Walking through time

PARKS, CASTLES, MONASTERIES:
DISCOVERING HISTORY AND LEGENDS
FROM THE HEART OF LAZIO
After “Surprising Lazio - Where History meets the Sea”, the guide to the archaeological treasures of the coast of Lazio, we renew our commitment to provide new and updated means of promoting the Region of Lazio’s tourist activities, both in Italy and abroad.

“Surprising Lazio - Walking through Time” starts from the reality of the environmental systems present in Lazio and aims at creating virtual thematic systems regarding the heart of the region.

In order to meet the evident demand for authenticity, local character and substantiality of the present tourist demand, the guide offers particular cultural proposals in addition to the theme of environmental values thus enhancing the entire artistic, historical, and religious heritage of the five Lazio regions, also through charming popular traditions and legends.

In the spirit of an evocative discovery journey through the history of our civilization, let us explore parks and nature reserves along interesting and original itineraries, and meet splendid fortified structures among towns, castles and abbeys.

Their charm will guide us through art and history, faith and legends, nature and traditions, providing a new and unexpected rhythm to our walks through time.

Luigi Ciaramelletti
Councilor for the Promotion of Culture, Entertainment, Sports and Tourism
Surprising Lazio!

www.regione.lazio.it
A THOUSAND DISCOVERIES IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF BANDITS

We start our journey into the heart of Lazio amidst breathtaking natural scenery in Tuscia, the noble land crossed since antiquity by pilgrims and travelers, scene of power struggles between Guelphs and Ghibellines, rich in traditions and cultures of remote origin.

CASTLES AND FORTRESSES

THE MONALDESCHI DELLA CERVARA FORTRESS

Bolsena

The medieval town dominated by the splendid Rocca Monaldeschi awaits us on the hill slopes of the Monti Volsini overlooking Lake Bolsena, the largest lake of volcanic origin in Italy. The first defensive town wall and watchtower, corresponding to the main tower of the present fortress, were built in 1156 over the remains of ancient Velzna, the last of the 12 Etruscan cities conquered by the Romans (256 BC), and the Roman town of Volatini.

Those were the days of the raids of Frederick Barbarossa when Pope Hadrian IV ordered the fortification of all the towns situated along the Via Cassia. The original fortress was erected in 1295, and in the early 1300s, following a vast fortification campaign of the numerous Monaldeschi castles, members of Cervara faction started living there on a regular basis. In 1334 Ermanno Monaldeschi became podestà of the village and consolidated the authority of his family that obtained ownership of the fortress by order of Boniface VIII (1398), and later of Alexander V (1409). Political events and the decline of the Monaldeschi (1451) caused the fortress to be abandoned in 1460; raids and fires, also at the hand of the Lansquenets, caused further damage. In 1612, the structure was assigned to Cardinal Sanesio, bishop of Orvieto, who promoted restorations that proved useless in the wake of the terrible earthquake of 1665. Used as a prison and warehouse, it was restructured again in 1750 when Benedict XIV assigned it in perpetual lease to Captain Florido Zampi. Yet in 1815, the population itself preferred to destroy the castle rather than leave it to Luciano Bonaparte, prince of nearby Canino.

Thanks to restoration started in the 1970s, the Fortress is now open to the public and houses a Historical Museum.
The common practice of “personalizing” and decorating military banners and shields answered the need to distinguish the different corps of the Christian army during the Crusades. The symbols and figures were later adopted by noble families as a sign of distinction and dignity. This is how aristocratic coats of arms and emblems came into being and during the 12th century their use became widespread throughout the West. Following bitter internal struggles, the Monaldeschi counts were divided into four branches: della Cervara, del Cane, della Vipera, dell’Aquila. The coat of arms of the Cervara branch is present in all the pictorial decorations of the numerous family palaces between Umbria and Upper Lazio.

Starting from the 11th century, in the area around the lake of Bolsena, power was also held by the Farnese family, originally from the ancient Castrum Farneti, corresponding to today’s Farnese. Owing to the intense political and military activities of Ranuccio the Elder, military defender of the papacy and nominated Senator of Rome in 1417, the family succeeded in obtaining estates in Tuscia as well as prestige. In time they acquired and built strategic castles, strongholds and fortresses virtually tracing a medieval and Renaissance itinerary in the lake valley: Gradoli, with the imposing Palazzo Farnese, a Renaissance work by Sangallo, Latera and its Farnese Castle in the heart of the medieval town, Valentano, with the Tower and the Fortress, seat of the Study Center on the ducal family, Ornano with the Rocca Farnese but famous also for the variety of lentils by the same name, founded in the 16th century, and Farnese, with the remains of an ancient fortress and a prehistoric, archaeological museum. We finally return to the lake at Capodimonte, dominated by the 16th century Rocca Farnese.
THE REGIONAL PARKS OF MONTE RUFENO AND SELVA DEL LAMONE

Massive volcanic eruptions have shaped this territory: lakes and hills, gorges and mountains are evidence of a highly active geology. This is the Lazio section of Tuscia, one of the most beautiful areas in Italy, where the ancient volcanoes of Volsinio, Cimino and Sabatino created the lakes of Bolsena, Bracciano and Vico.

The thermal springs of Tolfa were already famous in ancient Roman times, but lovely Caldara di Manziana, situated in a unique natural context that favours the presence of the southernmost birch trees in Europe, also deserves a visit. In the Monti della Tolfa the landscape becomes rougher. It is the setting for many Italian-style western films and a favourite area for horse and cattle breeding, an area of great natural variety with ancient agricultural traditions at a stone’s throw from the capital. In this context, the nature reserve of Monte Rufeno is a strip of Lazio caught within the legendary land of Siena, whereas the Selva del Lamone is one of the most interesting and least known protected areas in Lazio.

THE PARK IN NUMBERS

Nature Reserve of Monte Rufeno
Management: Municipality of Acquapendente
Surface: 2,892 hectares
Instituted: 1983

Nature Reserve of Selva del Lamone
Management: Municipality of Farnese
Surface: 2,002 hectares
Instituted: 1994

Provincial nature reserve
Monte Casoli di Bomarzo
Surface: 175 hectares
Instituted: 1999

Tuscania nature reserve
Surface: 1,901 hectares

Woods of Turkey oaks, durmast, Mediterranean bush, along with river bank vegetation along the Paglia.

Numerous varieties of mushrooms are also present, including the Tricholoma Rufenum, perfectly camouflaged in the vegetation.

Above: Lake Bolsena, Bisentina island.

Above: brushwood vegetation.
The hills around the medieval town of Proceno, abutting the Tuscan countryside and hills of Umbria, have for centuries favoured the cultivation of a typical variety of garlic that has been acknowledged as a traditional product of Lazio by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and given an authenticated trademark.

Red garlic has chunky cloves and a strong aroma, it is a product of the land obtained with patient cultivation by hand, careful in each of its phases, from the selection of the bulbs to be planted, to the control of the flowers at the beginning of the summer, the drying and the braiding of the bulbs in the characteristic “resta” strings.
ABBEYS AND MONASTERIES

THE ABBEY OF SAN SEPOLCRO
Acquapendente

THE BASILICA OF THE SANTO SEPOLCRO, SYMBOL OF ACQUAPENDENTE, was involved over the centuries in the fate of what was founded as the stronghold city of the Empire of Otto I. The Basilica was built around the year 1000 above the sepulchre of Mathilda of Westphalia (895-968), Otto’s mother, as an homage to the Sepulchre of Christ in Jerusalem. Seat of the ancient Benedictine abbey, it was annexed to the House of the Templars, the military-monastic order of knights created to defend holy places and protect pilgrims (12th century). The elegant Romanesque-style Basilica was consecrated by Eugene III in 1149.

Between the 12th and early 15th centuries, Acquapendente passed under the rule of emperors, popes, Orvieto and Siena before being finally assigned to the Diocese of Orvieto in the 13th century. This was its period of maximum economic prosperity and the Basilica was decorated and enriched with works of art. In 1649, following the destruction of the city of Castro, Acquapendente became a bishop’s seat and the Basilica of San Sepolcro was elevated to the rank of cathedral, undergoing radical architectural transformations. In the course of the 18th century the original Romanesque structure was remodeled both in its facade and interior, and redone in the Baroque style, in the typical taste of Upper Lazio. More recently, during the Second World War, (June 1944), the complex was seriously damaged by the collapse of the left nave, and restoration has brought it back to its primitive

Romanesque aspect. Today we can admire its beautiful and elegant facade and the interior on three levels. Paintings on panels decorating the pilasters on the left side of the central nave illustrate the history of the Basilica: the arrival of Queen Mathilda, the departure for the 1st crusade (1096-1099), Eugene III consecrating the church (1149), the destruction of the facade in World War II. Among other valuable decorative elements, two bas-reliefs by the school of Agostino di Duccio (1418-1481), incorporated into the staircase leading to the presbytery, deserve to be mentioned along with the elegant altar in glazed and painted terracotta by Jacopo Beneventano (1522). Besides the remains of St. Ermete, the Basilica also preserves those of St. Anthony, St. Catherine and St. Augustine (13th century).
THE UPPER TUSCIA OF LAZIO

USEFUL INFO

THE ROMANESQUE CRYPT

The Basilica contains one of the most important Romanesque crypts in Italy, erected in the second half of the 10th century above the remains of the ancient aedicule of the Holy Sepulchre (9th century). The division of the space is especially interesting: three transversal naves and nine longitudinal ones with a play of 22 columns surmounted by rich capitals with stylistic elements of northern origin. The aedicule is at the center of the crypt, closed by a pyramidal cover with a rectangular base and, according to tradition, contains two small lthic fragments from the column of the flagellation of Christ stained with his own blood.

CASTLE OF BOLSENA
Piazza Monaldeschi - 01023 Bolsena (VT)
Opening times Winter (from November)
Wed - Thu - Fri: 10am-1pm
Sat - Sun - Holidays - Pre-holidays:
10am-1pm / 3pm-6pm
Summer (from mid July): all week
10am-1pm
Spring - Autumn: all week
10am-1pm / 4pm-7pm
Closed Monday.

AZIENDA DI PROMOZIONE TURISTICA DELLA PROVINCIA DI VITERBO
Piazza dell’Oratorio, 2
Palazzo Doria Pamphilii
01030 San Martino al Cimino (VT)
Ph. +3907613751
Fax +390761379233
www.apt.viterbo.it
www.provincia.vt.it

THE VIA FRANCIGENA

Considered one of the most beautiful tourist itineraries in Italy, in the Middle Ages it was the privileged route connecting the cities of the Italic kingdom with the world beyond the Alps, 2,500 km interspersed with rest stops, including Acquapendente and Bolsena. The itinerary met the need of the Lombards to connect the capital of their kingdom - Pavia - with the southern duchies by means of a protected path on the “Monte Bardone Pass”, Mons Longobardum, today’s Cisa. With the rise of Frankish domination, it was named “Via Francigena”, that is, “road originating in France” and represented the main connection of the Holy Roman Empire with Rome. In the 9th century it became compulsory for archbishops to go to Rome to receive from the hands of the pope the pallium, a wool shawl adorned with a cross, symbolic of the official investiture. In the travel journal of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Acquapendente is mentioned for the first time as a stop on the Via Francigena. Sigeric actually went to Rome in 994 at the time of Pope John VI and in the list of stops made on the way back to his bishop’s seat, indicated 79 “submansiones” between Rome and the Chartered. It became the route for pilgrimages to Rome and the tomb of St. Peter and for this reason was also known as “Romea” road, used by important travelers and as a vehicle for cultural and commercial exchanges.
enced the urban design of the town of Caprarola, which is dominated by its imposing presence. Numerous painters and artists were summoned to decorate the palace, seat of an active court life and frequented by nobles, men of letters, artists and musicians, in accordance with the fame of the Farnese as great patrons. The honorary entrance, accessed by a double staircase, has a great effect, as does the wonderful spiral staircase, created by Vignola and frescoed by Antonio Tempesti (1580-1583), leading to the “piano nobile”, where the lord resided, detached from the pettiness of daily existence.

The halls of the palace are decorated by a precious cycle of Mannerist school frescoes. The paintings in the Hall of the Labours of Hercules, and in the Chapel, with its circular plan and valuable marble and terracotta floor, and frescoes with biblical themes, are by Federico Zuccari (1566-1569). Taddeo Zuccari (1560-1566) painted the frescoes in the Hall of the Farnese Deeds, celebrating events in the life of Cardinal Alessandro in a context richly decorated with stucco. Also by Taddeo Zuccari, the Hall of the Council of Trent, with large frescoed panels recalls the convocation of the famous Council and events in the papacy of Paul III, along with stucco and arabesque decorations on the ceiling. The Hall of Aurora, of the Wool Mills and of Solitude, have frescoed ceilings with fine perspectives. The Hall of the Globes, with frescoes on the ceiling by Giovanni Antonio da Varesse and Raffaellino da Reggio (1574), represent the planetary system and were stunning for the period with their scenographic geographical maps painted on the walls with the four
continents known at the time. The outside area also represented the power of the family in a perfect Renaissance interpretation of open space visible in the great park, developed on different levels in the rear of the palace. Fountains, nymphaeums, and valuable decorative elements, both sculptural and in mosaic, reveal a clear tendency towards Baroque.

Immersed in the elegant park is the Palazzina del Piacere with its courtyard and loggia adorned by frescoes.

