making, and in the distinctive stonework.

Sheep farming sustained Pescocostanzo's prosperity for many centuries. By the 1600s, a census recorded more than 30,000 sheep owned by the town's wealthiest families. The economic growth driven by pastoralism transformed the town into an important artistic and cultural centre: churches, small palaces, and row houses sprang up. Merchants brought their goods to the streets, the clang of blacksmiths' hammers rang through the town, goldsmiths crafted highly sought-after filigree jewellery, and weavers produced magnificent rugs and tapestries sold far beyond Pescocostanzo.

The town was built according to a careful plan, rather than as a haphazard patchwork. From the 16th century onward, a planning board oversaw construction, creating a refined urban space with remarkable foresight. Every altar, façade, and courtyard reflected a shared vision of order and beauty. Rows of houses followed the slope in a steady rhythm, each *il vignale* – an external stone staircase with a small landing – lifting or dipping with the lay of the ground. Doors were framed in carved stone, and wrought-iron balconies *a pancia*, curved in bulbous, sculptural shapes, lent softness to the façades. Artisan workshops were strategically placed along the main thoroughfares, integrating craft and daily life into the urban fabric.

BAROQUE FLOURISH

Over the centuries, Pescocostanzo navigated a complex web of authority, but always exercised a strong spirit of autonomy, managing civil and criminal affairs, overseeing education and welfare, and regulating the activity of the clergy. Privileges from the rulers of the Kingdom of Naples, new trade and cultural currents along the *via degli Abruzzi*, and close ties with Rome fostered steady growth, laying the foundations for Pescocostanzo's eventual full liberation



Photos: (from top) a house with *il vignale*; the clocktower of the Palazzo del Municipio

from feudal control in 1774 – when the town adopted the proud title *Universitas Sui Domina*, a declaration of self-governance still present on its coat of arms. This independence nurtured an atmosphere where learning could flourish. Legal studies, philosophy, mathematics, history, and literature found eager audiences across many social groups, and a strong devotion to the arts became part of everyday life.

The foundations laid by generations of careful planning and skilled artisans prepared Pescocostanzo for its flowering in the Baroque age. Local patronage was strong, and the town's ruling families drew talented architects and sculptors to this mountain town. Today, Pescocostanzo is often regarded as Abruzzo's foremost Baroque centre, not

Photos: (from below clockwise) Palazzo Sabatini; a wrought-iron balcony a *pancia*; a carved detail of a doorway in Pescocostanzo



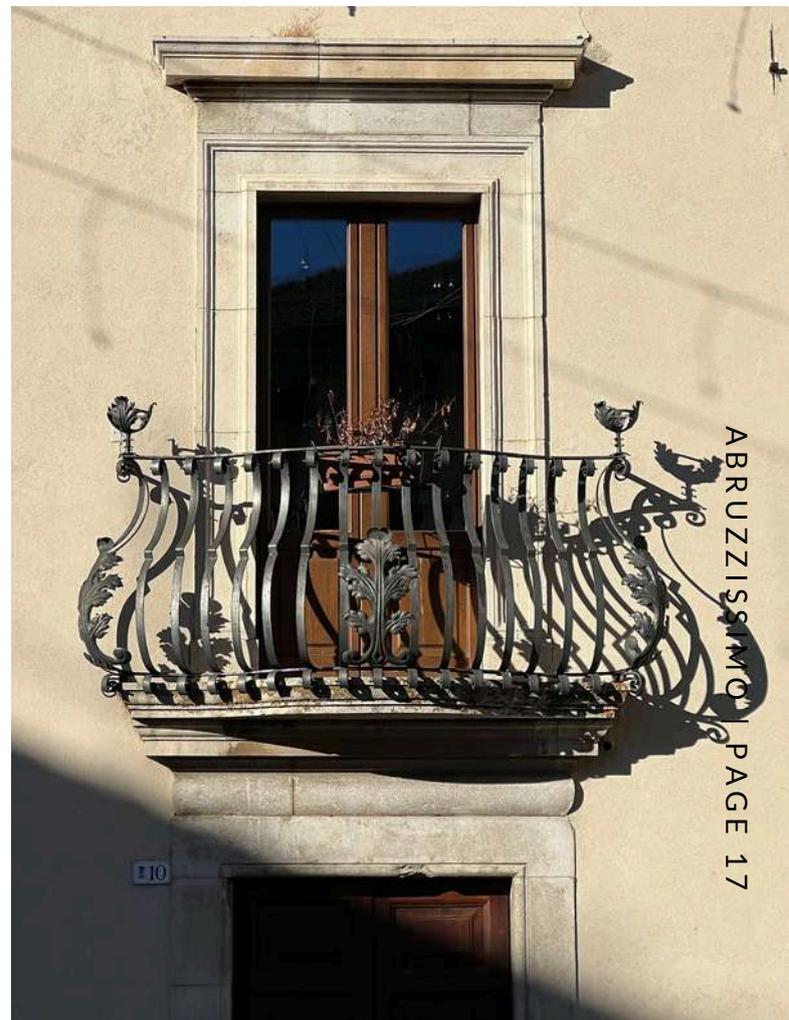
because of isolated masterpieces, but for the cohesion of the town as a whole. Palaces, churches, and family homes maintain a rare harmony, each contributing to a wider composition that has survived largely unchanged for centuries.

The town still preserves a wealth of Baroque treasures, from the Collegiate Church of Santa Maria del Colle, with its gilded interiors, marble altars, intricately carved wooden ceilings, and wrought-iron details, to the numerous noble *palazzi* and the 18th-century Fontana Maggiore that graces the main *piazza*.

ILLUSTRIOUS FIGURES

Intellectual and cultural life flourished alongside economic prosperity producing prominent scholars, philosophers, and artisans, nurtured by the town's wealthy and culturally engaged families which have left a cultural imprint far larger than its size might suggest.

Among the most notable figures was Ottavio Colecchi, a Kantian philosopher and mathematician whose presence in Pescocostanzo reflected the town's appetite for rigorous thought and inquiry. Colecchi's studies and writings placed the town firmly on the map of Enlightenment-era intellectual life in Abruzzo, and his legacy helped inspire generations of local scholars.



Artisans, too, elevated the town's reputation. Ferdinando Mosca, an 18th-century architect and woodcarver, contributed some of Pescocostanzo's most striking interiors. In 1716, he worked in his native town to complete the high altar of the Church of Santa Maria del Suffragio, and his crowning achievement, the carved and gilded coffered ceiling of the Basilica of San Bernardino in L'Aquila, remains celebrated across Abruzzo for its mastery and scale. His influence can still be traced in wooden choirs and ornate ceilings found in churches throughout the region.

More recently, the town also produced notable scholars of language and letters. Francesco Sabatini, a linguist, philologist, and lexicographer, served as honorary president of the Accademia della Crusca and has made significant contributions to the study of Italian. He has organised cultural events in Pescocostanzo and curated works on the town's history, earning a place among its most honoured citizens. He continues to spend his summers in the town.

Photos: (from top right) old botteghe doors; a stone inlay mosaic in the Church of Gesù e Maria; the staircase leading to the Collegiata di Santa Maria del Colle and the Church of Santa Maria del Suffragio dei Morti



A YEAR-ROUND DESTINATION

By the 19th century, Pescocostanzo entered a quieter chapter. The waning of pastoralism was mirrored by a downturn in local crafts, and the town's population began to shift. Many affluent families left for Rome or Naples, while members of the working class joined the broader wave of Italian migration that reshaped Italy during those years.

