



Abruzzo, the Authentic Wilderness of Central Italy

*Walking through the 3 National Parks of the Abruzzo,
abundant nature, dotted with cultural highlights*



TRIP NOTES 2023

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****GENIUS LOCI TRAVEL - The Real Spirit of Italy****



INTRODUCTION

At only a short distance from Rome lies one of the most interesting nature areas of Italy, the Abruzzo, featuring an almost pristine landscape. The mountains of the Central Italian region are part of the Apennine mountain range and include several peaks over 2000 m high, including the Corno Grande in the Gran Sasso Massif (2913 m). In this landscape of wild mountains and rolling hills, wolves and bears still roam free.

Nature here is overwhelming and now protected by three national parks, each very different from the other. You'll visit the Gran Sasso National Park, the savage Maiella National Park, dotted with remote medieval monasteries and the Abruzzo National Park, one of the oldest protected landscapes in Italy.

During your tour you will walk through all of this abundant nature and have the opportunity to climb up to the very top of the Corno Grande. You will walk through the spectacular Orfento Canyon. You will explore the Lama Bianca Nature Reserve and hike on the Camosciara footpath where you can observe chamois roaming in the wild. During your walks you will cross meadows full of colourful alpine flowers and wild orchids, while hiking in the woods alongside little streams you will be able to admire giant centuries-old beech trees.

However, there is more than just nature in Abruzzo. You will walk through medieval villages scattered around the hilltops of the area and visit monasteries with beautiful frescos. You will hike through abandoned hamlets squatting under ruinous castles and you will have the opportunity to eat your lunch in the spot where parts of famous films such as "The Name of the Rose" were filmed! You will also stay in the wonderful Sulmona, birthplace of the Roman writer Ovid and one of the most famous popes, Celestine V, mentioned in Dante's 'Divine Comedy'.

This wonderful mix of pristine nature and many, often unknown cultural treasures, represents the real authentic character of the Abruzzo Region, yet to be discovered by mass tourism, where a traveller is still treated like a welcome guest.



During this tour you can choose the difficulty level of the excursions yourself. Walks follow easy routes without any technical difficulties, feasible for anyone who has walking experience and is in a good physical condition. Walking times: approx. 2 to 5 hours.



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DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Day 1 – Arrival in the ‘Gran Sasso’ National Park

After arriving at Rome or Pescara’s airport, you pick up your rental car and head to the small mountain village of Fonte Cerreto, wonderfully situated at the foot of the ‘Gran Sasso’ (Big Stone). If landing in Rome, according to your arrival time you have some time to make a wonderful walk halfway Rome and L’Aquila, either in the Duchessa Mountains or at the most interesting excavations of Alba Fucens. Coming from Pescara you can opt to visit the beautiful little town of Penne, and drive straight up to the campo Imperatore. Your hotel is either located in the small hamlet of Fonte Cerreto, situated at the feet of the massive of the ‘Gran Sasso’ (Big Stone), or, on request, also a hotel directly on the Campo Imperatore can be booked. After leaving your luggage at the hotel you are already free to make a short walk with views of the imposing rock cliffs of Central Italy’s highest mountain peaks. Of course, instead of flying you can also get here by driving your own car if you wish.

Hotel in Fonte Cerreto/Campo Imperatore - HB

Day 2 – Roundwalk ‘Campo Imperatore’

On your first day in Abruzzo you have many options for a beautiful roundwalk on the high plateau of the ‘Campo Imperatore’ (Emperor’s Field). If staying in Fonte Cerreto, you can either drive up or take the cable car up to the plateau, otherwise you start walking from your hotel door. You have several options for a rewarding roundwalk, depending on your level of fitness and the weather conditions, ranging from really challenging to less difficult or easy walks. You can opt to follow the ridge towards the highest peak Corno Grande (2913 m.), followed by a great walk through the ‘Fields of Danger’ (Campo Pericoli) The first part of the walk takes you up to the ridge which delimits the high plain of ‘Campo Pericoli’ (Field of Danger) to the South. From here you have already great views over the main top of the mountain chain, and the highest of the Apennine Range, the Gran Sasso (2912 m.). From here you have several options, which can bring you either to the very top, or to some ‘minor’ summits, all with spectacular views. Then you walk to the Rifugio Garibaldi in the plain of the Campo Pericoli, with two options for the return: following a (partly difficult) path over the Portella Pass, back to the Campo Imperatore, or returning along an easy, well-trodden path back to the mountain hut of Duca degli Abruzzo, descending to Campo Imperatore the same way as you came up. After returning to the car you drive along a wonderful panoramic road over the ‘vast high plain of ‘Campo Imperatore’, also known as ‘Little Tibet’, down to the beautiful village of Santo Stefano di Sessanio.