**Heraldry**

Palazzo Farnese is an authentic gallery of dynastic emblems; the coats of arms of about forty aristocratic families that over seven centuries became related to the Farnese are represented in the frescoes. The Farnese coat of arms stands out with its fleur-de-lis, symbol of the double character of the family, secular and ecclesiastic. In time heraldic mannerisms, inspired by mythological themes, led to variations in the decoration, but the shield, the pale blue fleur-de-lis in a gold field, the rampant unicorn and the plumed helmet remained unchanged. The Palazzo also contains the "Farnese devices", an interesting artistic and cultural phenomenon, popular since antiquity. These concise images accompanied by mottoes represent the Renaissance taste for allegory between the 15th and 16th centuries. While the coat of arms was a distinctive symbol of the family, the "device" stood for the personal goal of an individual member through a declaration of intentions, thus acquiring a moral value. In the Palazzo they are everywhere, among the stuccoes and frescoes, as a representation of the goals of the illustrious Farnese.

**The Farnese Coat of Arms and Device**

On the rocky plane of the Monte Cimino stands a curious boulder, known already in antiquity to the erudite Marcus Terentius Varro (116-27 BC) and to the naturalist Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD) who called it “naturae miraculum”. This enormous block of trachyte, an eruptive rock common in the volcanic areas of central-southern Italy, weighs about 200 tons. It is 8.5mt long, 6.5mt wide, 3mt tall and has a volume of about 100 cubic metres. In the area it is known as “sasso naticarello”, and it maintains its balance even when it is pushed and caressed.
The Regional Park of Marturanum and of the Antichissima Città di Sutri and the Regional Reserve of Lake Vico

Upper Lazio was shaped by volcanoes in their explosive phase resulting in the lower range of the Monti Cimini and in the beautiful lakes of Bolsena, Mezzano, Vico, Bracciano and Martignano that form a fascinating landscape. Evidence of human presence, Etruscan and Roman, blends with flourishing vegetation favoured by the acid composition of the volcanic soil. The area is enriched by deep valleys carved into the tufa by wind and water. An idea of the “silva cimina” that actually hindered the expansion of the Romans, can be had by climbing up the Venere and Fogliano mountains and looking over Lake Vico. This is one of the most beautiful and best preserved lake basins in central Italy, born of an active volcano a million years ago which today feeds numerous thermal-mineral springs.

Not too far from here, the regional park of Marturanum and of the Antichissima Città di Sutri offer an unforgettable glimpse of Etruscan Lazio. Tufa gorges, necropoli and walls remind us of the people who lived here before us, and the amphitheatre of Sutri, entirely dug out of tufa, is truly spectacular. A unique environment of exceptional value with uncontaminated wildlife.

The Park in Numbers

- Suburban Park of Marturanum
  Management: Municipality of Barbarano Romano
  Surface: 1,220 hectares - Instituted: 1984

- Urban Park Antichissima Città di Sutri
  Management: Municipality of Sutri
  Surface: 7 hectares - Instituted: 1988

- Nature Reserve of Lake Vico
  Management: Municipality of Caprarola (VT)
  Surface: 3,100 hectares - Instituted: 1982

- Natural Monument of Pian Sant’Angelo
  Management: Natural Monument of Pian Sant’Angelo
  Surface: 254 hectares - Instituted: 2000

Woods of beech, Turkey oak and huge chestnut trees cover most of the slopes of the ancient crater of Vico. The so-called depressed beech wood (because of the lake climate it grows at a lower-than-average altitude, hence the name) of the Fondo delle Tavole is a breathtaking sight.

Above: Anacamptis Pyramidalis.
The charm of the wood is intact as proven by the elusive presence of wildcats, martens and badgers. Birdwatchers find one of their favourite spots in the Pantanacce, the reign of ducks, loons, herons and limicolous species.

Pride of the Viterbo territory, the Chestnut of the Cimini is considered by qualified experts among the best in Italy. Its quality is guaranteed by the cultivation area, and was appreciated already in the early 20th century when it was exported to Paris for the production of Marron Glacés. A traditional product of Lazio, recognized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, it is the main ingredient of typical dishes such as chickpea and chestnut soup and chestnut cake.

Technology and tradition coexist in the cultivation and production of hazelnuts or “nocchie”, that are found whole, crushed, or in a paste in sweets and seasonings. Their pleasant flavour, average weight (12 gr.) and excellent conservation properties make Cimini hazelnuts especially appreciated throughout Italy.
THE CISTERCIAN ABBEY
San Martino al Cimino

San Martino al Cimino, Cistercian Abbey: facade.

The town of San Martino al Cimino is a splendid example of 17th century Baroque urban design. It is reached through the Porta Viterbese, designed by Borromini during his exile in Viterbo and modeled on the gate of Castel Sant’Angelo in Rome. The main attraction of the town is nonetheless the Cistercian Abbey with its gothic architecture of great historical and artistic merit.

Ancient sources confirm the presence of an early religious complex in San Martino in Monte, site of the Abbey. Documents mention: the deed of gift of the land (838) to the Abbey of Farfa and the presence in the church of an ancient column (the first on the right of the central nave towards the altar) dating from the 9th century, with the coat of arms of cardinal Francesco Todeschini Piccolomini on the capital. Since then it was inhabited by a Benedictine community that became considerably important in the 9th century, thanks to the attention of Gregory VII.

The first Cistercian monks arrived in San Martino from the convent of San Sulpizio in 1151 by order of Eugene III (1145-1153) and later from the Abbey of Pontigny (1207), when the structure was granted to them with a papal bull by Innocent III. In addition to reinforcing the small preexisting religious community, the French monks established their mother house there. Thanks to a contribution of the pope, in 1208 the construction of the abbey began according to a project by Cistercian architects of the Burgundian school. The church was consecrated in 1225 and in 1305, during the pontificate of Clement V, the entire abbey complex was completed. After a period of splendour due to John II (1213-1228), the most important abbot, starting from the 14th century the abbey underwent a phase of crisis and thefts of goods that ended with the expulsion of the monks. The rebuilding of

the Cistercian community occurred in 1462 with Pope Pius II (1458-1464) who entrusted the administration of the Abbey to his nephew, cardinal Francesco Todeschini Piccolomini (future Pope Pius III). Controlled by the Piccolomini until 1564, under Pope Pius IV (1560-1565) the abbey returned under papal authority. In 1645 Cardinal Pamphili (later Pope Innocent X) carried out a revaluation of the principality of San Martino al Cimino and granted the title of Princess to Olimpia Maidalchini, widow of his brother Pamphilio, who bought the farms and also obtained the Church’s independence from the Bishop of Viterbo. A woman of great artistic and intellectual sensitivity, she started significant works of restoration and revaluation of the urban structure of the town with the purpose of preserving the beauty of the abbey complex and its historic function. The Monastery became a fortified complex with bold changes in the destination of its rooms. This unique example of gothic architecture has reached present times in all its splendour. The architectural layout, dominated by Cistercian dictates, appears further evolved than others in Lazio and shows the influence of medieval Viterbo. The best preserved parts are the cloister, the two libraries, the capitular hall, the refectory, the abbot’s quarters, and the monks’ cells. The Church of San Martino, focus of the monastic life, is a sublime representation of the Cistercian style; elaborated through elements of the Burgundian style, that give it more sobri-
Useful info

**THE MONTI CIMINI**

**PALAZZO FARNESE**
Caprarola
Ph. +390761646052
Visits: 8.30am-6.45pm
Except Mondays, January 1, May 1, December 25

**ABBAZIA CISTERCENSE**
San Martino al Cimino
Ph. +390761379603
Open every day until evening.

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**REGIONAL PARK OF MARTURANUM**
C/o Comune
Piazza G. Marconi
01010 Barbarano Romano (VT)
Ph. +390761414507

**REGIONAL PARK OF THE ANCITISSIMA CITTA DI SUTRI**
Comune, Piazza del Comune, 32
01015 Sutri (VT)
Ph. +390761801115

**REGIONAL PARK OF LAKE VICO**
Scuderie di Palazzo Farnese
01032 Caprarola (VT)
Ph. +390761647444

**MONUMENTO PIAN SANT’ANGELO**
WWF - Via Ottusa, 4
01100 Viterbo
Ph. +390761345784
www.parchilazio.it
www.parks.it

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**BENEDICTINES AND CISTERCIANS**

The founder of the Benedictine order was Benedict from Norcia (480-547), father of Western monasticism. He founded the first Benedictine monastery in Montecassino, where in 540 he dictated the “Rule” that was perpetuated in the communities of his order for centuries. Poverty, humility, austerity were and still are at the base of the life of the monks, devoted to work and prayer. A period of intense diffusion in the 6th century was followed by a crisis in the order, the reform of which resulted in the founding of the order of the Cistercian monks (named after the French town of Citeaux, ancient Cistercium), founded in 1097 by St. Robert de Molesme and spread throughout Europe by St. Bernard. The order aimed at recuperating the value of Christianity and returning to absolute respect of the Benedictine Rule by stressing the significance of manual labour and poverty. In Italy their presence determined the reclamation of uncultivated and malarial land and had a decisive role in the social and economic development of areas of the abbey complexes.
and feasts, a meeting place for men of letters and scholars. In time the Orsini possessions grew and in 1560 Pius IV raised Bracciano to the rank of duchy with a papal bull. The period of even greater splendour that ensued ended only in 1696 when the last Orsini duke, Flavio, sold the entire duchy to the Odescalchi family in order to emerge from the financial straits his own family had fallen into. The Odescalchi, originally from the Como area, took charge of the Castle and its upkeep with restorations, additions and embellishments.

Its excellent condition still allow visits along an itinerary through three thousand square metres, thanks to the presence of the Castle Museum, instituted by Prince Don Livio IV Odescalchi. The irregular structure has a square plan and consists of two asymmetrical nuclei, built at different times and connected by an inner courtyard and the long bay for rounds connecting the Castle's six towers. The minor quadrilateral, corresponding to the Orsini structure, develops around the courtyard that provides access to the kitchen and service area. The beautiful rooms on the main and upper levels are still complete with period furnishings.
ings, decorated lacunar ceilings, valuable paintings and frescoes, such as those in the Papal Room where Pope Sixtus V was a guest, painted by the Zuccari brothers: the Orsini Room and the Room of Isabella. On the outside, the perfectly groomed secret garden should not be missed.

**GETTING THERE**
- Bracciano and Anguillara Sabazia (RM) - A12 Roma-Civitavecchia or SS1 Via Aurelia, Cerveteri exit, directions for Bracciano and Anguillara. In alternative SS2 Via Cassia, junction for Bracciano-Anguillara.
- Canale Monterano (RM) - A12 Roma-Civitavecchia, Cerveteri Exit, continue for Bracciano, junction for Manziana. In alternative SS1 Via Aurelia and after Cervetera turn right for Manziana.
- Valle del Treja Park - A1 Milano-Napoli, Magliano Sabina exit and SS3 Via Flaminia for Civita Castellana-Calcuta. From Rome: SS3 Via Flaminia, exit at Rignano Flaminio for Calcuta or SS2 Via Cassia and junction for Mazzano Romano.

**THE ARMOUR HALL**
Visiting these magnificent rooms in the Odescalchi Castle is like travelling back in time, among motionless warriors in shining armour. The room in fact contains a rich collection of cuirasses and weapons from the 15th to the 17th centuries, including a 15th century Milan-made equestrian suit of armour for tournaments and two German-made suits of armour for tournaments. Used by knights as protection in combat until the 18th century, armour traditionally included all defense devices: helmet, shield, cuirass and greave. Made of bronze, copper, steel and leather, in the Middle Ages artisan masters used to fabricate miniature suits of armour as toys for children.

**THE GREEN ROADS ALONG BRACCIANO LAKE**
Dirt roads and paths reserved exclusively for ecological mobility; Bracciano Lake offers cycle-touring enthusiasts the possibility of circumnavigating its perimeter along its shores. A ring of 36 kilometers, paved and without difficulties, is ideal even for non-pros. A celebration of alternative itineraries offering: nature, art, history, enchanting landscapes and unusual views of the castles of Bracciano and Anguillara.
THE REGIONAL PARKS OF THE TREJA VALLEY, VEIO AND THE NATURE RESERVE OF MONTERANO

A LAKE WITH AN ENDLESS HORIZON and Etruscan cities lost among woods and gorges evoke the unique and mysterious landscape of the Monti Sabatini. The great lake of Bracciano and the smaller uncontaminated one of Martignano occupy a low depression (over 165 meters) resulting from the filling in of a volcanic cone. These waters are surrounded by a mosaic of fields and lovely historical centres that make it one of the most charming areas in southern Tuscia. Not too far south lie the mysterious ancient cities of Veio (Rome’s ancient rival) and Monterano, the most beautiful lost city in Italy, with its cluster of walls covered with ivy, churches, castles and an extraordinary arched aqueduct. On this site, excursionists are captivated by a sense of isolation, of the effect of time on the works of man and by the way nature takes over abandoned constructions. Two regional parks and a nature reserve protect this natural and cultural patrimony of Lazio.

THE PARK IN NUMBERS

Suburban Park of the Treja Valley
Management: Consortium of the Municipalities of Mazzano Romano and Calcuta
Surface: 1000 hectares - Instituted: 1982

Regional Nature Park of the Bracciano and Martignano lake complex
Management: Regional Nature Park
Surface: 16,682 hectares - Instituted: 1999

Park of Veio
Management: Regional Board Park of Veio
Surface: 14, 984 hectares - Instituted: 1997

Nature Reserve of Monterano
Management: Municipality of Canale di Monterano
Surface: 1,084 hectares - Instituted: 1988

FLORA

Ferns and maidenhair cover the gorges of the ditches and streams of the park of Veio; the sunnier areas are filled with woods of holm-oak and durmast, Turkey oak and bay-oak.