A century later the tide shifted again. In the 1970s, travellers from Rome and Naples rediscovered the town, drawn by the fresh air and its winter snows. Substantial funding flowed into the development of the Roccaraso ski area and Pescocostanzo's own lifts, ushering in renewed prosperity and a surge of construction. The new buildings, raised quickly to meet demand, lacked the measured grace of earlier centuries. Rows of apartment blocks and concrete houses went up at the foot of Monte Calvario, a stark counterpoint to the elegant historic palazzi of the town. But, thankfully, the *centro storico* remains carefully preserved and survives as the true heart of Pescocostanzo.

Today, Pescocostanzo remains one of Abruzzo's most visited destinations year-round. In winter, skiers and lovers of crisp mountain air flock to the nearby slopes, while summer draws those escaping the lowland heat, seeking altitude, fresh breeze, and long days on the trails. Just a short drive from Pescocostanzo, the Bosco di Sant'Antonio is one of Italy's favourite spots for autumn foliage. When winter arrives, the forest becomes a peaceful haven for cross-country skiers seeking a slower, quieter rhythm.

Property prices are high and the town's restaurants attract diners from far beyond the region, but beneath this modern appetite Pescocostanzo has kept the thread of its own story intact. It has weathered the centuries with a rare steadiness, avoiding the quiet abandon that has eroded so many mountain communities in Abruzzo.

Photos: Ex Chiesa di Santa Maria di Loreto; an inscription on a Baroque fountain; fragment of the the Collegiata di Santa Maria del Colle's portal



WHAT TO DO AND SEE IN PESCOCOSTANZO

WALK IN THE CENTRO STORICO

The town's streets are lined with magnificent, well-preserved palazzi and churches, a testimony to the centuries of Pescocostanzo's prosperity. A visit to the historic centre can begin at the **Church of Gesù e Maria** and the adjoining Franciscan convent. Founded in 1611, the church features elegant baroque marble altars, dominated by the impressive high altar designed by Cosimo Fanzago between 1626 and 1630. Following Via Colecchi, you will see the 17th-century **Palazzo Sabatini**. Like in the past, there are several *botteghe* that have still preserved their old-style shopfronts with split doors.

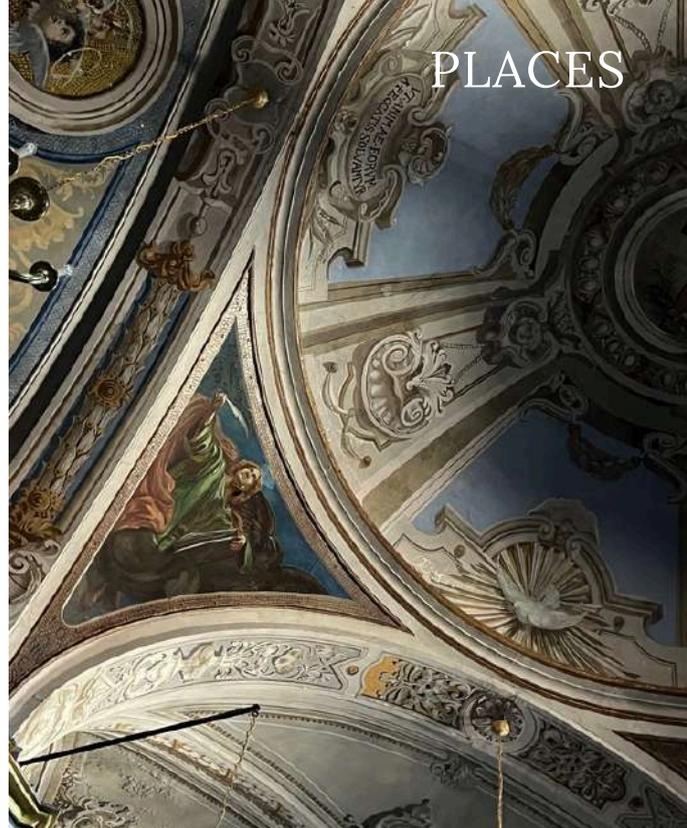
To the left, on the top of a magnificent set of steps, stands the **Collegiata di Santa Maria del Colle**, undoubtedly one of Abruzzo's most beautiful churches. Inside, the church holds remarkable works: splendid frescoes, gilded coffered ceilings, a 13th-century wooden statue of the Madonna del Colle, polychrome marble décor, and the ornate Baroque wrought-iron gate adorned with putti, angels, mythical beasts, and scrolling foliage that encloses the Chapel of the Sacrament. The church is also renowned for its acoustics, making it an ideal setting for the classical music concerts held there during the summer months. Along the same staircase, just below the Collegiata, stands another gem, the **Church of Santa Maria del Suffragio dei Morti**. Its striking 17th-century portal opens onto a coffered wooden ceiling and a grand walnut altar, completed by Ferdinando Mosca in 1716.

On Piazza Municipio stands **Palazzo Fanzago**, built in the 1620s by the renowned Baroque architect Cosimo Fanzago as a cloistered convent for the nuns of Santa Scolastica. Its façade is striking for six large, ornamented stone niches, which replace the windows prohibited under the convent's strict cloistered rules.

To the right of the piazza, a flight of steps climbs to the rocky outcrop, *il Peschio*, the where the town's oldest quarter and its castle once stood. From here, the *Quarti* plateau unfolds beneath you, framed by the surrounding mountains.

To the left of **Piazza Municipio** lies the Renaissance quarter, where elegant *palazzi* line the streets, each featuring its characteristic *vignale* – an external stair landing – nowadays always adorned with bright red geraniums.

Photos: (from top) the frescoed ceiling of the Church of Gesù e Maria; a gilded decor detail in the Collegiata di Santa Maria del Colle; the wrought-iron gate in the Collegiata di Santa Maria del Colle



MEET LOCAL ARTISANS

Pescocostanzo's traditional crafts continue to thrive. Three local blacksmiths shape wrought iron into gates, railings, chandeliers, and candle holders. At Bottega Donatelli, four generations of the family have preserved this craft since 1910. Just off Piazza del Municipio on Corso Roma, the dark, smoky workshop glows with the fire of the forge, where Nicodemo and his son Enrico work side by side and are always happy to show their skills to visitors.

Generations of the town's goldsmiths have earned renown for creating delicate traditional jewellery, from *la presentosa* and *la cannatora* necklaces to *gli orecchini a Sciacquajje*. Their work can be admired at **Laboratorio d'Arte Orafa Trine d'Oro** (Via Colecchi Ottavio, 35) or **La Bottega dell'Orafo** (Piazza Municipio, 1).

JOIN THE FESTIVALS

Pescocostanzo's calendar is packed with events throughout the year. At the end of May, **La Festa della Madonna del Colle** animates the streets with a grand procession carrying the 13th-century statue of the

Madonna, accompanied by music and fireworks. Summer brings a lively mix of concerts across every genre, theatre and cabaret performances, outdoor films, and sporting events, often featuring acclaimed writers and artists. The town also hosts its popular music festivals, including **Muntagninjazz**, **Pescocostanzo Classica**, and **Summer Rock Blues Night**.

August honours one of the town's patron saints, San Felice, alongside the Assumption, with religious processions, marching bands, concerts, and streets lined with food stalls. January brings the **Festa di Sant'Antonio Abate**, with the blessing of animals, costumed singers performing traditional chants recounting the saint's battle with the Devil, a large bonfire in Largo Porta di Berardo, and celebrations that continue into the night with *vin brulé*, traditional dishes, and a DJ keeping the festivities alive well into the night.