Above: Veronica Chamaedrys.
Loons and cormorants, widgeons and pochards, multicoloured bee-eaters along with thousands of coots, and rarer species of divers, different varieties of dun-birds that increasingly populate the park of the Lake Bracciano.

In the calcareous ground under the oaks, holm-oaks and hazels, it is possible to find a quality product of the Monti Sabatini, the Summer Truffle or “Scorsone” (Tuber Aestivium Vitt). The fruiting body varies in size from that of a nut to the that of a grape-fruit, its pulp is beige in colour and becomes more intense as it ripens. It has a pleasant flavour and slight fragrance, it is less valuable than other varieties and it ripens from May to Autumn. If it is enjoyed while fresh, it should be considered a good truffle.
The Monastery of Monte Virginio

This simple, enchanting monastery was founded in 1688, on the estate of Canale Monterano, property of the Orsini family. In the early 1600s an Orsini family member, Virginio, brother of the Duke of Bracciano Paolo Giordano, was in fact a Carmelite priest. Having renounced all his possessions, Virginio ordered his powerful brother to make a large donation to the Order of the Barefooted Carmelites for the construction of a monastery. In 1615 the tenant farmers were expropriated from the medieval town on the northern side of Monte Sassano and in exchange obtained new lands and pastures in the area known since then as Monte Virginio.

Construction began in 1651 and the solemn monastery complex was completed by 1668. The structure has a rectangular plan; the second floor is occupied by the monks’ cells and the rooms for community activities. The large cloister at the centre provided access to the service areas. The Church was inaugurated later, in 1670. The Roman Province of the Barefooted Carmelites contributed to the development of the monastic community of Monte Virginio that soon came to manage a prosperous agricultural activity that guaranteed its economic autonomy for a long time.

Yet hard times were upon the Carmelites: in 1810 they abandoned the monastery owing to the suppression of monastic orders enforced by the Napoleonic empire, and returned there in 1817. Governmental persecutions of monastic orders led to another suppression in 1873 by the civil authority. Bought on auction by Prince Altieri, the monastery was partially returned to the Order in 1875 and was redeemed entirely only in 1893, thanks to a total payment of £70,000 made to the Prince.

Set in a lovely location on the slopes of Monte Virginio, the complex dominates the surrounding valleys in an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity, the same one the monks found when they settled there to pray and contemplate God. The individual dimension found its expression in silence, fasting, the lectio divina, that lead to the achievement of ascetism, individual in silent prayer; collective in the celebration of the Hours and the community liturgy.

The park around the complex and the presence today of only four monks are the most stirring elements in a discreet visit to the Monastery.
THE MONTI SABATINI

USEFUL INFO

Regional Park of the Valle del Treja
00060 Mazzano Romano (RM)
Via Roma, 1/F - Ph. +390669049295

Regional Park of Bracciano - Martignano
C/o Comune di Bracciano
00062 Bracciano (RM)
Via Saffi, 4/a Ph. +39069820626

Regional Park of Vejo
00063 Campagnano di Roma (RM)
Via E Cavallotti, 18
Ph. +390669042774
www.parcodivejo.it

Nature Reserve of Monterano
00060 Canale Monterano (RM)
Piazza Tubingen,1
Ph. +39066962724
www.parchilazio.it

AZIENDA DI PROMOZIONE TURISTICA DELLA PROVINCIA DI VITERBO
Piazza dell’Oratorio, 2
Palazzo Doria Pamphilj
01030 San Martino al Cimino (VT)
Ph. +3907613751 - Fax +390761379233
www.apt.viterbo.it www.provincia.vt.it

AZIENDA DI PROMOZIONE TURISTICA DELLA PROVINCIA DI ROMA
Via XX Settembre, 26 - 00187 Roma
Ph. +3906421381 - Fax +390642138211
www.otreroma.it

THE BAREFOOTED CARMELITES

The Carmelite Order was founded in the 12th century as a hermit order strongly devoted to contemplation. In 1156 the Fathers settled on Mount Carmel in Palestine - hence their name - where they established their Rule with the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Alberto. Turned away by the Muslims, they returned to Europe and in 1247 were turned into the Mendicant Order of Our Lady of Carmel. At that time the Church established that contemplation was to be joined with mission work, the Rule was consequently modified and the order divided into three branches: conventual, observant and tertiary. Tied to the mystic concept of isolation, after centuries of uncertain application of the Rule, the monks went back to practicing a hermit life according to the reform of the Order established in 1538 by St. Theresa of Jesus and thanks to the work of Saint John of the Cross, founder of the observant branch of the Barefooted Carmelites.

DEVIL’S BRIDGE

The countryside between Manziana and Canale Monterano has preserved for centuries an archaeological finding of truly impressive proportions. The remains of an ancient aqueduct have in fact left a bridge of uncertain date (Etruscan or perhaps Roman), 100 metres long, 4 metres wide, with powerful arches 9 metres high. Beyond its obvious historical and artistic merit, the bridge has a feature that has always been found fascinating. This colossus is formed by huge blocks held together without mortar and each one of them measures 2mt by 1mt. Popular belief attributes the building of this majestic, mysterious structure to the Devil who, according to tradition, wished to show his powers to a skeptical monk he casually met near by. There are those who prepared to vow the devil’s hand is in that bridge!

ODESCALCHI CASTLE

00062 Bracciano (RM)
Piazza Mazzini, 14
Ph./fax +39069902380
Visits: April-September (summer schedule)
11-12am/ 3-6pm;
9:30am-3:30pm Sat and holidays
October-March (winter schedule)
10-12pm/5pm
10-12:30am/ 3:30pm
Sat and holidays. Closed Mon

MONASTERY OF MONTE VIRGINIO

00060 Canale Monterano (RM)
The Church is open to the public
EVEN GARIBALDI’S SOLDIERS CAME THROUGH HERE

As we approach the heart of Rome’s province, the area around us seems suspended between space and time. From an ancient Roman presence to the heroic deeds of Garibaldi’s troops, nothing has affected the deep identity of these mountains, countryside, cities and towns.

THE ORSINI PALACE

Monterotondo

At the top of the mountain stands Palazzo Orsini, symbol of Monterotondo and of its entire history, which is strongly connected to the vicissitudes of the noble families who ruled it, the Orsini and the Barberini.

The first phase of the fortification grew in the 11th century above the remains of ancient Eretum, a Sabine city dedicated to the goddess Hera. In 1286 the Castrum Montis Rotundi, until then a possession of the Church, became property of the Orsini family who built the castle there. The first wall that also surrounded the town, was built between the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th centuries by Orso Orsini Di Gentile who also added four ramparts and as many doors, creating the first real fortification of the town of Monte Rotondo.

The Orsini conditioned the life of the townspeople for three centuries with their constant political struggles against the rivaling family of the Colonna, and the castle was almost destroyed in 1486 by order of Innocent VIII. Yet their munificence allowed them to overcome their difficult moments and, to show their power, they called many artists to fresco and embellish the rooms of the renovated structure.

The influence of the family was so great that in the second half of the 16th century two descendents, Franciotto and Raimondo, approved a new and more modern statute for the well-being of the community. The Orsini coat of arms, the five-petal rose, was thus joined with the new seal of the town of Monterotondo. In 1626 the family was forced to sell their farms in Monterotondo to the Barberini family who obtained the title of duchy for it. The town walls were rebuilt and enlarged, and the entire town and palace were transformed from fortification to an authentic aristocratic residence.

It later passed on to the Grillo family and then to the Boncompagni in 1814; today it is the seat of the Town Hall.

The large door leads into the courtyard containing a splendid 16th century well. The only surviving tower is a donjon used at one time as a prison, although with its height of 40 metres it served above all as a watchtower.

The royal staircase provides access to floors occupied by the family members, with splendid frescoed rooms.
GETTING THERE

- **Monterotondo (RM)** - From Rome, SS4 Via Salaria direction Rieti, at the km 21 follow directions for the historical centre and the Eremo dei Cappuccini.
  - By train: Metropolitan Train FM1 from Roma Trastevere and Roma Tiburtina for Monterotondo. By bus: Cotral lines from Roma Tiburtina station to Monterotondo.
- **Capena (RM)** - At exit Fiano Romano and continue to Morlupo, follow the directions for Capena and for the Valle del Fosso di San Martino (for the Lake).
- **Regional Reserve Macchia di Gattaceca and Macchia del Barco** - From Rome, SS4 Via Salaria up to km 12.4 by main: Metropolitan Train FM1 from Roma Trastevere and Roma Tiburtina for Monterotondo.
- **Regional Park of the Inviolata** - From Rome, A24, exit Tivoli and SS5 for Guidonia, deviation for Cascate dell’Inviolata, or Via Nomentana then Via Palombarese, directions for Cascate dell’Inviolata.
- **Marcigliana** - From Rome, G.R.A. exit Via Salaria direction Rieti and turn right for Via Marcigliana.

THE FRESCOES

The paintings in the third room of the main floor of Palazzo Orsini, with hunting scenes and landscapes of Monterotondo, are by the Flemish painter Paul Bril (1561). The artist spent an important period of his career in Rome and became one of the major representatives of picturesque landscape painting. Along with his pupils, including Mattheus Bril, he contributed to the delicate rustic scenes in the first room. The myth of Adonis is the theme of the 16th century frescoes and decorations in the second room. The artist, Girolamo Siciolante da Sermoneta, was a member of the Raphael school. Myths and the celebration of the deeds of the Orsini family are celebrated among mythological figures and coats of arms.

At the end of the 1600s the rooms were enriched by harmonious barrel-vault ceilings, as can be seen in the fourth hall, finely decorated with an allegory of Time. The Renaissance chapel was restructured in later times according to Baroque taste but still preserves a lovely painting on wood by the school of Ghirlandaio.

CLARICE ORSINI AND LORENZO THE MAGNIFICENT

Icon of the strong power of the Orsini, Clarice was a young noblewoman of the influential Monterotondo branch of the family. She was chosen as a bride by the cultured Lorenzo De Medici, son of Piero and Lucrezia Tornabuoni, who longed to get his family closer to Rome and the Papal State.

Delicate and kind, Clarice spent her youth in the splendour of the family Castle in the small rural town of Monterotondo, far removed from the elegance of Florentine nobility, at least according to the biting remark of her future mother-in-law, who resolved to refine the girl’s manners.

The wedding of the couple who was probably never in love, was the great event of the period: three days of celebrations (June 4, 1469) in Florence that from that year was ruled by Lorenzo who increasingly affirmed his authority throughout the country. Clarice, devout and reserved, was never truly at ease in Renaissance Florence but assumed her role of wife and mother with seriousness and tranquillity. Their marriage brought 8 children, including Giovanni De Medici who in 1513 became Pope Leo X.
From the protected area of the Marcigliana to the regional reserves of Gattaceca and Nomentum, just outside the city, Nature provides occasions for a walk among olive trees, Turkey oaks, maples and hornbeam, and a chance to discover scents and sounds too often lost in the urban environment.

Above: olive trees.

THE PROTECTED NATURAL AREAS AROUND ROME

One of the most surprising facts about Rome is that it is one of the most important municipalities in Italy with an agricultural vocation. Churches and monuments, remains of the past and today’s hectic traffic are interspersed with valleys, fields and thickets that together with the river Tiber create a tenacious, mysterious natural presence. Discovering these corners of wildlife can bring pleasant, beneficial surprises also to those who live their everyday reality in Rome.

14,000 hectares of territory are managed by the RomaNatura Board for the safeguard of the environment and the management of protected areas. Archeological sites, monuments, villas and farmhouses are only a part of the wealth of this endowment, whose real treasures are the ecological niches that host 1000 plant species, 5000 species of insects and over 150 species of mammals, birds, amphibians and reptiles.

THE PARK IN NUMBERS

Inviolata Archeological Park
Management: Municipality of Guidonia Montecelio
Surface: 535 hectares - Instituted: 1996

Nature reserve of Macchia di Gattaceca and Macchia del Barco
Management: Province of Rome, Department II, Service 5 “Environment planning; park development, nature reserves” Surface: ca.1,200 hectares - Instituted: 1997

Nomentum Nature Reserve
Management: Province of Rome, Department II, Service 5 “Environment planning; park development, nature reserves” Surface: ca. 850 hectares - Instituted: 1997

RomaNatura
Management: Regional Authority for the Management of the Protected Nature Area System of the Municipality of Rome Instituted: 1998

Below: olive trees.

PARKS

THE PROTECTED NATURAL AREAS AROUND ROME

From the protected area of the Marcigliana to the regional reserves of Gattaceca and Nomentum, just outside the city, Nature provides occasions for a walk among olive trees, Turkey oaks, maples and hornbeam, and a chance to discover scents and sounds too often lost in the urban environment.

Above: olive trees.
The hooded crow, a constant presence in countryside excursions, is a very intelligent and adaptable bird that has managed to survive where others have fled. It endures pollution and noise and eats about everything, taking advantage of abandoned waste. A pleasant bird but a world populated only by crows would be rather dull.