The summer programme is published each June on the municipality's [Facebook page](#). Details of other festivals can be found on the town's tourist office's [page](#) and updates on the patron saint celebrations are posted by the [festivities committee](#).

Photos: (below) inside the Boteguccia shop; (right) Enrico Donatelli in his workshop



VISIT THE BOBBIN LACE SCHOOL AND MUSEUM

The art of bobbin lace, brought to Pescocostanzo by Lombard craftsmen after the 1456 earthquake, has been preserved for centuries. To safeguard this heritage, the town established the **Scuola per il Tombolo** and the **Mostra Museo Mercato dell'Artigianato** in the 1990s, housed in the 17th-century **Palazzo Fanzago** (Piazza Municipio, 117). The school trains professional artisans while the museum complements this instruction with a display of historic bobbin lace from private and ecclesiastical collections, some dating to the eighteenth century, alongside modern pieces, a table set with the finest examples of Abruzzo's craft: Pescocostanzo lace, Castelli ceramics, and silver filigree cup holders. The museum is open on weekends, with extended hours during the summer and over the Christmas season.

ENJOY THE OUTDOORS

For winter sports, the **Vallefura–Pescocostanzo ski area** offers a gentler alternative to the larger resorts of Roccaraso and Rivisondoli. Four lifts and nine runs spanning roughly seventeen kilometres cater to beginners and families, complemented by snowtubing runs and an evening-lit snowpark for younger visitors.

Photos: (below) bobbin lace from Pescocostanzo; (right) Vallefura-Pescocostanzo ski station; Bosco di Sant'Antonio in autumn

Cross-country enthusiasts can explore 13 kilometres in the Bosco di Sant'Antonio. Well-marked trails make the forest also ideal for leisurely walks in other seasons, or birdwatching, with the occasional sighting of deer, wild boar, and other woodland creatures. You can also hike the nearby mountains with medium difficulty trails running up to Monte Calvario, Pitre Cernaia, Pizzalto, Monte Rotella.

TASTE LOCAL PRODUCTS

Pescocostanzo is renowned for its exceptional cheeses. At **Boteguccia**, Ornella sells cheeses made from sheep and cow's milk by her son Andrea, the third generation of the family to work their farm – don't miss their soft, creamy *formaggio stracchinato*. Nearby, **Biscottificio Di Giacomo** (Via della Fontana, 3) produces the famous pizzella di Pescocostanzo with a hint of cinnamon, alongside traditional biscuits, *ciambelle*, and *cantucci*. Their standout speciality, however, is *la scarsella*, an Easter pastry filled with cheese, cinnamon, sultanas, and candied citron (see the recipe in the April 2025 issue of ABRUZZISSIMO). For more sweet treats and a coffee, pop into the **Biscottificio Artigianale Donatelli**. They make delicious morette alla mandorla, biscuits with heritage *Solina* flour and, during the Christmas season, *il casatiello di Natale*, a Neapolitan-style cake that has become a local favourite.



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Anna Lebedeva

Editor of Abruzzissimo Magazine

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QUICK STOP

MONTONICO MUSEUM IN BISENTI



In the centre of **Bisenti (TE)**, the tiny *Museo dell'Uva e del Vino Montonico* pays tribute to a grape that shaped the identity of the Fino Valley. Found in just 70 hectares around Bisenti and Cermignano, Montonico is an old local variety first recorded in 1615. For centuries it was a household staple. Families hung the bunches from ceiling beams to enjoy fresh grapes through winter, and as vineyards expanded, the grape found its way into wine. The result is a single-variety white with a straw-yellow hue and floral, fruity notes. Left to age into its second year, it can even become a lively sparkling wine once dubbed "*petit champagne*" by Napoleonic troops.

Phylloxera nearly wiped the vines out in the 1930s, emptying the hillsides and pushing many vineyard workers to emigrate. A recovery project in the early 2000s brought Montonico back, and in 2010 the grape earned DOC recognition. Today it grows mostly in family plots and takes centre stage during Bisenti's annual *Revival Uva e Vino Montonico* festival held in autumn.

The museum, offers a compact but engaging journey through this story. A giant 19th-century screw press greets visitors at the entrance, followed by an 18th-century barrel built by Bisenti master coopers, period clothing, contemporary art, and audio-video installations telling the tale of Montonico's cultivation and winemaking.

Address: Piazza A. Costantini. Free admission. Booking is required through the ProLoco at 0039 338 9349406 or proloco.bisenti@gmail.com.

There is no tasting on site, but you can enjoy a glass of Montonico at Bar Tulli in the same *piazza*.

EASY TRAILS

SENTIERO DEL CUORE ABOVE LAKE SCANNO



- **Length:** about 4 km
- **Time:** 1 ½ hours
- **Starting Point:** Behind the Ristorante Hotel del Lago. Search for "Sentiero del Cuore" on Google Maps

Park at the *parcheggio comunale* or along the road near Ristorante Hotel del Lago. From the shore of Lake Scanno, the path winds upward, offering gentle slopes at first, safe wooden railings, and metal handrails for those starting the climb. But soon the trail sheds its human touches, narrowing into a woodland path that threads through pine and oak, with glimpses of the lake's turquoise waters teasing you from below.

The trail gains 250 metres in elevation. The climb is steady but never strenuous, with a few wooden signs and junctions guiding your way. About halfway, the 17th-century Hermitage of Sant'Egidio comes into view, and a nearby stone fountain provides fresh water.

The final stretch steepens slightly, but in just fifteen minutes, the trail opens onto a natural terrace with a lone bench, perfectly positioned to take in the view. From here the lake, framed by hills, looks shaped like a perfect heart (hence the name, Trail of the Heart). Maps and satellite images never capture it this way; it's only from this angle that the magic appears.

The trail is suitable for families. It can get crowded in summer and on weekends when the weather is good. To enjoy the views in peace, try to arrive early or visit on a weekday. See the trail coordinates [here](#).



**TRADITIONAL RECIPES FOR
CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR**

LENTIL AND PORK RIB SOUP

By Fernando Alvarez

I learnt this recipe from Nonna Pina, 87 years old, who cooked the tiny lentils of Santo Stefano di Sessanio the old way, in her fireplace. The scent of rosemary and bay leaves mingled with the smoke of oak wood as the pot bubbled slowly. Portano fortuna e scaldano l'anima, she would tell me – they bring good luck and warm the soul. *Chi mangia lenticchie a Capodanno, trova soldi tutto l'anno* – whoever eats lentils at New Year will find money all year round.

The tradition of eating lentils with pork (*cotiche* or ribs) at *Capodanno* (New Year) exists across Italy, but in Abruzzo we hold a particular treasure – the lentils of Santo Stefano di Sessanio. Cultivated for more than 1,000 years, they are known among European gourmards for their tiny size, dark colour, and rich flavour. This variety doesn't need to be soaked before cooking.

If you can't find lentils from Santo Stefano, choose a good alternative, such as those from Umbria.

In the past, when the dish simmered over an open fire, it needed around two hours to cook.

INGREDIENTS

Serves 6

- 500 g Santo Stefano di Sessanio lentils
- 800 g pork ribs and rind
- 2 celery sticks, roughly chopped
- 2 carrots, cut into rough chunks
- 1 medium onion
- 2 to 3 garlic cloves
- A few bay leaves
- A few sprigs of rosemary
- 5 to 6 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt to taste



PREPARATION

Warm 4 tablespoons of olive oil in a casserole pot with two garlic cloves and let them release their aroma. Add the pork ribs with rind (if using) and brown them thoroughly so they develop a deep, savoury crust.