The **Gentian**, *Gentiana Lutea L.* is a typical plant of the Appenines that grows in the clearings of woods and pastures, and blooms in the summer. Always used in liquor-making and in pharmacy, its long and brown cylindrical root is the ingredient of an excellent liquor with a sweet taste and a slightly bitter aftertaste. According to an ancient recipe the roots are gathered in Autumn, left to dry and then washed, ground, and steeped in ethyl alcohol for 40 days. **Gentian liquor** is completely natural and acknowledged as a traditional product of Lazio by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.
ABBEYS AND MONASTERIES

THE CAPUCHIN MONASTERY

Monterotondo

Thanks to the information provided by the Bullarium Cappuccinorum, and documents preserved in the convent archive, we know that the first official news of the original settlement of the Capuchins dates back to the 27th of February 1542. This is the date of the bill of sale of a piece of land, a vineyard, “to be used by the Capuchins”, made by Evangelista Jacobi Seretij of Monterotondo to one of the Orsini. In one of his reports, the Orsini doctor, who in 1642 owned the convent, confirms that it had been founded about 80 years earlier, as indicated in the bill of sale.

What the Capuchin Monastery meant for the local population is revealed by the history of the convent itself that was built thanks to their will and strong devotion. In the early 1600s the lords of the town bought some land and contributed to the construction of a new convent (1609) on the slopes of the Colle Reatino, along the Via Nomentana, to save the monks from the unhealthy air of their original location. So it is that today the convent rises on a splendid viewpoint, surrounded by the silence and greenery of the woods.

The Church is simple and sober, a destination for prayer and visits, and is dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi. It bears the emblem of the Municipality of Monterotondo on its main door, evidence of the strong tie between civil and religious worlds in the social context of the time. The Church houses paintings from the 16th and 17th centuries. The Choir contains paintings depicting Saint Lucy (17th century) and Saint Agatha (early 16th century). The Cloister partakes in the sober atmosphere of the convent with an ancient cistern at its centre to collect spring water.

Many important figures in Italian civil and religious history experienced significant moments here. Brother Crispino da Viterbo, canonized in 1982, lived here for a few years (1703-1709) as official gardener, as recalled on the little well of spring water in front of the convent’s cellar, that he used to water the orchard. Giuseppe Garibaldi took refuge here with his wife Anita during his defense of the Roman Republic in 1849, and in 1867 he based his troops by the convent during the occupation of Monterotondo, in the struggle against the French and Papal forces, in the Roman campaign ending with the battle of Mentana. Even Pius IX visited the monastery in 1853, as indicated by a plaque in the old Refectory. It seems that in occasion of that visit a large pine tree was planted in the woods of the convent that can still be seen today.

The role of this religious centre whose monastic community always preached poverty and hospitality, was very important. Also a study centre, it has a seminary founded in 1834, and philosophy and theology courses were introduced in the 1900s.
The order of the Capuchin Friars Minor, named after the typical hood (in Italian “cappuccio”) of their habit, started in the 16th century as a new branch of the Franciscans. Founded by Matteo da Bascio as a mendicant order, it was officially recognized in 1528 by Clement VII. Tied to the vow of poverty, the Capuchin friars observed the Rule of St. Francis rigorously and sustained the Jesuits in their programme of church reform. They have always lived their spiritual commitment and apostolic activities with great simplicity and openness, sharing their experience with the faithful. There are many Capuchin convents throughout Lazio and their first saint was San Felice da Cantalice.
magnificent Renaissance palace worthy of the grandeur of this Florentine family. At the end of the construction work all that was left of the small preexisting villa was a wall, incorporated into the new structure. The entire residential complex follows the layout of the area and develops on a series of terraced planes with striking yet functional ramps, according to the typical Renaissance plan, animated by ornamental elements that anticipate Baroque. The main facade is elegant, adorned with pilasters and the Aldobrandini coat of arms above the door. The spacious 18th century atrium leads to the great central salon on the ground floor, frescoed with colours made with plants (known as "grass juices"), along with rooms on the sides and stairs to the upper levels. The first floor houses the aristocratic rooms with fine furniture and painting decorations with biblical themes by Giuseppe Cesari, known as the Cavalier D’Arpino, who along with Giovanni Fontana completed the works after the death of della Porta. The great hall was located on the second floor. The loggia on the third floor and the belvedere terraces added splendour and prestige to the whole. The main structure is flanked by structures creating a balanced...
effect, service areas and entrances to the palace, and a chapel dedicated to St. Sebastian. In later times the villa was acquired by the Pamphili family and then by the Borghese when in 1832 Francesco Borghese inherited all the Aldobrandini possessions and decided to adopt their name. Since then the villa, visible only from the outside, has always remained property of the family that preserves its wealth and history.

In Villa Mondragone, near Monte Porzio Catone, on the 13th of February 1582 Pope Gregory XIII signed the Bull of the "Gregorian Reform" decreeing the revision of the Julian Calendar and the adoption of a new criterion to establish the cycles of leap years. The solar cycle at the base of the calendar established by Julius Caesar in 46 BC and used since that time, exceed correct calculation by as many as 11 minutes and a quarter every year. Through the centuries the inaccuracy had added up to 11 days, and in October of 1582, by order of the pope, 10 days were suppressed, passing from the 3rd to the 14th of October. Thanks to the calculations and studies of Luigi Lilio, an astronomer from Calabria, and other famous mathematicians from all over the world, the Gregorian Reform was established, introducing the Gregorian Calendar, adopted by most Western countries.

**GETTING THERE**

- **Frascati (RM) and Monte Porzio Catone (RM)** - A1 Milan, exit Monte Porzio and continue along the SP216 according to directions.
- **Grottaferrata (RM)** - From Rome: G.R.A., junction for the Via Tuscolana and/or Via Anagnina and follow directions for Grottaferrata.
- **Ariccia (RM)** - From Rome: G.R.A. exit Via Appia continue along SS7 Via Appia direction Ariccia.
- **National Park of the Castelli Romani** - From Rome: G.R.A., exit Anagnina-Tuscolana direction Grottaferrata, follow directions for Rocca di Papa where, in Via Cesare Battisti 5, seat of the Regional Park of the Castelli Romani.

**ART**

After the stay of Pope Clement VIII in Frascati in 1603, a beautiful monumental garden was set up in the park surrounding Villa Aldobrandini, along with an innovative work for the channeling of water. Great artists of the time participated in the project, including sculptor Ippolito Buzzi, French stucco decorator Jacques Sarrazin, and painters Domenico and Tommaso Passignano. The celebrated fountain attendant Orazio Olivieri along with Giovanni Guglielmi created the sophisticated hydraulic devices that allowed each fountain to produce marvelous waterworks complete with sound effects. The architecture was bold and scenographic, in typical Baroque taste, and aimed at surprising and entertaining visitors with the spectacular effects of its fountains, waterfalls, nymphaeums, mythological statues, paintings, ornamental mosaics, the Theatre of Waters and the great Hall of Waters. In his “Relazione”, the designer of the iconography, monsignor Giovanni Battista Agucchi - Pietro Aldobrandini's secretary - describes the allegory of Beauty in the Garden of the Villa by comparing it to the Garden of the Hesperides. According to this plan, the power of Pope Clement VIII corresponded to that of Atlas sustaining the world, and his nephew Aldobrandini was represented by Hercules who helped him. At the time uncle and nephew were both greatly involved in defending Christian peace.

**HISTORY**

In Villa Mondragone, near Monte Porzio Catone, on the 13th of February 1582 Pope Gregory XIII signed the Bull of the “Gregorian Reform” decreeing the revision of the Julian Calendar and the adoption of a new criterion to establish the cycles of leap years. The solar cycle at the base of the calendar established by Julius Caesar in 46 BC and used since that time, exceed correct calculation by as many as 11 minutes and a quarter every year. Through the centuries the inaccuracy had added up to 11 days, and in October of 1582, by order of the pope, 10 days were suppressed, passing from the 3rd to the 14th of October. Thanks to the calculations and studies of Luigi Lilio, an astronomer from Calabria, and other famous mathematicians from all over the world, the Gregorian Reform was established, introducing the Gregorian Calendar, adopted by most Western countries.
At the top of Monte Cavo it is still possible to admire tall beech trees and a few chestnuts here and there on the slopes. The coppice woods are made up of holm oak and maple, hornbeam and hazel. There is also a beautiful Mediterranean bush thick with broom, heather and strawberry trees. Narcissus and peonies are rather common too.

The Castelli Romani, by now an integral part of the metropolitan area of Rome, are still a traditional destination for the out-of-town excursions of the Romans. At one time site of dark woods of oak and beech, today they appear as a mosaic of bush and vineyards, houses and towns, the result of a very ancient urbanization. Nature here has been shaped by the power and variety of geology. The entire area originated from a series of volcanic eruptions that shook the original crater, creating the lakes of Albano and Nemi and of the one of Ariccia, which is now dried up. The rock of the Castelli, the famous peperino, was used to build the Roman wall that separated the Imperial Forums from the Suburra, but even the slab stones of Roman roads were made with basalt from the Colli Albani.

In this unique setting, with its blend of nature and culture, we need to know how to look for evidence of natural life. An authentic natural patrimony in a protected area surrounded by towns inhabited by 350,000 people, where we can still see the flight of owls and sparrow-hawks.
In the Pratoni del Vivaro we can come across a tortoise, or spot an egret hunting along the lake shores. Where Man’s presence in the lake area is scarce, in every season we can enjoy the sight of tenches, bleak and pikes darting through the water while herons, loons, dabchicks and ducks swim undisturbed.

The names seem taken from a romantic Italian fairytale, but they actually refer to two typical products of Lazio. Fragolino is a tasty distillate of wild strawberries (“fragolina”), common to the area of the Colli Albani and one of the four recognized as typical product of Lazio.

The original recipe for Fragolino calls specifically for the wild strawberries from the woods around the Lake of Nemi, sweet and aromatic, and strictly hand-picked.
ABBEYS AND MONASTERIES

THE ABBEY OF SAN Nило
Grottaferrata

The Abbey was founded in 1004 by St. Nило, a Basilian monk from Calabria, who was already over ninety at the time. Gregorio I, master of Tuscolo, granted the scribe monk the piece of land on which the monastery was built and that was previously occupied by a sepulchral chapel from Republican times, known as Cryptaferrata because of the iron protection surrounding it, that probably also originated the name of the town of Grottaferrata that hosts the beautiful abbey.

The complex is the only one of the numerous Greek monasteries built in Italy and Europe between the 6th and 13th centuries that survived time and destruction and in which Baslian monks still observe the Orthodox rite, in communion with the Church of Rome, to this day. The Greek-Catholic rite differs from the Latin only in exterior aspects and was widely diffused in southern Italy around the 15th century when, following the invasion of the Balkan area by the Turks, many Albanian monastic communities moved to Italy.

Declared national monument in 1874, the complex has a square plan and the appearance of a fortified Renaissance abbey, with four towers at the corners and a mighty wall. This was how the Cardinal Giuliano Della Rovere wanted it when between 1483 and 1491 he ordered the restructuring project to Antonio da Sangallo, in a period in which monasteries were not just places of worship and faith but also fiefs that exerted their jurisdiction over the neighbouring territory. Fully equipped with a moat and a bridge for defense, the structure presents all the typical elements of an abbey complex: basilica, cloister, library, refectory, and other service areas used by the monks in their daily practice of faith.

The actual monastery is accessed through the first courtyard, where we find the airy Portico designed by Sangallo framing an elegant garden.

The Basilica di Santa Maria di Grottaferrata, founded by St. Bartholomew, is in the second courtyard: the interior is in 18th century style, owing to the numerous interventions that erased the original Romanesque style, represented by the elegant bell tower from the 12th century. The church has three naves and contains Byzantine mosaics (13th century) and decorations, a baptismal font (10th century) and a fine Byzantine-Italic icon painted on wood and representing the Virgin and Child. Scenes from the life of St. Nило and his disciple St. Bartholomew are depicted on the walls of the Chapel dedicated to the founder of the abbey, frescoed in 1610 by Domenichino (1584-1641), accessible from the right nave of the basilica.
Walking through time

PARKS, CASTLES, MONASTERIES
DISCOVERING HISTORY AND LEGENDS
FROM THE HEART OF LAZIO

GENERAL MAP

REGIONE LAZIO

ASSISORATO ALLA CULTURA,
SPETTACOLO, SPORT E TURISMO
REGIONE LAZIO
Itinerary 1: Bolsena, Monaldeschi Fortress.

Itinerary 2: Caprarola, Palazzo Farnese.

Itinerary 3: Bracciano, Odescalchi Castle.

Itinerary 4: Roman countryside, Autumn landscape.

Itinerary 5: Frascati, Villa Aldobrandini.
The Regional Park Agency (A.R.P.) is a governmental organization established by the Lazio Region Government, with the objective of improving the management of the Regional Protected Areas System.

The Agency specifically deals with the training and continuing education of the Park staff and supports sustainable development projects for the enhancement and sustainable utilization of natural resources.