Stir in the finely chopped onion and let it soften slowly, taking on a gentle colour.

Add the lentils, then pour in enough water to cover everything. Tip in the chopped carrots and celery, along with the rosemary, bay leaves, and a little salt.

Bring to a quiet simmer and cook over a gentle heat for about 1 hour, checking from time to time and adding water if needed. The soup should remain thick and hearty rather than liquid.

Before turning off the heat, taste the lentils to make sure they are fully cooked. Adjust the seasoning, adding a splash of water or a pinch of salt if required.

Serve hot with a generous drizzle of extra virgin olive oil.

Chef Fernando Alvarez, born in Ecuador and raised in Abruzzo, spent 15 years working in some of Europe's most respected restaurants before returning to his home region. He now offers private chef services, creating personalised menus for home dining, private events, romantic dinners, and exclusive celebrations. You can contact him on [Instagram](#).

I CAUCNITTI FROM TIONE DEGLI ABRUZZI

By Jessica Ciccarone

Across Abruzzo, these sweet half-moon pastries go by many names: *calcionetti*, *caviciunitte*, *caggiunitte*, and in Tione degli Abruzzi, *caucnitti*. Whatever they are called, they remain one of the region's most beloved winter treats, once eaten during long tombola evenings and stored in wicker baskets until Epiphany. In the old days, they were fried over the fireplace, and each village and family had its own version. Some recipes use Montepulciano grape jam, but our Tione recipe calls for chickpeas, which were once widely grown in the mountains of Abruzzo.

This version comes from the *Ricettario della tradizione tionesa*, a collection dedicated to the Pagliare di Tione, published by our association, *Il Melo di Nonno Dario*. More than a cookbook, it preserves stories of dough kneaded at dawn, ricotta made the same morning, and sauces left to simmer for hours. The dishes it gathers are humble yet full of character, deeply tied to the land and to the pastoral world that sustained generations.

If you want to purchase the *ricettario* (in Italian), please contact Il Melo di Nonno Dario association at ilmelodinonnodario@gmail.com. For more information about their work and the preservation of Pagliare di Tione, see their [website](#) and Jessica's article in the April 2022 issue of ABRUZZISSIMO.

INGREDIENTS

Makes 50-60 pieces

For the dough:

- 1 kg of "00" flour
- 200 g of sugar
- a cup of olive oil
- 3 eggs
- a glass of red wine
- 1 tsp cinnamon

For the filling:

- 1 kg cooked chickpeas
- 200 g raisins
- 300 g honey
- 250 g sugar
- 100 g chopped candied cedro zest (can be replaced with candied citrus peel)
- 100 g chopped almonds
- 50g unsweetened cocoa powder



PREPARATION

Combine the flour, sugar, olive oil, eggs, red wine, and cinnamon, kneading until you obtain smooth, elastic dough. Cover it and let it rest for about half an hour.

Meanwhile, prepare the filling. Drain the cooked chickpeas and mash them until smooth. Transfer to a bowl and stir in the raisins, honey, sugar, chopped candied citron, chopped almonds, and unsweetened cocoa, mixing thoroughly until all the ingredients are well combined into a thick, uniform paste.

Once the dough has rested, roll it out on a lightly floured surface to a thickness of about 3–4 millimetres. Cut it into circles about 10 centimetres in diameter. Place a spoonful of filling in the centre of each circle, then fold it over to form a half-moon shape. Press the edges firmly to seal.

Heat a generous amount of oil in a deep pan until it reaches 170–180°C. Fry the *caucnitti* in batches, turning occasionally, until they are golden brown and crisp on all sides. Remove them and drain briefly on paper towels.

Once cooled, dust the *caucnitti* with icing sugar before serving. They can be enjoyed immediately or stored in an airtight container for several days.



SCARPONI DELLE MAESTRE DI PRATOLA PELIGNA

By Barbara Summa

Of my nine aunties, Silvestrone from Ofena, zia Sestina, as her name suggests, was the sixth-born. She became a teacher, married in Pratola Peligna, and lived there until she was ninety-five – bless her memory. Her daughter, zia Paola, followed in her footsteps and became a *maestra* in the same town.

So, I call this recipe *gli Scarponi delle maestre di Pratola*. It has a few tweaks compared to other versions from Sulmona, Bugnara, or elsewhere in the Valle Peligna. Most of the time you find it under the name *Scarponi di Sulmona*. It's zia Sestina's recipe, written in her neat teacher's handwriting in the little recipe booklet that later passed on to zia Paola. After both of them passed away, zia Sestina's daughter-in-law, Grazia, lovingly shared it with me.

It's a recipe the rest of their sisters, scattered all over the place, never really made themselves, but there was no need. We would always have them at our Christmas reunions in Sulmona or Ofena, just as zia Sestina and zia Paola used to make them.

Remember that in traditional recipes the amount of flour is always indicative, because you add *quella che si tira*, meaning as much as the liquid ingredients can absorb.

I have two versions of my aunt's recipe: one specifically calls for extra-virgin olive oil, the other for seed oil. As always, you use what you have at home. Olive oil has a more pronounced flavour and is more expensive, but if you enjoy that particular taste, I would choose it.

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.

INGREDIENTS

Makes 40-45 biscuits

- 1 kg "00" flour
- 200 g dark chocolate
- 150 g unsweetened cocoa powder
- 200 g sugar

- 100 g candied citron, roughly chopped (cedro candito)
- 100 g sultanas (raisins), soaked in warm water
- 40 g baking powder (about three small packets)
- A handful of walnuts and almonds, roughly chopped
- 3–4 glasses of *mosto cotto* (cooked grape must), depending on consistency
- 1 glass extra virgin olive oil or sunflower oil
- Ground cinnamon, to taste

PREPARATION

In a saucepan, gently warm the *mosto cotto* with the broken pieces of dark chocolate until the chocolate melts completely. Set aside to cool slightly.

In a large bowl, combine most of the flour, cocoa powder, sugar, baking powder, and cinnamon. Stir well. And add the citron and raisins.

Pour the warm *mosto*-chocolate mixture into the dry ingredients. Add the olive oil and mix with a wooden spoon or with your hands until you obtain a compact but soft dough. Adjust the texture by adding a little flour if too wet, or a spoonful of *mosto cotto* if too dry.

With slightly oiled hands, form small balls about the size of a walnut. Place them on a baking tray lined with parchment paper and brushed lightly with oil, leaving some space between each – they will expand slightly in the oven.

Bake in a preheated static oven at 165 °C / 330 °F for about 15–20 minutes, until firm outside but still soft inside.

Let cool completely, then dust with icing sugar before serving.

54 Christmas markets, nativity scenes, and festive experiences in Abruzzo

Every year, Abruzzo hosts many mercatini di Natale. Although our region rarely appears on lists of Italy's top Christmas destinations, its holiday markets are well worth a visit. Some feature just a handful of stalls, while others have several dozen - but all offer plenty of festive cheer and good food..

Mercatini di Natale normally run through December until January 8. Some markets are open in the afternoon, others all day (especially, on Sundays or bigger ones). Make sure to check the dates and opening times via the links we provide in each listing before heading to a market for the day.

Here is our updated round-up of 45 Christmas markets, big and small, held throughout the region this holiday season. This year's listings feature six of the most beautiful presepi, an essential part of Abruzzo's Christmas tradition, along with several other special experiences not to be missed.