The Agency promotes sustainable tourism in protected areas with the “GIORNIVERDI (GreenDays) Program” offering naturalistic and cultural activities, educational camps, access to nature without barriers and promotion of the local accommodation industry. In 2003 ARP and certain protected areas in Lazio offer more than 400 initiatives to discover the nature, history, fragrances, colours, and flavours of the area. Information on the protected areas of the Lazio Region, specific projects and initiatives for the promotion of local resources is available on the Web-site www.parchilazio.it

ARP
Regional Park Agency
Via Indonesia, 33 - 00144 Roma
Ph.+39065913371 fax +39065919404
agenzia@parchilazio.it
www.parchilazio.it
comunicazione.arp@parchilazio.it

On the cover of the general map
Land map of Lazio
Domenico De Rossi, 1693

Relief map of Lazio: Regione Lazio
Dipartimento Territorio - Direzione Regionale Territorio e Urbanistica
Sistema Cartografico e Geografico
Near Ariccia there is a place where a strange phenomenon was recorded in 1978. To fully understand its effects it is worth going to the exact spot, at km 11.6 of the SS218 between Ariccia and Rocca Priora, past the junction for Castel Gandolfo. The rise in this location, 550mt above sea level, forms a descent that continues into a broad curve and looks quite normal. Yet, in defiance of all rules and the law of gravity, the descent behaves like an up-hill climb: every object tends to roll up rather than down. In that point even people feel strangely attracted to the climb. Despite the strong skepticism of the scientific community, some scholars exclude it could be an optical illusion. It seems the unique phenomenon may be explained through an anomaly in the magnetism and force of gravity in the area of the Colli Albani, caused by the preexistence of the ancient volcanic range, the Lazio Volcano, extinguished 25,000 years ago.

**THE "DESCENDING" CLimb**

The Abbey of San Nilo is famous for the presence of the fascinating Scientific Laboratory for the Restoration and Conservation of antique books and for the School of Miniature and Paleography, both instituted in 1931. The delicate work of “curing” and preserving the book patrimony - vulnerable to the marks and injuries of time - originated at the time of the Abbey’s founding, when the scriptorium created by St. Nilo was assigned to the practice of decorating and preserving ancient manuscripts carried out by patient amanuensis monks. Through this masterly work handed down for centuries, the monastic community has instilled its profound sense of prayer, present in every simple gesture of daily life.

It was here that the restoration of the Atlantic Code by Leonardo da Vinci took place in 1962, twelve volumes of drawings, studies and calculations. It was the monks from Grottaferrata who, on request of Pope Paul VI, recuperated and saved 1200 volumes of an immense book patrimony during the flood in Florence in 1966, and to this day it is in this institute that rare works from all over the world are given rigorous chemical conservation treatments.

The library and the public one, among the most ancient and precious in Italy, contain 60,000 Byzantine works, one thousand illuminated manuscripts, incunabula, Greek and Latin manuscripts, works by St. Nilo, Plato, Aristotle, Petrarch and Boccaccio.
Nobili became related to the Vitelleschi family and in 1624 when the latter became extinct, adopted their name along with their own.

Between the mid 15th century and the beginning of the 16th, the castle was entirely reconstructed and enlarged by incorporating houses, towers and walls of the older fortress, in order to make it safer and more compact. To this day ancient paths departing from the famous Three Gates in the heart of the town, run along the defensive perimeter. Restorations in later times allowed the family to transform their residence in a true baronial palace with a beautiful terraced garden crossed by a spectacular double staircase.

Between the end of the 1800s and the early 1900s the complex was significantly restructured with the opening of windows, the addition of small loggias and typical Guelph battlements. In excellent condition, it is still inhabited by the aristocratic Vitelleschi family.

**THE NOBILI-VITELLESCHI CASTLE**

Labro, Nobili Vitelleschi Castle: rampart and detail of the wall.

For over one thousand years, the Nobili-Vitelleschi Castle has preserved precious documents through which it is possible to reconstruct the history of the family. The Historic Archive collects and conserves documents dating from 1068, and more than 300 rare parchments also include a "brief" in which Pope Celestine III authorized the building of a church in 1191 and the one in which the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III nominated one of the descendents of the Vitelleschi Palatine Count in 1452.

**THE HISTORIC ARCHIVE**

During his papacy, Alexander VI impassively supported the designs for domination of his son Cesare Borgia, intent on creating a strong state in central Italy. After conquering a large portion of Romagna, Cesare proceeded south by attacking and invading, and eventually ordered the assault on the Castle of Contigliano, a strategic base for the control of central Italy, in August of 1501. To the resistance of the townspeople, the leader of the troops Vitellozzo Vitelli answered with a harsh battle that led to the occupation of the town. Every August the event is commemorated with an evocative ceremony in medieval costume with a Historic Parade, the Palio dell’Ariete, and the reenactment of the battle with warriors in costumes.
Reed thickets are true reservoirs of biological diversity and the entire swamp environment gravitates around them. Along with reeds and cat's tail, the surface of the water is scattered with white water-lilies and yellow candocks, delicate duckweed and less known varieties of water plants.

**THE NATIONAL PARK OF THE GRAN SASSO AND OF THE MONTI DELLA LAGA**

Along the border between Lazio, Abruzzo and Marche, lies one of the most beautiful forests in Italy, the forest of the Monti della Laga, part of the National Park of the Gran Sasso. Water flows through sandstone and marls forming a unique environment in the context of the Appennines and that during the thaw offers a truly unforgettable sight. Mountain climbers explore these surges in the wintertime also, evidence of how the Laga is an ideal destination for excursions all year round. The waterfall of the Barche has a drop of over forty metres and is one of the most evocative places in this part of the region. Flowing water is the main feature also in the nature reserve of Lakes Lungo and Ripasottile, and the one of Tevere-Farfa, two natural lakes along the Velino river and a marshy area created after the construction of an artificial water reservoir, two among the most popular destinations for the observation of bird-life in a swamp environment in Lazio. Two authentic natural “lungs” just outside of Rome.

**THE PARK IN NUMBERS**

**National Park of the Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga**
Management: Park Board
Surface: 150,000 hectares - Instituted: 1991

**Nature Reserve of Lakes Lungo and Ripasottile**
Management: Municipalities involved: Rieti, Cantalice, Colli sul Velino, Conigliano, Foggio Bustone, Rivodutri
Surface: 3,000 hectares - Instituted: 1985

**Nature Reserve Monte Soratte**
Management: Province of Rome, Department II, Service 5 “Environment planning, park development, nature reserves”
Surface: ca 410 hectares - Instituted: 1997

**Nature Reserve Tevere Farfa**
Management: Board of the Nature Reserve
Surface: 705 hectares - Instituted: 1999

**FLORA**

Reed thickets are true reservoirs of biological diversity and the entire swamp environment gravitates around them. Along with reeds and cat's tail, the surface of the water is scattered with white water-lilies and yellow candocks, delicate duckweed and less known varieties of water plants.

*Above: swamp landscape with reed thicket.*
The wolf is the most feared and admired animal in Italy. Its proverbial ability to survive in difficult conditions has led him past the Alps from the heart of our Apennines, a great example of wildlife’s strong adaptability.

Yellow, almost green in colour, an aromatic, almost fruity flavour, this refined product from the land of Sabina obtained the authenticated trademark for quality a few years ago. The “liquid gold” the Romans were the first to appreciate is today a high quality extra-virgin olive oil, thanks to its area of origin, its seven selected cultivated varieties (Carboncella, Leccino, Frantoio, Raja, Pendolino, Moraiolo, Rosciola), and its precious organoleptic characteristics. The mild climate and the calcareous soil of the hills, typical of Sabina, have created for over 2000 years the ideal habitat for the cultivation of olives that the ancient Romans themselves implemented. In time, the patient work of the Benedictine monks refined and rationalized the various phases (hand-picking and pressing) of the careful limited production. In Canneto Sabino stands a 2000 year-old olive tree, the biggest in Europe, whose trunk has a diameter of 7 metres.
NEAR THE RUSTIC TOWN OF POGGIO BUSTONE, on the slopes of Monte Rosato, stands the Convent of San Giacomo, built between 1235 and 1237 by the grotto where Saint Francis lived in the years of his preaching in the Rieti valley around 1209. After becoming a Franciscan Sanctuary it was rebuilt numerous times between the 13th and 17th centuries and all that is left of the original architecture of the 1200s is a small portico leading to the Church and Convent complex, consisting of sections from the 14th century and other sections added later, along with the charming Cloister.

The Refectory, built in the 16th century, is decorated with frescoes representing saints. The convent Church dedicated to Saint Giacomo Maggiore, dates from the first half of the 1400s and is an example of simplicity and devotion: the exterior has maintained the original aspect whereas the interior, with a single nave, is in gothic style. Beautiful frescoes represent moments in the life of St. Francis, including one from the 15th century that shows him receiving the stigmata.

The life of St. Francis had a strong influence on this place of prayer and stretched to the area outside the convent itself. Starting from the square and climbing up Monte Rosato, we arrive in fact at the Hermitage, a place dug out of the rock where the Saint retired to pray in solitude or with his companions. We still find it today, practically identical to when he received the revelation from God on the rightness of the path he had chosen and regarding the mission of his Order, and for this reason it is also known as the “Grotto of Revelations”.

The grotto is situated in a small 13th century church built after St. Francis’ death and to which a chapel was added in the 1600s, containing a beautiful paint-
SAINT FRANCIS represented a profound spiritual turning point in the history of Christian faith. The simplicity and poverty he preached can be traced in the bare structures and serene atmosphere of the sanctuaries, convents and monasteries he stopped at during his preaching in the Rieti valley. We know it all began in Poggio Bustone in 1208 and that every place chosen by St. Francis through the years as his spiritual retreats became symbols of faith and devotion. Greccio, where he represented the “Nativity of Baby Jesus” for the first time (1223), is for this reason considered the “Bethlehem of the West”. The town, that hasn’t lost its original aspect of medieval castrum, welcomed him for the first time in 1209. The Franciscan Convent, symbol of the Saint’s work, and still today a destination for pilgrimages, was built in 1260.

Among the woods and hills there were many places the Saint chose as retreats to pray in the last years of his life (1182-1226), spent in the Rieti valley, including Monte Rosato, Monte San Francesco, the Chapel of Forgiveness. In the Convent of Fonte Colombo in 1223, after fasting for forty days, he wrote the Rule of the Order. In 1225, in occasion of a visit to Rieti to cure his eyes, Saint Francis stopped at the Convent La Foresta, where according to tradition, he composed the “Song of the Creatures”.

THE SANCTUARIES OF VALLE SANTA

THE MONTI SABINI AND REATINI

USEFUL INFO

Nobili-Vitelleschi Castle
Labro (RI)- Via Santa Maria Maggiore, 4
Ph. +390746636020
Visits: 10-12am / 3-6pm; 3-7pm (summer)

Convent of San Giacomo
02018 Poggio Bustone (RI)
Piazza Missioni Francescane
Ph. +390746688916
Visits: 9-12am / 3-6pm

Abbey of Farfa
02032 Fara in Sabina (RI)
Via del Monastero, 1
lanouofarfa@libero.it
Visits: 10am-1pm 4-7pm except Mondays
Library: 9:30am-1pm 3:30-6pm
Saturday 9:30am-1pm Holidays closed

Franciscan Sanctuary
02018 Poggio Bustone (RI)
Via Cintina, 87 - 02100 Rieti
Ph. +39074620146 - Fax +390746270446
www.apt.rieti.it

Regional Reserve of Lakes Lungo and Ripasottile
c/o V Comunità montana
Via A. Manzoni, 10 - 02100 Rieti
Ph. +39074620999

Regional Reserve of Monte Soratte
Provincia, Ufficio Parchi Naturali Via Tiburtina, 691
00159 Roma - Ph. +390667663301

Regional Reserve of Tevere-Farfa
Via Tiburtina, km 32
00036 Nazzano (RM)
Ph. +39076530271
www.parchilazio.it
www.parks.it

Regional Park of the Gran Sasso and the Monti della Laga
Via Convento, 1
62010 Assergi (AQ)
Ph. +39086260521
www.gransassolagapark.it

The abbey of Farfa
A representative monument of the European Middle Ages rises above the ruins of a pagan temple where around 420 Saint Lawrence from Siro founded a Christian hermitage, destroyed by the Lombards in 556. In 680 Thomas de Maurienne built a Benedictine monastery and in 775 Charlemagne granted it the most complete form of autonomy and turned it into his outpost to control Rome, and the monastery became a centre of power. It was sacked by the Saracens in the following century (9th century), but with the abbot Hugo of Cluny (10th century) it reacquired its cultural role and became one of the most important spiritual centres in Western monasticism. It exerted its jurisdiction over all of Sabina with the means and the influence of an authentic feudal state and controlled 683 churches, 132 castles, ports, mills and numerous cities. Its decline began in the 1200s when it became a papal holding. Its many treasures include the Library with over 20,000 volumes, rare illuminated manuscripts; the Church of Santa Maria di Farfa (1400) with a valuable fresco (The Last Judgement) by Flemish painter Baker, and a Roman sarcophagus from the 3rd century AC in the Carolingian crypt.
was abandoned (10th century), the Ottaviani, a branch of the Roman Crescenzi and eventually first lords of Palombara, settled there. At that time the castrum already had its quadrangular structure with the ancient tower, but the Ottaviani family provided it with new buildings and fortifications and gave it the aspect it maintained for two centuries. It became property of the Savelli family no sooner than 1216, when Honorius III Savelli ordered the restoration of the Church of San Biagio and perhaps built the Church of Sant’Egidio. Between the 15th and 16th centuries the aspect and function of the castle changed, from fortress to authentic baronial residence in Renaissance style. The apartments of the masters, in the shape of casemates, incorporated the service areas; the stronghold was connected to the cylindrical tower and the walls by a fortified bay, the Wall of Rescue, used by crossbowmen in times of attack. The significant frescoes in the Hall known as “of the Republican Heroes” date from the same period. Ordered by Cardinal Savelli to exalt the valour of the monarchy and of the Roman Republic, they are lively and of excellent quality, to the point of being

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**SAVELLI CASTLE**

Palombara Sabina

With its position, this magnificent, imposing castle determined the urban development of the first settlements in the area. Today it is situated at the centre of a precise and fascinating structure of concentric rings in the medieval town of Palombara, at the foot of Monte Gennaro. The first official mention is found in 1064, in the Regesto Sublacense, and in the same period sources indicate the presence of the fief of Columbaria - ancient Palombara - belonging to Duke Alberico, a descendant of the Lombard dynasty. It seems that following the Lombard invasions and raids (578 AD), a castrum, a specifically military encampment, was built around the original nucleus (consisting of a cell used by hermits as a refuge) which in time became an urban settlement. In later times, owing to its strategic location, the castrum longobardum was attacked by the Saracens who took over the castle in 875 and used it as an observation and defense base, as well as for their attacks on neighbouring cities and on Rome. When the castle was abandoned (10th century), the Ottaviani, a branch of the Roman Crescenzi and eventually first lords of Palombara, settled there. At that time the castrum already had its quadrangular structure with the ancient tower, but the Ottaviani family provided it with new buildings and fortifications and gave it the aspect it maintained for two centuries. It became property of the Savelli family no sooner than 1216, when Honorius III Savelli ordered the restoration of the Church of San Biagio and perhaps built the Church of Sant’Egidio. Between the 15th and 16th centuries the aspect and function of the castle changed, from fortress to authentic baronial residence in Renaissance style. The apartments of the masters, in the shape of casemates, incorporated the service areas; the stronghold was connected to the cylindrical tower and the walls by a fortified bay, the Wall of Rescue, used by crossbowmen in times of attack. The significant frescoes in the Hall known as “of the Republican Heroes” date from the same period. Ordered by Cardinal Savelli to exalt the valour of the monarchy and of the Roman Republic, they are lively and of excellent quality, to the point of being
attributed to the School of Raphael in the first half of the 16th century. The Castle remained property of the Savelli until 1637 and maintained the family name. In the late 1800s the Torlonia Princes purchased the estate which then passed on to the Sforza-Cesarini and finally in the last century it became municipal property.

**GETTING THERE**

- **Palombara Sabina (RM):** 35 km from Rome, by car from the Via Salaria (even for those coming from Rieti) and then along the “Stadi della Neve”, otherwise Via Nomentana and then Via Palombarense, or also from the Via Tiburtina continuing for the Via Maremmana.

- **Natural Park of Monti Lucretii**
  - By car: for different accesses to the sections of the Park: Via Salaria (also for those coming from Rieti); SS 636 for Marcellina, Palombara Sabina, and San Paolo dei Cavalieri; A24 Roma L’Aquila, exit Vicovaro-Mandela, continue along the Via Tiburtina and then the SS 314 Liccinese.

**CURIOSITIES**

One of the rooms in the Savelli Castle contains a bust of delicate and tender beauty known as the “Palombella”, an early work by French sculptor Jean Baptiste Carpeaux, made around 1855 when he was a “boarder” at the Academy of France in Rome, at Trinità dei Monti. The artist had fallen in love with Barbara Pasquarelli, a young girl from Palombara he had met by chance in Trastevere, in occasion of the grape harvest in the vineyards there, and who posed for this portrait. Their attachment was sincere and passionate but their lives - commitment to art on his side, her family on hers - separated them. A few years later Carpeaux heard that the girl was very ill and according to tradition, rushed to Palombara to see her. It was the year 1861 and the two confessed their unchanged feelings for each other. Their love became a cherished memory for the artist after the premature death of the “Palombella”.

**THE CASTLE OF ROCCA SINIBALDA**

In the heart of the Turano Valley stands a fortress of great interest, the Castle of Rocca Sinibalda, symbol of the life and history of the town in the Rieti area by the same name, built by Cardinal Alessandro Cesarini in the 16th century on a project by the great architect Baldassarre Peruzzi. The imposing structure shows evidence of medieval stylistic themes and is composed of a donjon, residences, courtyards towers and massive walls. As others in the neighbouring area, the estate was the property of a whole succession of Italian aristocratic families, from the Cesarini to the Lante della Rovere, the Sforza-Cesarini and the Mattei.
Eagles and a wonderful beech-wood just an hour from Rome? The Monti Lucretili are certainly one of the surprises to be found close to the city. On clear days the rounded profile of these mountains can be seen even from the terrace of the Janiculum, as a backdrop for the skyline of roofs and buildings of the Eternal City. An advanced front of the Appenines, these mountains form a southern appendix of Sabina. The peaks are calcareous, never sharp-looking, with wide Karstic tableland, fresh woods and small lakes forming the natural setting of a rather solitary environment. The area is enhanced by the presence of the nature reserve of Monte Navegna and Monte Cervia, instituted to safeguard - in two distinct nuclei - an important section of the calcareous ridge between the lakes Turano and del Salto.

THE PARK IN NUMBERS

**Regional Park Monti Lucretili**
Management: Municipalities of Monteflavio, Montorio Romano, Moncione, Palombara Sabina, Marcellina, S. Paolo dei Cavalieri, Vicovaro, Roccagiovine, Licenza, Percile, Scandriglia, Orvinio, Poggio moiano, the IX and X Comunità Montana
Surface: 18,204 hectares - Instituted: 1989

**Nature Reserve of Monte Navegna and Monte Cervia**
Management: Reg. Board Reserve of Monte Navegna and Monte Cervia
Surface: 2,195 hectares - Instituted: 1988

**Nature Reserve Montagne della Duchessa**
Management: Municipality of Borgorose
Surface: 3,543 hectares - Instituted: 1990

The beechwood is striking for the silence it offers. At times it feels like a deserted world, inhabited only by huge tree trunks marked by time. The flora is very rich and multicoloured, with the endemic Iris sabina and the charming Turk's cap lily.

Above: Turk's cap lily in bloom.
The natural symbol of the Monti Lucretili is the golden eagle that nests in the area. The presence of peregrine falcons, sparrow-hawks and other varieties, is also worth mentioning. There is no lack of mammals, wildcats and wolves along with martens, porcupines, hedgehogs, badgers, dormice and foxes, evidence of how the area has remained untouched by pollution.

Because of its resistance and adaptability, spelt is one of the most ancient cereals; its cultivation dates to at least 7000 BC and its land of origin seems to be Palestine. Common in ancient Egypt, quoted in the works of Homer, it was greatly valued also by the ancient Romans who used it as “exchange currency”. The spelt from the Monti Lucretili is a typical product of Lazio, recognized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. In the larger varieties it is the basic ingredient of many local recipes, such as spelt tarts with almond flakes and pine-nuts, different types of pasta, including tagliatelle and stortini, and healthy soups.
One of the most important abbeys in Lazio, in imposing Romanesque style, it is a spiritual centre for the Benedictines and was declared national monument in 1895. Although information on its origins is imprecise, the Church was probably founded before the 9th century over the remains of an early Christian oratory (4th century). During the Lombard era (8th century), a new complex incorporated the original structure (crypt, main altar and ciborium), and its construction was completed only in the Romanesque period.

The ancient Church of the Argentella may have been named after the silver reflections on the surface of the spring water that to this day flows in the crypt and is traceable to groundwater tables of the valley floor. Outside, above the entrance to the Church, the presence of an insignia with a Greek cross (with four discs in between its arms), symbol of the Basilian monks, may indicate that it was founded by the Basilian monks of Eastern rite from Greece.

It became property of the Benedictines as early as the 11th century, then in 1284 Pope Honorius IV Savelli donated it to the Guglielmites, followers of Guglielmo Malavalle, whose order was officially recognized by Innocent IV and that between the 13th and 14th centuries founded over sixty monasteries in Italy, France and Germany that all obeyed the rule of Saint Benedict.

Owing to the impoverishment of the order, the Abbey was initially managed by commendatory abbots together with the Silvestrine monks, until it ended in a serious state of abandonment.

Thanks to patient and careful restoration, today we can admire the imposing stone structure that on the outside of the longitudinal walls shows regular white stripes in calcareous stone. The Church is rich in Byzantine graffiti and preserves a very ancient fresco representing St. Bernard. It is structured into three naves with three semi-circular apses with uncovered trussed ceilings, and a choir divided from the rest of the church by an arched pulvinar. The bell tower still stands out against the greenery and is divided into four sections with single, double and triple lancet windows in Romanesque style.

The annexed Convent is also in Romanesque style and is inhabited today by a lay community. The Abbey has always been an important reference point not only in its spiritual commitment, but also in the administrative and political life of the surrounding area.
USEFUL INFO

Regional Park of the Monte Lucretili
Piazza Vittorio Veneto
00018 Palombara Sabina (RM)
Ph. +390774637027
www.montilucretili.it

Regional Reserve of Monte Navegna and Monte Cervia
Via Roma, 35
02020 Varco Sabino (RI)
Ph. +390765790139

Nature Reserve of the Montagne della Duchessa
02021 Corvaro di Borgorose (RI)
Ph. +390746306493
www.parchilazio.it
www.parks.it

AZIENDA DI PROMOZIONE TURISTICA DELLA PROVINCIA DI RIELI
Via Cintra, 87 - 02100 Rieti
Ph. +39074620146 - Fax +390746270446
www.apt.rieti.it

AZIENDA DI PROMOZIONE TURISTICA DELLA PROVINCIA DI ROMA
Via XX Settembre, 26 - 00187 Roma
Ph. +3906421381 - Fax +390642138211
www.oltreroma.it

THE PERGOLA

At the end of the right side nave of the Church of the Argentella, closing the chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary, we find a Pergola supporting two icons representing the Virgin with the Child and Christ Pantocrator.

The two slabs of marble that function as a stand were made by Centurius - marble worker - who in 1170 decorated the base with Cosmatesque mosaic designs in porphyry, white and coloured marble, without the use of gilded tiles, in accordance with an ideal of simplicity, and whose beauty recalls that of the Cosmatesque ambo in the nearby Abbey of Farfa. Lamps hang from the architrave, following the model of the pergola in early Christian churches.

THE WELL OF CINETO ROMANO

In Cineto Romano, along an ancient mule-track leading to Riofreddo, we find one of those works of man, maybe dating from Roman times, that to this day remain a mystery: an artificial well dug out of the bare rock, over 500 metres deep, with about 6 metres of water at the bottom and less than 3 metres in diameter. Scholars still debate its real function, although a reference made by the naturalist Pliny the Elder who recommends digging deep wells to prevent earthquakes, could provide an interesting explanation.
In 1306, with Clement V, the Colonna became lords of Palestrina again and regained possession of their lands, including the fief of Castel San Pietro Romano, thus resuming the work of reconstruction that over the centuries never ceased.

In 1438, when Cardinal Vitelleschi ordered their expulsion, another series of wars destroyed their properties, including the fortress.

Only the peace between Lorenzo Colonna and Pope Nicholas V (1448) returned the estates to the Colonna who maintained them until the 17th century. The Castle was rebuilt in 1482, as indicated in the famous inscription on the turret of the external bridge: MAGNIFICUS DOMINUS, STEPHANUS COLUMNA RAEDIFICAVIT CIVITATEM CUM MONTE ET ARCE MCDLXXXII.

The Princes rarely used it as their residence, at least in the period of the battles, and the structure was used exclusively for defense. With its square plan and square towers at the corners, the rationality of its layout and its safety, the Castle became the refuge of important personages in seek of protection, or even a secure prison, whose restricted spaces were housed in the cylindrical rampart at the centre of the structure. Illustrious people were imprisoned there: St. Bernard, Bishop of the Marsi, Jacopone da Todi, Conrad of Sweden, and the
painter Caravaggio. The typical castle architecture is still intact thanks to important restoration; inside we find the well to collect rainwater, used in lieu of a source of spring water in the area, and on the outside, the defensive moat surrounding the structure and the small bridge with the arched gate to access the town.

Once it lost its defensive function, in time the fortress decayed, and in 1630 it became a property of the Barberini family.

THE IMPRISONMENT OF JACOPONE DA TODI

In 1298, when Palestrina was razed to the ground by Boniface VIII, Brother Jacopone da Todi was held captive in the prison of the Colonna Castle by order of the pope himself, against whom he had fought in the struggle with the monastic movements. After the accidental death of his beloved wife, Countess Vanna of Coldimezzo (1268), Jacopone da Todi, noble lord of the De’ Benedetti family, chose a path of repentance and became a hermit and then a Franciscan friar. He spent five years in prison in harsh conditions. Isolation and suffering inspired some of his greatest works, such as the 102 Laudì and the famous Stabat Mater.

THE MASSIMO DI ARSOLI CASTLE

This ancient residence dates to the end of the 10th century and became a possession of the family by the same name in 1574, when it was bought by the noble Fabrizio Massimo. Over the centuries the castle underwent numerous interventions. At present it is well preserved and houses evidence of a fascinating past: period furniture, ancient armour, documents and musical instruments. The magnificent halls are enriched with valuable frescoes on the ceilings and walls by the brothers Federico and Taddeo Zuccari (1557) and Marco Benefial (1749), a highly original representative of the Roman Academy. The Castle also has a Villa right next to it, along with a splendid Italian-style garden with a statue of the goddess Rome at its centre.

Left: Pope Boniface VIII.
THE REGIONAL PARK OF THE MONTI SIMBRUINI

**THE LARGEST REGIONAL PARK IN LAZIO**, the Monti Simbruini, awaits us with all the mystery and charm of an intact and wild natural area. At the border with Abruzzo, the protected area has peaks of over two thousand metres with rocky ridges and spectacular tablelands. Here, in the vast forests of beech, life flourishes and awaits only to be discovered in every season, in an authentic mountain setting only an hour away from Rome. It is a land of water that imbues the Karstic terrain and reemerges everywhere in the form of streams and waterfalls, supplying some of the most important hydraulic sources in the region. The wealth of biological diversity is impressive. Woods stretch over two thirds of the park’s extension. There are woods, such as Tagliata, Vallone, and Campo dell’Osso, that are themselves worth a visit for their complexity, age and variety.