PRACTICAL ADVICE



We have done our best to provide the accurate dates for the mercatini di Natale, but they may change, so please check the links in the descriptions before heading out.



Many markets are open only in the afternoon, and some close for lunch. Be sure to check the opening hours using the links provided in the descriptions.



Allow extra time for your visit and consider stopping at a local restaurant for lunch.



Larger markets (e.g., in Pacentro) offer organised parking, usually for a small fee.



Pescara
December 1 - January 6

Abruzzo's main commercial center, Pescara, goes all out with a splendid display of Christmas spirit bursting from 24 wooden huts installed on piazza Sacro Cuore with artisans and sellers from Abruzzo, Trentino, Puglia, and Sicily. Light shows and colourful nativity scenes lend merriment to the festivities. A small skating rink is installed on piazza Salotto and marching bands will be playing in the city's neighbourhoods throughout December. Some stalls open in the morning with a break for lunch, while others open only in the evening. Keep an eye on the municipality's [page](#) for more details.

Tione degli Abruzzi
(AQ)
December 6

The traditional Festa di San Nicola will start at 10am with a Santa Messa and procession. From 6pm, a mini-Christmas village with a market will welcome visitors with zampognari playing festive tunes and gifts distributed to children. On December 6, Tione can easily be combined with a visit to Goriano Valli, as the two towns are just a few minutes' drive apart. See the full programme on the [Cuore della Valle page](#).

Bugnara (AQ)
December 6

The Christmas Market in Piazza SS. Rosario will open at 2pm, bringing together local artisans, associations, and producers selling handcrafted goods and artworks. You can enjoy a full afternoon of entertainment, including archery shows, flag-wavers, drumming workshops, and Christmas decoration labs. Children can meet Santa in his village, join creative activities, and enjoy festive games, while the streets come alive with music from the Banda dei Babbi Natale. Food and drink stalls serve winter treats such as polenta, roasted chestnuts, sausages, frittelle, fried pizza, vin brulé, and local wines and spirits. More details on the municipality's [page](#).



Pennapiedimonte (CH)
December 6

Starting at 4pm, the pretty mountain town will host a lively Christmas market with artisans selling gifts such as ceramics, jewellery, leather crafts, and local delicacies. On the central Piazza Umberto I there will be a DJ, karaoke, roasted chestnuts with vine brulè, hot chocolate, and such traditional dishes as *pizza e foije*.

See the full programme on the municipality's [Instagram page](#) or [Facebook](#).

Goriano Valli (AQ)
December 6-8

Starting at 11am, the town of Goriano Valli will come alive with a small Christmas market, with stalls selling local crafts, sweets, teas, and artisanal products, while the aroma of vin brulé and hot chocolate fills the air. Santa Claus will make a special appearance at 4.30pm, adding a festive touch to the town's atmosphere. On 7 December, Goriano Valli hosts the 1st Abruzzese Blanket Gathering, celebrating local stories, skills, and creativity, with exhibitions and guided tours of the lovely MuDi museum during which you can see the old houses and learn about the town's past. See the full programme on the [Cuore della Valle page](#).

Tagliacozzo (AQ)
December 6 - January 6

Dozens of local craftspeople and food artisans will be selling their products in wooden huts in the centre of Tagliacozzo. Over the Christmas holidays, the piazza will host a *tombolata* and prize draws for children, while itinerant stiltwalkers perform magical acts and street vendors offer traditional hot dishes. The full programme and updates are published on the ProLoco's [page](#).

Avezzano (AQ)
December 6 - January 6

Conveniently located between Rome and Abruzzo's coastal area, Avezzano is a lovely central hub to visit for Christmas. The town's central Piazza Risorgimento will be dotted with wooden booths that offer foods typical of the region and season, wine, and craft products. At the refreshment points located throughout the piazza you can purchase local products or treat yourself to waffles and even kebabs. A skating rink, Santa train, and a heated tent hosting concerts, theatre, films, and children's shows offer opportunities for fun activities and entertainment.

For opening hours and the full details see the [ProLoco's](#) and the [event's](#) pages.

Roccaraso (AQ)
December 6 - 8, 13-14, December 20 - 31, January 1 - 6

Roccaraso is home to a popular ski resort and always has a rich programme of winter festivities. As the last stop of the Transiberiana Railroad, it hosts one of the most visited Christmas markets in Abruzzo. Booths lining Viale Roma and Piazza Leone offer specialty crafts, gift items, and local foods such as the hearty zuppa di Natale, a photo and art exhibition, and music. From 10.30am to 7pm. A large covered ice rink will be open over the festive period most of the days. The full programme is available [here](#).

Calascio (AQ)
December 6-8,
December 27 - January 6

Home to the iconic castle of Rocca Calascio, during this period the town itself takes centre stage. It adorns itself with illuminated buildings and holiday decorations throughout its historic streets. One can enjoy demonstrations of the work done in past eras, art installations, music, and children's entertainment. Warmed wine is available to see you through your festive strolls. More details are [here](#).

While you are there: Make sure to take a walk to the famous castle of Rocca Calascio. You can either drive up the road to a small car park and walk from there or hike up from the village (about 40 minutes up a steep, but beautiful path).

Roccascalegna (CH)
December 6 - 8

Head to Roccascalegna for a browse through craft and food stalls, festive cheer, and a visit to the medieval castle which will be open throughout the days (yes, even during lunch time!) until late evening. From 10am to 8pm, there will be theatre performances for kids, flamethrowers and, on December 8, a gospel choir performance. See the full programme [here](#) or on the event's [page](#).



Villaggio di Natale Caramanico Terme

dal 15 Novembre al 6 Gennaio tutti i weekend e festivi



Caramanico Terme (PE)
December 6-7, 13-14, 20-21, 27-28, December 20 - January 6

Don't miss the twinkle-light-laden Christmas village market in Caramanico Terme, one of the biggest and most beautiful in Abruzzo. Both kids and adults can hop on a little train to travel along the main street, enjoy a pony ride, or go skating on a small rink. Kids can pay a visit to the elves' village and hand-deliver their letters to Santa. For most of the evening there will be live music and folk band performances. One of the most mesmerising shows of the season will be the stilt walkers dressed as giant luminous white butterflies. See the full programme on the dedicated Facebook [page](#).

Corropoli (TE)
December 6-8

This little festive extravaganza will offer plenty of festive cheer, an array of stalls with artisanal creations and local products. The market opens at 3pm on the above dates and there will be workshops for children, food stands and live music. On December 14, a running competition will be held with participants dressed as Santas. See the full programme [here](#).

Stiffe (AQ)
December 6-8

Following the huge success of the last year's edition, the mercatino di Natale returns to the tiny village of Stiffe, renowned for its magnificent Stiffe Caves. Stalls will be set up in pretty wooden huts, with vendors offering a range of local crafts and typical foods. If you want to have lunch or dinner in one of the local restaurants, make sure to book in advance as the village will be heaving with visitors. See the Grotte di Stiffe [page](#) for details.

While you are there: Make sure to visit the Stiffe Caves that will be lit up with special Christmas light installations (for more details see the section "Presepi in Abruzzo").



L'Aquila
December 6 - January 6

Without a doubt, one of the biggest and most beautiful markets in the region, the Mercatino di Natale di L'Aquila animates Corso Vittorio Emmanuele in the heart of the city from December 8 to January 6. The skating rink and colourful giant Ferris wheel on Piazza Duomo transform the old part of the city into the kingdom of Christmas. Vendors sell local delicacies and a wide array of holiday ornaments, from tacky to quality handmade. On December 11-14, there will also be a Harry Potter-themed Fiera della Magia market with many events for all fans of the famous wizard. More details on the event's dedicated [page](#) or [website](#).