**THE PARK IN NUMBERS**

Regional Natural Park of the Monti Simbruini  
Management: Board of Public Right  
Surface: 29,900 hectares - Instituted: 1983

La Selva Natural Monument  
Management: La Selva Natural Monument  
Surface: 25 hectares - Instituted: 2000

Valle delle Cannuccete Natural Monument  
Management: Municipality of Castel S. Pietro  
Surface: 20 hectares - Instituted: 1995

**FLORA**

Gentians, bellflowers and wild lilies are common in this natural environment. As many as 1246 species of plants have been registered in the park, of which 79 are considered at risk and especially protected. Spring in these parts is an explosion of colour.
Every excursionist’s dream: sighting an eagle, symbol of strength and wild nature! Thanks to the protection assigned to it and to its presence in the parks, this species is slowly recovering, allowing us to be optimistic in our bird-watching.

In the heart of the Park of the Monti Simbruini, in a town at the foot of Monte San Bartolomeo called Cervara, we find the black truffle named after it, a truly precious typical product and the pride of the area. The black truffle of Cervara is an ingredient of delicious fettuccine and tasty bruschetta.

There are different seasons for its tasting, the long winter period for the most valuable variety (Tuber Melanosporum Vitt), and the Autumn for the more common, but not less flavourful, Ordinary Black Truffle (Tuber Masentericum Vitt).
THE MONASTERY OF SAN BENEDETTO AND THE ABBEY OF SANTA SCOLASTICA

Abbeys and Monasteries

IN THE HEART OF THE ANIENE VALLEY, on an isolated hill, Subiaco seems to silently watch over its archaeological and architectural treasures, constantly recalling the intense history and mysticism of the place in which in the 5th century St. Benedict chose to spend a period of prayer and meditation. The three years of monastic retreat were spent in a rocky hermitage later known as the Grotto of the Sacro Speco, ideal focus of the entire Monastery of San Benedetto, that in fact contains a statue of the Saint illuminated by thirteen oil lamps.

The imposing monastic complex was built starting from the 13th century and follows the unevenness of the rocky face of Monte Taleo on which it is situated and that, like the structure itself, overhangs the valley below. The most ancient parts, some of which dug out of the rock, represent to this day the daily life of the Saint and his spiritual experience: the Holy Wood, through which the Convent is accessed, the Grotto of the Sacro Speco, where he spent his years of isolation, the Grotto of the Shepherds, where he met the local shepherds for his preaching, the Holy Staircase, that facilitated his way to the Grotto. Those were the years of the codification of the norms that would regulate the life of the Benedictine order for centuries, and during which St. Benedict promoted the construction of other twelve monasteries in the Aniene Valley, although the only surviving one is the nearby Abbey of Santa Scolastica.

In later times, the Chapel of Gregorio Magno (or of the Angels), the Upper Church, with a rectangular plan and the Lower one, formed by chapels on different levels (14th century), were built around the Sacro Speco. Close by we find the Abbey of Santa Scolastica (dedicated to Saint Benedict’s twin sister starting from the 15th century), an important cultural and spiritual centre, as indicated by the presence of a very ancient and rich Library and the Archive containing copies of ancient codexes.

The Abbey captivates visitors with its stylistic variety, already evident in the 12th century facade, in the marvelous portal, and in the Romanesque bell tower, thought to be the oldest in central Italy. The structure is centred around three cloisters, constructed in different periods; the first we meet dates to 1580 and contains two columns recuperated from the imposing villa Emperor Nero built near Subiaco. The courtyard providing access to the church dates from 1052 and is featured by small ogive arches, whereas the elegant Cosmatesque architecture makes the last cloister, from the 12th-13th century, the most precious and truly emblematic of monastery life. The Church was built in 981, restuctured in gothic style during the 13th century, and its interior was renovated later in accordance with Neoclassical taste.
On Monte Guadagnolo, the highest peak of the Monti Prenestini, at an altitude of 1218 mt, we find a place where art, faith and nature coexist in an unreal silence, pervaded by the fragrance of an ancient “sweet-smelling mint”. The Sanctuary of the Mentorella - the most ancient in Italy - was founded thanks to Constantine, the first Christian emperor, 1800 years ago. According to Christian tradition, Saint Eustachio had a miraculous vision of Christ on this site at the time of the Emperor Hadrian (117-138 AD) and so later Constantine decided to erect a church here which was than consecrated by Pope Silvester. The strong religiosity and harmony of this place are represented by the sweetness of its symbol, said to have miraculous powers: a statue of the Madonna of the Mentorella, a precious 13th century wooden sculpture by a Lazio workshop, embedded with gems and pearls. It is preserved in the main altar of the Church, founded in the 4th century, with a simple hut facade in medieval style.
The Longhi De Paolis Castle

Fumone

Still property of the Marquises Longhi De Paolis, the fortress is a valuable example of an aristocratic residence with a strong military and medieval character. Its position at the top of Monte Fumone (783mt), which also offers a splendid view from the Liri Valley to the Colli Albani, already indicated its different functions, strategic, political and residential. The origins of the fortress are ancient and unclear, but even before the Middle Ages, tightly connected with its function as watchtower. In medieval times, its strategic location led it to be part of an authentic communication system, aptly summed up in an ancient motto: “Si Fumo fumat, tota campanea tremet”. In fact the Castle worked as a centre for sighting and giving the alarm in occasion of the invasion of the surrounding area; smoke from the tower warned Rome and the entire territory of possible attacks drawing near. Always tied to the ancient Longhi family, that was granted the fief of Fumone by Pope Innocent III in 1210, the Castle was under ecclesiastic dominion for 500 years and used as an outpost for Southern Italy and as a papal prison, starting from the 11th century. This was the prison of hermit Pietro da Morrone, better known as Celestine V, the pope who renounced the pontificate and abdicated in 1294 as a sign of protest against an ecclesiastic system he did not acknowledge. Owing to this “great refusal” Dante placed him among the slothful (Inferno, Canto V). After numerous escapes, he was captured by order of his successor Pope Boinface VIII and held in the Castle, where he died after ten months of harsh imprisonment, in 1296.

In 1584 Marquis Giovanni Longhi, descendent of Boinface VIII, bought the property and requalified the ancient manor, abandoned at the time, and transformed it into an aristocratic residence of great taste and value.

Today we can admire, along with the perfectly preserved halls, the service structures that best reveal the customs of the time: the drawbridge, the moats and roof garden (the highest in Europe), the halls and the rooms of the guard, the evocative bays used for rounds, the wells and cisterns.
In the historical centre of Isola del Liri the river divides into two branches, and the Castle Boncompagni-Viscogliosi stands in the vicinity of the Great Waterfall. Mentioned in a manuscript from 1100, it originally belonged to the Church, later to the Della Rovere Dukes and towards the end of the 1500s it was passed on to the Boncompagni. With its medieval tower, courtyard, park with a spring, the fortress had a strategic and defensive function not only for the nearby town, but for the entire plane of Sora and the valley beneath. Its history of wealth, splendour and political intrigue, is characteristic of the families who lived there. The finely decorated halls, such as the Room of the Swallows with its 17th century frescoes with episodes from the Old Testament, and the Room of the Stuccoes, with its 18 bas-reliefs from the early 1600s, are worth a visit.

According to legend, when the Greek god Kronos was overthrown by Zeus, he found refuge in Lazio and originated the Golden Age. For the Romans he became Saturn, the god of sowing, and founded five fortified cities in Ciociaria: Anagni, Ferentino, Alatri, Arpino and Atina, all of them built on the median line of the Gemini constellation. Official science and archaeology never provided an explanation, but some scholars have proven the almost perfect correspondence between the stellar charts and land cartography of Southern Lazio and the location of the cities. The hypothesis is that these sites may have been in the past points of anomalous energy tied to the stars and this may have allowed the Pelasgians or their local successors, the Ernici, to move the enormous blocks, a possible explanation, defying all laws of gravity, to understand the building process of the acropoli. All we need to consider is that Alatri is surrounded by a wall made of gigantic blocks and that the large gate, known as “of the Civita”, is 4.50mt tall, 2.68mt wide, and the single stone of the architrave is 5.30mt wide and 1.80mt tall, for 1.65mt of depth, which converted into volume means 15 cubic mt. and a weight of many tons.
THE NATIONAL PARK OF ABRUZZO, LAZIO AND MOLISE AND THE REGIONAL RESERVES OF THE LAKE CANTERNO AND POSTA FIBRENO

The waters looking up to the mountains, recalling their origin, give life to Lake Canterno. The thickets of poplars and willows, and the legendary “floating island” of Posta Fibreno (already known to Pliny the Elder, the first naturalist in Western history), face the nearby mountains of Abruzzo. In a setting of great natural beauty, between cultivated fields and meadows and because of their clean waters, these two nature reserves host very rich wildlife. Nearby, the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise, one of first in Italy, offers one of the most intense experiences of wilderness available in the country. All the great Apennine fauna lives and thrives there. Bear footprints left in the snow or in the woods, traces of the presence of wolves and their howling at dusk, the flight of eagles across the sky, chamois jumping on the rocks in perfect freedom, all call out to the need for wild nature in everyone of us.

The Lazio side descends from the ridges of Monte La Rocca and leads to the wide basin of the Comino Valley and to the beech-wood of Carbonara Valley. Among woods and forests, peaks and valleys, rivers and waterfalls, this part of Lazio is a natural jewel worth knowing and visiting to experience the passing of the seasons day by day.

THE PARK IN NUMBERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park / Reserve</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Surface</th>
<th>Instituted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise</td>
<td>The Park Board</td>
<td>43,900 + 60,000 hectares</td>
<td>1923 (Park Board: 1951)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature Reserve of Lake Canterno</td>
<td>Special Consortium Company</td>
<td>1,804 hectares</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature Reserve of the Lake of Posta Fibreno</td>
<td>Municipality of Posta Fibreno</td>
<td>345 hectares</td>
<td>1983</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The parks are the reign of clear and running water, free from pollution and alterations. This is the home of duckweed and cress, that along with other species of water plants, offer a safe refuge for fish and amphibians.

Above: Lake Canterno.
Everyone would like to see a bear, even if we are afraid. Yet our brown bear is a tranquil omnivore that rarely attacks the grazing flocks and keeps at a safe distance from man. Those who are lucky enough to him in the wild never forget. He is the true symbol of wildlife.

The bees that populate the Lazio side of the National Park of Abruzzo produce excellent honey in different varieties: acacia honey with a dry flavour, chestnut honey with its rich, aged taste, thyme or eucalyptus honey with therapeutic qualities, and the classic wildflower, fresh and delicate.

In the heart of Ciociaria we find the largest Italian plant for the production of grappa. Technology and tradition coexist in the distillation of wine products, always a typical activity in the area, and maintain the flavour of traditional Italian brandy and of grappa, aged in durmast.
ABBEYS AND MONASTERIES

THE ABBEY OF CASAMARI

Veroli

For over 1500 years Ciociaria, with its numerous historical abbeys, has welcomed expressions of spirituality and Christian faith. Monasteries were founded mostly thanks to the work of Saint Benedict (480-547), and have always been centres for study, meditation and prayer in which the Rule established by the saint is respected to this day. The structure of these abbey complexes reflects the style and rhythm of daily spiritual life inspired by the Benedictine Rule, in a social micro-system organized for total autonomy.

Near Veroli we find the Abbey of Casamari, originally erected (1035) above the ruins of the ancient Roman city of “Ceratæ Marianæ”, thanks to the work of four priests who founded a Benedictine monastic community there.

Through the centuries it became a lively cultural centre with the Cistercians, to whom it was assigned in 1151. In those same years the Abbey was reconstructed in the gothic-Cistercian style, perfectly preserved to this day. Austere portals and wide arches are the features of the monastic complex: the cloister, refectory, living quarters of the monks, pharmacy and magnificent Capitular Room, severe and linear in its three naves with ribbed vaults and a true architectural treasure, confirm the fame of the Abbey of Casamari as a gothic-Cistercian masterpiece. The Church itself - built in 1203 and consecrated in 1217 - is imposing in its facade, with the rich central portal, and essential in the interior which has an Egyptian cross plan in three naves (of Burgundian and Cistercian influence) and the cross vaults sustained by sheaf pillars and small penultimate columns, typical of the gothic style.