On December 6-7, a local association is organising a Medieval Christmas celebration with a period costume parade, medieval games and music. See the full programme [here](#).

Collecervino (PE)
December 6-8, 13-14

Collecervino's Christmas Village always draws crowds of visitors. During the two festive weekends, you can wander through the crafts market, watch fascinating demonstrations of ancient trades, taste treats at the Elf Chocolate Workshop, watch street artists performances, or partake in a treasure hunt with your little ones. Food stands will be dishing out hot food, including everyone's favourites *calcionetti* (fried ravioli with a jam or chocolate filling) and deep-fried pizza.

For more details see the event's [page](#).

Mercatini di Natale

Alba Fucens, Aq



VISITE GUIDATE - ESPOSIZIONE DI ARTIGIANATO - FOOD TRUCK
MUSICA - SPETTACOLI - MASCOTTE BIMBI



6 -7- 8 DICEMBRE 2025

Orari

Sabato 6 12:00-21:00 Domenica 7 10:00-21:00 Lunedì 8 10:00-19:00

Piazza della scuola, Alba Fucens di Massa D'Albe -AQ

Con il patrocinio del
Comune di Massa D'Albe



Massa D'Albe/Alba Fucens
(AQ)
December 7-8

Ancient Roman ruins and a merry *mercato di Natale* is a winning combination. You can browse Christmas gifts and local gastronomic delights by local artisans and then take a guided tour of the town's archaeological site where once Alba Fucens, an important Roman city, stood. Fill up on tasty, hot fritters and other traditional fare. The events kick off at 3.30pm on both Saturday and Sunday, with guided tours scheduled for 11.00am each day. See the organisers' Facebook [page](#) for full details.

Atessa (CH)
December 5 - January 6

Visitors can explore charming wooden huts filled with unique handmade gifts, enjoy a ride on Santa's Train, and glide across the ice-skating rink in Piazza Garibaldi. In addition to live music, performances, tastings, delicious local dishes and wines, old botteghe along Corso Vittorio Emanuele will re-open their doors to showcase artisans' works. The full programme is published on the event's [page](#).

Gissi (CH)
December 7

Gissi lights up for the holidays with its Christmas Market, starting at 3pm. Stalls in the town centre will be selling handcrafted gifts, local honey, olive oil, salumi and cheeses as well as delicious scrippelle, calcinetti, fried fregne, and vin brulé. At 5pm, the festive atmosphere peaks with the lighting of the Christmas illuminations. For more details see the municipality's [page](#) and the dedicated event's [page](#).

Civitaquana (PE)
December 7

The new edition of *Aspettando il Natale* in Piazza Umberto I will start at 10am. There will be small artisan market, food stalls, and activities for all ages. In the afternoon, Mago Ithan will amaze visitors with a magic show at 3pm, followed by Santa's arrival at 4.30pm, when children can hand him their letters. Live music, roasted chestnuts, vin brulé, and a crochet Christmas tree crafted by local women will complete the festive atmosphere. See the full programme on the ProLoco's [page](#).

DOM **MERCATINI** LUN
DI NATALE 10^a EDIZIONE
7 **PACENTRO** **8**
ARTIGIANATO - ENOGASTRONOMIA - OGGETTISTICA - MUSICA
· **DICEMBRE** ·



Comune di
Pacentro



PROLOCO
PACENTRO



APERTURA
h 10.00



CHIUSURA
h 20.30



Pacentro (AQ)
December 7-8

Pacentro's little squares and old streets will be lit up with Christmas lights for the town's annual festive market. About 50 stalls will be set up in small wooden houses and cellars of the the town's old palazzi. It is one of the best markets in the region for the quality of the gifts and food on offer as well as the magic atmosphere of Pacentro, one of the most beautiful towns in the whole of Italy. There will be Santa Claus greeting kids, music, and a great atmosphere. A dedicated parking space just outside the old part of the town will be available at €5 per car. Open from 10am to 10.30 (but some stalls close for lunch). More details [here](#).

While you are there: *Make sure to visit the Caldora Castle on the top of the town.*

Pretoro (CH)
December 7-8

Pretoro (CH) transforms for a festive celebration that turns the village into a living fairy tale. The streets will fill with lights, music, and roaming performers. Children can meet Santa in his grotto, while artisan markets invite everyone to discover unique gifts inspired by local traditions. Along the route, festive entertainment and music create a warm, lively atmosphere, making it a celebration that delights all ages. See the full programme on the organisers' [page](#).

Rapino (CH)
December 7

Rapino celebrates Christmas with a full day of mercatino di Natale in the historic centre, starting at 10am. Local businesses, artisans, and hobbyists will showcase handmade creations and traditional products. Children will find dedicated activities, while the food area offers seasonal dishes to enjoy as you wander between the stalls and sip hot vin brulé. See the details on the municipality's [page](#).



Guardiagrele (CH)
December 7

On December 7 the lights will be lit up on the Christmas tree on the central Piazza Santa Maria Maggiore. You can sip hot vin brulé accompanied with roasted chestnuts and traditional Christmas desserts. More details are available on the ProLoco's [page](#). While you are in the town make sure to visit the Mostra Artigianato Artistico Abruzzese's [gallery](#) and permanent shop for regional quality gifts.

Francavilla al Mare (CH)
December 7, 13

The small garden on via Zara will become a magical Garden of Elves kicking off the festive programme in the town. There will be a small craft market organised by a local women's association (expect pretty crocheted decorations and accessories), Babbo Natale with his Elves, plenty of candy floss and, in the evening, a bonfire to celebrate the Immacolata Concezione. For more details see the organisers' [page](#) and the dedicated event's [page](#).

The festivities will continue every weekend evening until January 6 with a Christmas mini-train, light shows with magicians and giant dragons. On December 13, on Piazza Sirena, there will be artisan stands, tasty holiday food, and live music to delight young and old. The full programme will be published on [Visit Francavilla](#).

Città Sant'Angelo (PE)
December 7-8

For two evenings, the old streets of Città Sant'Angelo will host Christmas markets and festive celebrations. The neighborhoods will be decorated with lights and the streets lined with merchants selling holiday gifts and local produce. A Christmas band of Santas and a street artists will be entertaining visitors. The full programme of the events at the town's Christmas Village will be published on [Visit Città Sant'Angelo](#).

Pietracamela (TE)
December 7

Pietracamela is already draped in snow, so bundle up before heading to this picturesque mountain town. The market opens at 2pm in Piazza degli Eroi, where *zampognari* bagpipers will fill the streets with festive music. Throughout the historic centre, miniature nativity scenes will be set in every corner, adding a magical touch. In the evening, the streets will be illuminated with twinkling lights, while stalls sell artisan gifts, seasonal treats, and warm drinks. The details are published on the municipality's [page](#).

Castel Castagna (TE)
December 7-26

The famous Santa's House in Castel Castagna is back for its 10th edition promising magical experiences for all ages. Located near the picturesque Abbey of Santa Maria di Ronzano, this enchanting attraction features over 400 square metres of festive displays, including the new Garden of Wonders, the Enchanted Forest, and an expanded Elf Village. Visitors can enjoy live Christmas music, creative workshops, a small market with local products, and delightful themed areas like Santa's bedroom and pastry kitchen. With twinkling lights and Santa's giant tree, this free-entry event is a perfect way to celebrate the holiday season for the whole family. See full details on the event's [page](#).