Yet the Abbey of Casamari is famous above all for the galenic activity of its monks and its ancient pharmacy. The existence of an authentic pharmacy is officially mentioned in 1711, although 160 varieties of officinal plants were already cultivated in the monastery garden during its Golden Age. 1761 seems to be the date of the official foundation and the activity increased over the following years. The Epistolario De Jacobis, preserved in the abbey Archive, indicates that Fra’ Giacobbe Margione bought only some particular plants in Rome and when he obtained the license of apothecary in 1822, the pharmacy was opened to the public. It also became a study and preparation centre for lay pharmacists under the direction of Don Giacomo Verrelli who invented the preparations that made the pharmacy of Casamari famous, such as the seven-herb elixir and the ancient imperial tincture, of the modern distillery. The rich Painting Gallery and Museum are also worth a visit.
Useful info

National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio, Molise
Viale Santa Lucia
67032 Pescasseroli (AQ)
Ph. +3908631910715
www.pna.it
Regional Reserve of Lake Canterno
C/o Ass.to all’Ambiente
Provincia di Frosinone
Via Brighiini - 03100 FR
Ph. +39077836823
Regional Reserve of the Lake of Posta Fibreno
Piazza Cesare Battisti, 14
03030 Posta Fibreno (FR)
Ph. +390776887184
www.parchilazio.it
www.parks.it

San domenico of Trisulti and the pharmacy

Despite its Benedictine origin (San Domenico da Foligno, 10th century), this building complex was rebuilt in 1204 according to the Carthusian and Cistercian style and tradition, by Carthusian Fathers from Piedmont by order of Pope Innocent III. The Charterhouse of Trisulti is one of the most ancient architectural examples of its type and owes its fame to the herbal preparations of the monks. Saint Bartholomew dispensed his cures here and the ancient pharmacy (1763) was always very active. The 18th century rooms, decorated by Neapolitan painter Filippo Balbi, preserve the collections of antique vases, bronze mortars and wooden boxes. The production of traditional liquors is still active.

The Abbey of Montecassino

Saint Benedict from Norcia founded it in 529, but it was devastated by the Lombards (580) and the Saracens (883), and totally destroyed during World War II (1944). The abbey was rebuilt every time and its Latin and Christian culture was maintained and preserved. On this site the promoter of Western monasticism established the principles of the Rule (540) - liturgy, reading of sacred texts and manual labor - and was buried (547) with his sister Saint Scolastica. The relics were found in 1950 and are now preserved in the crypt from 1557. Starting from the 8th century, the abbey became a centre of culture, especially in the transcription of ancient works according to the Benevento writing technique, and for its Library, a national monument which houses rare works including 40,000 parchments, codices and incunabula (15th century). The Apothecary is known for the work of the monks with herbs and pigments, for the production of medicaments and distilled waters and liquors, as well as for the beautifully cared for Hortus Sanitatis.

The Liri Valley and the Mainarde

The Liri Valley and the Mainarde

History

The Abbey of Montecassino

03043 - Cassino (FR) - Tel. +390776311529
montecassinoarchivio@libero.it
Visits: 9-12am / 3:30-5pm
Library: Ph. +390776311529
Fax +390766311010
montecassino@librari.beniculturali.it
Visits, holidays excluded: 8:30-12am

San domenico of Trisulti and the pharmacy

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Botanical Garden “Flora Ernica” and Herb Museum

03010 - Collepardo (FR)
Visits: from April to June, Saturday, Sunday and holidays 3:30-7:30pm
Guided visits by reservation:
Ph. +39077547012 - +393474422642

Regional Reserve of Lake Canterno

Via Brighiini - 03100 FR
Ph. +39077549023
Museum hours: 10:12-3:00am / 3:6-3:00pm

Aby of Casamari

03020 - Veroli - Casamari (FR)
Ph. +390775283430
casamari@librari.beniculturali.it
Visits, holidays excluded: 8:30am-3:30pm
Tues and Thurs; 8:30-12:30am Sat.

BOTANICAL GARDEN “FLORA ERNICA” and Herb Museum

03010 - Collepardo (FR)
Visits: from April to June, Saturday, Sunday and holidays 3:30-7:30pm
Guided visits by reservation:
Ph. +39077547012 - +393474422642
Pope Alexander VI Borgia to turn it into a real fortress, the "Citadel", which was designed to include the construction of a fortified residence (the House of the Cardinal), still part of the structure. On the outside the castle was surrounded by five concentric defense lines, according to the medieval model, so that the inhabited area was incorporated into the circuit of walls, forming an authentic fortified town.

From the 13th century, with the exception of the Borgia years, the castle belonged for long periods to the Caetani family and, thanks to a total restoration at the beginning of the last century - at the time of Gelasio Caetani - it is still perfectly preserved. The complex of buildings, a typical example of defensive architecture, has a powerful and majestic appearance, with its central nucleus supporting the system of fortified walls and ramparts.

The halls and rooms are beautiful: the Hall of the Barons, the House with the Painted Rooms, with frescoes by a student of the Pinturicchio school, and the Large Battery, a long corridor, the Stables and Parade Ground.

Castles and Fortresses

Caetani Castle

Sermoneta

When Sermoneta became a fief of the Annibaldi family (1222), the preexisting fortress (dating at least to the 11th century) was reinforced: the only surviving elements of the original structure visible today are the Donjon and the counter-tower. Excellent observation point over the entire Pontine plane, the Castle immediately acquired a decisive role in the control of the traffic routes between the coast and the mountains, Rome and the South.

In 1297 the Annibaldi sold the fiefs of Sermoneta and Bassiano to the noble Caetani family for 140 thousand gold Florins, and from that moment the entire area thrived. In those years the Castle was completely restructured and new sections were added, including the famous Hall of the Barons, 22mt long. In the early 1500s, the town of Sermoneta was assaulted by the unrestrainable Borgia family that conquered it along with the Castle. Consequently, Antonio da Sangallo the Elder - great military architect - was commissioned by Gelasio Caetani to turn it into a real fortress, the "Citadel", which was designed to include the construction of a fortified residence (the House of the Cardinal), still part of the structure. On the outside the castle was surrounded by five concentric defense lines, according to the medieval model, so that the inhabited area was incorporated into the circuit of walls, forming an authentic fortified town.

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One of the illustrious guests of the Caetani Castle in Sermoneta, she lived there towards the end of the 1400s, when her father Rodrigo Borgia, Pope Alexander VI expropriated the Caetani family. Very young and gentle at the time, she was used by her brother Cesare and her father for the advancement of their political interests and married off three times to men she never chose. It was said that during her short but intense life (1480-1519), the charming Lucrezia was never really happy. Intellectually engaging, she expressed her strong personality and intelligence in the creation of a splendid court life. When she married her third husband Alfonso I d’Este (1501) and became Duchess of Ferrara, she surrounded herself with the most brilliant individuals in Italian Renaissance culture.

Walking through the ancient streets of this medieval town also rich in Renaissance recollections, we discover the peculiarity of its urban layout. The ancient part of the town, protected by a circular wall (12th-13th centuries), has a unique “spiral” structure in which the houses and the main street with its pavement made of small cubes, develop in a helix up to the Piazza della “Torre”. The presence of the imposing cylindrical structure at the top, raised and paved with small stone cubes, provides an even greater evocative charm; it seems time has stopped. This is the birthplace of Aldo Manuzio the Elder, typo...
The Mediterranean bush is the symbol of Nature that resists everything: wind, rain, fire. Mastic and strawberry trees, cistus, daphne, heather and all the other species, cover the green hills and mountains in every season.

THE REGIONAL PARK OF THE MONTI AURUNCI

FROM THE BREATHTAKING CLIFFS of the regional parks of Gianola and Monte Orlando, the peregrine hawk attacks the exhausted migrating birds coming and going from Africa. A complex of calcareous mountains dropping into the sea surrounds the southern section of Lazio, the Ausoni and Aurunci mountains, that along with the Lepini precipitate into the sea with the beautiful cliffs of Sperlonga. When impenetrable forests covered this area it was the reign of bandits of all kinds: today we find a low bush area with shrubs, terebinth, broom and heather. Only on the cooler mountainside do we find a scrub of holm oak, manna-ash, field maple, cork-trees, hornbeam and durmast. In a landscape where Lazio meets Campania, the sunny, solitary, wild beauty of the Aurunci truly stands out. The regional park is very famous for its botanical complexity and has around two thousand registered species. From the woods of holm oak to the cliff vegetation, in the space of a few kilometers we go from beech woods to woods covered with orchids and saxifrages on the mountain ridges. The gentler cliffs are the home of authentic botanical rarities such as the Sternbergia lutea, the Euphorbia serrata and the Bupleurum rolii. The side facing the sea has typically Mediterranean woods, with holm oak and cork trees and beech further north.

THE PARK IN NUMBERS

National Park of the Monti Aurunci
Management: Park Board
Surface: 19,374 hectares - Instituted: 1997

Urban Park of Monte Orlando
Management: Municipality of Gaeta
Surface: 60 hectares - Instituted: 1986

Suburban Park of Gianola and Monte di Scauri

The Mediterranean flora is the symbol of Nature that resists everything: wind, rain, fire. Mastic and strawberry trees, cistus, daphne, heather and all the other species, cover the green hills and mountains in every season.

Above: Daphne Sericea.
This is the reign of thrushes and blackbirds, starlings, and robins, Sardinian warblers and magpies, jays, along with owlets and barn owls. The peregrine hawk is the fastest bird of prey. When it dives it can reach 300 km an hour. There is no escape. Yet it is the only one in real danger, as it needs peaceful cliffs to nest in and finds safety only in parks. Mammals in the area include hedgehogs, foxes, weasels and dormice.

HONEY FROM THE PONTINE PLANE

Recognized as a “traditional product” of Lazio by the Ministry of Agriculture, the honey of the *eucalyptus monoflora* type is collected and manufactured in the Pontine Plane. Every year in occasion of summer blossoming, thousands of hives rush here, especially from the surrounding areas and the north. This particular type of honey is made thanks to the presence of the *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*, a tree planted in abundance in the Agro Romano and in the area of Latina in the last century by monks to favour the reclaiming of the marshy land. Intensely aromatic, not very sweet and with balsamic properties, it is the ingredient of a refreshing natural beverage made with water, eucalyptus honey and lemon juice.
THE ABBEY OF VALVISCIOLO

Sermoneta

In the land where the rules of history have always been dictated by power and faith, the Abbey of Valvisciolo has always been an important point of reference in monastic life. The uncertain origin of the Abbey’s name is the first sign of its complex history. Valvisciola may derive from a simple naturalistic reference: vallis lusciniae, nightingale valley, or possibly valley of the “visciele”, the wild cherries that grow in the area, at the foot of Monte Corvino. The first founding monks were Greek Basilians of Saint Nilo in the 8th century and later, in the 13th century the abbey was rebuilt by the Cistercian Fathers who definitively took over. According to tradition it was also an ancient Templar centre until the suppression of the order, in the early 14th century. This theory is confirmed by the presence in the rose window of the church of a small cross of the order of the Templars carved in the left side of the central oculus. The small cross was also found in the ceilings of the cloister (north wing) during the restoration of 1956-1957. The presence in Valvisciolo of Knights of the Order of the Temple, the monastic-military order instituted by Hugo de Payns at the beginning of 12th century to defend holy places, would have doubtless been an exceptional event but explainable through the famous connection between the Knights and Cistercian monasticism, as indicated clearly in the final formula of the Templar vow. The monks of the Abbey of Carpineto Romano, originally called Valvisciolo, moved from there in the 14th century to the new monastery and brought the name with them. Together with the Abbey of Fossanova, the Abbey of Valvisciolo is a true jewel of gothic-Cistercian architecture, with the simple facade, the portal, the beautiful rose window with a 5mt diameter, and the oculus. The Church, simple in its interior too, has three naves with pointed arches and gothic arches in the main one, and the Choir with a rectangular plan creates a sense of intimacy in these distant places so full of history. Baroque paintings and frescoes are the only decorative element. The Monastery building contains numerous beautiful rooms, such as the Capitular Hall of the 12th century, the Refectory and the elegant Cloister with a square plan and double lancet windows with small columns and elegant capitals.
The majestic abbey, declared national monument in 1874, was founded in the vicinity of Priverno by Benedictine monks in the 11th century above the ruins of a Roman villa. In 1134 the Cistercian Fathers arrived in the area to reclaim its marshes, and the name seems to have originated from the digging of a drainage channel, the “fossa nova”. The abbey was rebuilt according to primitive Cistercian architecture of which it is a well-preserved example. The access portal has a very effective Cosmatesque decoration and the rose window has 24 small double columns. The interior of the Church, consecrated in 1208, is in gothic-Burgundian style: bare, luminous and beautiful. The Cloister has a rectangular plan, three sides in Romanesque style and one Gothic. The superb Capitular Hall is also gothic, and was restructured around 1250. The guest quarters still preserve the cell where St. Thomas Aquinas died in 1274 during the stop on his journey to Lyons. The cell is today a chapel with a lacunar ceiling.

According to tradition the holy image of the Madonna della Civita was painted by the Apostle Luke and was fought over through the centuries by the towns of Campodimele and Itri. The dispute was concluded by relinquishment on both sides, that still celebrate the event with a meaningful ceremony known as the “Embrace of the Elders”, in which two groups of seven elderly citizens partake in a brotherly embrace in front of the Sanctuary of the Madonna della Civita (Itri - 11th century), which houses the sacred image. A curious fact is the presence in the Church of the Sanctuary of a red cement tile in the marble floor on the right of the main altar. This “aesthetic” anomaly is originated by a strange phenomenon: every time a substitution of the red tile with a marble one was attempted, the new one always broke. The people in charge at the Sanctuary consequently decided to relocate the red one as they were unable to explain the unusual cracks.

THE MONTI LEPINI, AUSONI AND AURUNCI

THE MADONNA DELLA CIVITA

THE ABBEY OF FOSSANOVA

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Walking through time
PARKS, CASTLES, MONASTERIES,
DISCOVERING HISTORY AND LEGENDS
FROM THE HEART OF LAZIO

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On the cover: Sermoneta, Borgo and Caetani Castle (Simonetta Panzironi).
In the background: land map of Lazio - Domenico De Rossi, 1693.

Relief maps of Lazio: Regione Lazio Dipartimento Territorio
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