Bisenti (TE)
December 8, 13

Enjoy religious celebrations, a small craft market, Christmas choir concerts, *vin brulé*, *tombola*, and much more. The full programme is published on the organisers' Facebook page.

While you are there: visit the house where, according to local legend, Pontius Pilate was born. For more, see this article on [ABRUZZISSIMO website](#).

Cellino Attanasio (TE)
December 8, 14, 21

Cellino Attanasio is preparing to open its Christmas village to celebrate the holiday season. The town will be transformed into a magical wonderland as its streets glow with festive lights. The festivities will feature a traditional nativity scene, *zampognari* bagpipers playing Abruzzese Christmas music, and the *trenino di Natale* (Christmas mini-train) delighting children as it choo-choos through the town. Events will continue until the weekend of the Epiphany. Keep an eye on the municipality's [page](#) for details.

Navelli (AQ)
December 8

From 3pm to 9pm, Piazza Piccioli will turn into Navelli's festive heart, alive with music, colour, and family-friendly fun. Santa's Village, pony rides, a show of fantastic creatures, and the bright sounds of the Banda di Babbo Natale will animate the historic centre, while a dj set and group dances keep the energy high. Stalls will serve street food, *crêpes*, local wines, *vin brulé*, beer, and hot chocolate, alongside producers and artisans selling saffron, handmade soaps, and seasonal crafts. The full programme is published on the ProLoco's [page](#).

Penne (PE)
December 8, 13-14, 20-21,
24-25, 27-28, January 6

Il Borgo di Babbo Natale and Christmas market in Penne will transform the town's Viale San Francesco into a magical place. Santa's house, face painting, and the beloved Bobo the Bear, the village mascot, will keep the kids entertained while the adults can indulge in good food, browse artisanal gifts stands, and listen to live concerts. For more details see the organisers' Facebook [page](#).

Castilenti (TE)
December 13-14

The local women worked hard crocheting a huge Christmas tree that will light up with twinkling lights on December 13. There will be a Babbo Natale marching band, activities for kids, a bonfire and hot drinks. While it may be a small market, its warm and joyful community spirit more than makes up for its size.

The full programme of the festivities is published on the organisers' Facebook [page](#).

Bomba (CH)
December 13-14

A small, delightful market is worth visiting for the cheerful atmosphere and its beautiful location: the town sits above the Bomba lake. The second edition of the Christmas Markets in Bomba promises a festive celebration for all. Wander through the stalls in Piazza G. Matteotti and along Via Sangritana, where you'll find a range of local crafts and delicious traditional dishes. With entertainment for the whole family, from exciting activities for children to festive fun for adults, this event is the perfect way to get into the holiday spirit.

For more information check out the event's Facebook [page](#).

Paglieta (CH)
December 13-14

A small but lively market with music, activities for children, stands selling traditional Christmas treats, roasted chestnuts and hot drinks. Starting at 3pm. See the details on the ProLoco's [page](#).

Cepagatti (PE)
December 13-14

In Cepagatti, over two days, the historic town centre will transform into a Christmas village. Highlights include the Christmas parade featuring Santa's band, horses and pony rides for kids, live music, artisan stands with gifts and food stalls, art exhibitions and a group of traditional *zampognari* (bagpipers) playing old Abruzzese Christmas music on the streets. More details [here](#).

Castel Frentano (CH)
December 13 - 14

Two days of music, entertainments for kids and a few stalls selling gifts and local foods. It is a small but cheerful market in the charming old center of Castel Frentano. There is also an interesting exhibition of presepi (Christmas cribs) in Palazzo Clalente on Piazza Caporali from December 8 to January 7. More details are published in the Castel Frentano Oggi Facebook group.

vedizione

NATALE in ABBZIA

13/14 Dicembre
ore 11.00 - 22.00

THEFRAME
Associazione Culturale



Morro d'Oro (TE) December 13-14

The Abbazia di Propezzano, a historic 12th-century abbey, will host a two-day Christmas market from 11am to 10pm. The artisan market will feature carefully selected artisans and makers, offering high-quality gifts – some of the best in Abruzzo – including sustainable fashion, design pieces, and local specialties. You can also enjoy food and wine, with traditional dishes and creative culinary offerings paired with the abbey's own wines. Live music and a dedicated kids' area ensure fun for all ages. More details on the event's [page](#).

Colledimezzo (CH) December 14

For one Sunday, the town will transform into a festive wonderland. Strolling through the historic centre, you can explore stalls selling local crafts and decorations. The food area will serve up traditional pasta dishes, panini, and festive fritters. With activities for children and lively entertainment throughout the afternoon. See more details on the dedicated [page](#).

Lettomanoppello (PE) December 14

The Christmas market in Lettomanoppello opens at 3pm, with street performers adding to the festive atmosphere. Stalls feature local crafts and seasonal foods. The town has planned a full programme of events running until January 6, available on the Lettomanoppello Informa [page](#). Highlights include a *tombolata* and polenta in Piazza Umberto I on December 21, traditional *zampognari* bagpipers performing through the streets on December 24, and on December 27, roasted chestnuts, vin brulé, sausages, and another *tombolata* hosted by the local group of pensioners in the main square.



Manoppello (PE)
December 14

Manoppello will celebrate the season with its Casa di Babbo Natale and a festive market filled with music, artisan stalls, and unique gift ideas. A Santa Claus marching band will entertain visitors in the streets, while traditional Christmas sweets, hot chocolate, and vin brulé will be available from food stands. Activities begin at 3pm, and the full programme is available on the organiser's [page](#).

Campo Di Giove (AQ)
December 6-8, 13-14, 20-21, 26-30, January 2-6

Small, but one of the most charming, this Christmas market in the center of Campo Di Giove runs until January 6. The stalls in Piazza Duval showcase local artisans and their products such as cheeses, cured meats, traditional liqueurs, and other goodies. There is no shortage of arrosticini, porchetta sandwiches, hearty soups, mulled wine, and other festive treats. Families with kids can enjoy a ride in a mini-train along the main street. This year, there is also a small ice rink. On Sundays, the market is packed with visitors arriving on board the Transiberiana, the vintage train that runs between Sulmona and Roccaraso (see below). See the full programme [here](#).

Cappadocia (AQ)
December 6-7

For two days from 11am to 10pm (till 5pm on Sunday), Cappadocia's historic centre hosts *Presepi nel Borgo 2025*, a festive route of handcrafted nativity scenes. You can explore narrow streets, alleys, and historic cellars to admire works by professional artisans and local enthusiasts.

The route also features local crafts and food stalls offering hot dishes and regional specialties. Attendees can vote for their favourite nativity scene, with the most popular winning a trophy. The full programme is [here](#).



Capistrano (AQ)
Dates to be confirmed)

The programme of festivities in Capistrano will be packed with activities: Elves, Babbo Natale, *zampognari* (bagpipe players), plenty of delicious food such as castagne with *vin brule*, *pizza frita*, and *baccalà e patate* as well as cooking demonstrations featuring traditional Christmas desserts, and the local church choir singing in the evening. The dates are expected to be published [here](#).

Lanciano (CH)
Dates to be confirmed

The town of Lanciano has a special atmosphere during the Christmas season with street food trucks set up in the city's park Villa delle Rose and an antique market on Corso Trento e Trieste. As always, the city's festivities programme will include excellent music concerts. Details should be available on the organisers' [page](#) soon.

Pescasseroli (AQ)
Dates to be confirmed

The central Piazza Umberto I in the town will be hosting a Christmas market with many vendors selling crafts, local produce, street food and mulled wine. There are many good restaurants in the center of the town in case you want to have a sit-down meal. The dates should be published soon on the municipality's [page](#).

You can combine it with a visit to the beautiful town Civitella Alfedena to see the wolf sanctuary and the famous *Presepe* with its life-size papier-mâché figures (see the section *6 Most beautiful Presepi in Abruzzo* below for more details).



6 most beautiful presepi in Abruzzo

Presepi are a big part of Abruzzo's Christmas tradition. A presepe (Nativity scene) typically depicts the birth of Christ and often includes figures of the Holy Family, shepherds, animals, and the Three Wise Men. They can be miniature or life-size and are displayed in nooks and crannies of small towns, churches, and public spaces throughout the region. In Abruzzo, presepi often reflect the local landscape and traditions, incorporating handcrafted figurines dressed in traditional Abruzzese attire or featuring scenes of rustic village life.

Some towns take the tradition further with presepi viventi (living Nativity scenes), where entire communities come together to reenact the story of Christ's birth in medieval villages, caves, or ancient ruins. These are the most memorable and fascinating spectacles you can see during this holiday season. We pick five of the most beautiful presepi for you.

Presepe vivente in Cerqueto (TE) December 26

The *presepe vivente* (living Nativity scene) has been a treasured tradition since 1966. Celebrated annually on 26 December at 6.30pm, this event transforms the village into a magical setting that combines the spirit of Christmas with the natural beauty of the surrounding forests and the majestic Gran Sasso. The narrow streets of Cerqueto are illuminated by flickering torches, casting moving shadows on the ancient stone walls, while the central Nativity stable – a handcrafted structure that remains in place year-round – becomes the heart of the celebration. The role of Baby Jesus is given to a newborn from the community. Shepherds from Cerqueto, accompanied by their sheep and goats, add authenticity to the scene, creating an atmosphere that is both deeply spiritual and evocative of Abruzzo's pastoral traditions. The small village becomes very crowded during the event, so arrive early if you want a good view of the performances. For more details see this [page](#).

Presepe vivente in Chieti January 6

For over 30 years, Chieti has hosted its presepe vivente, a living nativity that transforms the city's streets and squares into a vivid recreation of the world at the time of Jesus' birth. Visitors enter from Largo Martiri della Libertà and follow a path through re-enactments of the Village of Nazareth, bustling markets, ancient crafts, Roman encampments, and finally the Nativity scene in Piazza Malta. More than a hundred costumed performers, alongside dance, music, and even birds of prey, bring the story to life, while an evening concert of Christmas songs adds a magical soundtrack. See the map of the *Presepe* and full programme on the dedicated [page](#).

Nativity Light Installations in Stiffe (AQ) December 1 - January 6

The Stiffe Caves, one of Abruzzo's natural wonders, take on a magical glow during the holiday season with *Meraviglie di luci: il Presepe incantato* (Wonders of Light: The Enchanted Nativity). The event blends the timeless tradition of the Nativity with the caves' magic, creating a mesmerizing atmosphere where dazzling display of over 50 light installations illuminate the natural formations. Visitors are taken on a 90-minute guided tour through the caves, where stunning illuminations and the enchanting atmosphere bring the story of Christmas to life in an unforgettable way. Open daily from 10.30am to 4.30pm. For more details see the dedicated [page](#).

Living Nativity in Pacentro December 26

The *presepe vivente* (living Nativity) of Pacentro, in its 25th edition this year, is one of the most anticipated traditions in the region. Held every year during the Christmas holidays, this captivating event blends the sacred story of Christ's birth with the vibrant local customs of the town, creating a truly immersive experience. The streets of Pacentro are transformed into a living depiction of Bethlehem, with local residents portraying figures from the Nativity story, set against the backdrop of the village's medieval charm. The event also highlights the area's agrarian roots, featuring workshops where visitors can witness traditional crafts such as blacksmithing, sewing, and lace-making. The air is filled with the scents of local foods – gnocchi, chestnuts, and regional sweets – adding to the sensory experience. The event starts at 6pm. For more details see the organisers' [page](#).

**Life-size papier-mâché
Nativity in Civitella Alfedena
From the first week of
December to January 6**



Civitella Alfedena looks like a fairy tale town in winter. Add Christmas lights, some snow and a nativity scene, and it becomes pure magic. For one month, starting the first week of December, life-size papier-mâché figures of bakers, blacksmiths, butchers, cobblers going on about their business are set up in courtyards, wine cellars, narrow alleyways and small squares in the historic centre of the town. Around any corner you might bump into a shepherd carrying a basket of hay, a donkey, or an old lady spinning wool. At the end of the itinerary, at the top of the town, you will find the manger with Baby Jesus cosily nestled in a natural grotto. The scenes are lit up from 5pm to 11pm. The dates are announced on the local tourism office [page](#).

**Theatrical Presepe vivente
in Rivisondoli
January 5**

Every year, about 100 people are involved in bringing Biblical scenes to life and the roles are assigned months before the event. Baby Jesus is always represented by the town's last newborn. A few years ago, a famous Italian theatre director was invited to revise the scenography of the manger scene to make sure it was more magical than ever. It has been snowing this year, so, maybe, Rivisondoli will get a white Christmas which will make the event truly special. It attracts big crowds and the atmosphere is very festive. For more details, see the municipality's Facebook [page](#) and a beautiful photo gallery on this [website](#).



3 Special festive experiences in Abruzzo

Case illuminate in Roseto degli Abruzzi, Manoppello Scalo, Ortona

In Abruzzo, three private villas have become a unique Christmas attraction, enchanting visitors each year with their festive displays. The homes—located in Ortona, Manoppello, and Roseto degli Abruzzi—are owned by private families who spare no expense or imagination, decorating their villas and gardens with thousands of lights every evening from December until the Epiphany.

To visit, simply search on Google Maps for *La Casa Illuminata* in Roseto degli Abruzzi or *Casa di Babbo Natale* in Manoppello. The illuminated villa in Ortona can be found along the road at Lido Riccio. These sparkling displays attract crowds of children and adults alike. There's no set schedule—just head there in the evening to experience the magic.

Ice rinks

Across Abruzzo, the festive season brings the joy of ice skating to town centres, with small outdoor rinks set up in several piazzas over the Christmas holidays. In L'Aquila, Pianella (PE), Atessa (CH), Sant'Omero (TE), and Pescara, families and visitors can lace up their skates and glide under twinkling lights, surrounded by the charm of historic squares and holiday decorations.

Fiaccolata in Civitella Alfedena (AQ)

Each year, on December 30, the beautiful mountain town of Civitella Alfedena hosts a Fiaccolata, a spectacular torch-lit event that draws thousands of spectators. Gathered around a roaring bonfire, visitors watch figures formed by people holding lit torches in several locations in the mountains above the town, the streets and piazzas forming different shapes and figures accompanied by atmospheric music. The event begins at 9.30pm, when the village is lit only by torches and candles, while the spectators stay warm drinking hot chocolate and vin brulé. In addition, from December 6 to January 6, Civitella Alfedena hosts a life-size papier-mâché nativity (see the section Six most beautiful presepi in Abruzzo). For more details see the event's [page](#).



NEXT ISSUE
FEBRUARY

ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE

GESSOPALENA

The town of gypsum cliffs,
war memories, and an
ancient grape

DEA POMONE

An ancient rite of Alfedena

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