Hotel in Santo Stefano di Sessanio - HB

Total walking distance: 8-20 km. Total walking time: between 3,5-7,5 h. (with extra option).

Day 3 – Santo Stefano di Sessanio and Rocca di Calascio

After breakfast this morning you start with a stroll through the village. This once abandoned splendid medieval village recently is being completely restored, with great respect for the original architecture. Do take your time to explore the quiet peaceful back alleys of the village, before starting the wonderful, but easy walk through the mountains, to Rocca di Calascio, Italy’s highest village at 1460 m, boasting an impressive castle and a wonderful church. Views are grand to say the least! On your way you can enjoy a picnic lunch. You should of course take some time to wander around in the scenic hamlet of Rocca di Calascio, now mostly abandoned. Then you walk down to the ‘new’ (which in Italy still means medieval!) village of Calascio and back to Santo Stefano (optional local bus). There is time to enjoy a drink along the lake, before settling into your hotel and then wander through the old town centre looking for a nice restaurant to have dinner.

Hotel in Caramanico Terme – BB

Total walking distance: 9-14 km. Total walking time: around 3,5-5 h. (if walking back to S. Stefano).

Day 4 – Walk through the Orfento Canyon

This morning you drive along a beautiful road to the spa town of Caramanico Terme situated in the middle of the Maiella National Park. But first you’ll discover some stunning places, linked to the Mythical figure of Pope Celestine V, drenched in spirituality. By car you first drive to the charming small town of San Valentino and



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then to the stunning Convent of Santo Spirito. Then you make a wonderful walk along some of the many monasteries in the area. First you walk through an open landscape, dotted with several 'tholos', strange stone buildings that seem to be prehistorical, but were used by shepherds until only a few decades ago, towards the canyon. Here you'll visit the beautifully located monastery of St. Bartholomew, one of the most scenic little churches of the region. The daring walkers can also visit the isolated cave church of San Giovanni and the small hamlet of Decontra at the other end of the canyon. Then, always through pleasant mountain scenery, and drive on to Caramanico.

Hotel in Caramanico Terme – HB

Total walking distance: 8 km. Total walking time: around 3,5 h. + sightseeing time.

Day 5 – Roundwalk Decontra

Today's walk starts directly from your hotel. After a short visit to the natural history museum you walk directly into the impressive canyon of the river Orfento. Although the landscape is spectacular and wild, the walk is not difficult. You can have a nice picnic lunch somewhere half way, and then descend along the river. At the end of the canyon you walk through a surrealistic landscape of waterfalls and grotto's, before returning to the village of Caramanico. You then climb up to the old town of Caramanico and make a walk through the historical centre, beautifully located on the ridge above the river. The late afternoon is at leisure for a stroll or a drink in the old town.

Hotel in Caramanico Terme - HB

Total walking distance: 15 km. Total walking time: around 5 h. + sightseeing time (shorter option: 12 km./4 h.).



Day 6 – The Orta Valley and Sulmona

This morning after breakfast, you make a short scenic ride through the Orta Valley, which separates the two main ridges of the Maiella National Park. There are several shorter and longer walks possible in this area. A recommended stop is Rocca Caramanico, a small hamlet towering above the valley from a lonesome rock. From here you can start your walk along the edge of the mountain range, a scenic walk, without too much climbing. Then you start the steep descent towards the medieval village of Pacentro, a very scenic village on the edge of the mountain chain, dominated by the impressive towers of its medieval castle. Take your time to walk through the whole historical centre! Then you continue down to Sulmona, a beautiful city surrounded by mountains, and well worth exploring. Our hotel here is located in the very heart of the city, which gives you the opportunity to walk around and take in the atmosphere. In the evening you can go out for dinner in a nice restaurant with some superb local cuisine, or opt for a pizza in one of the city squares.

Hotel in Sulmona - BB

Total walking time: several shorter walks: around 2,5 h. (Roccacaramanico) + 1 h. in Pacentro + sightseeing time + extra optional walk in Lama Bianca (2 h.).



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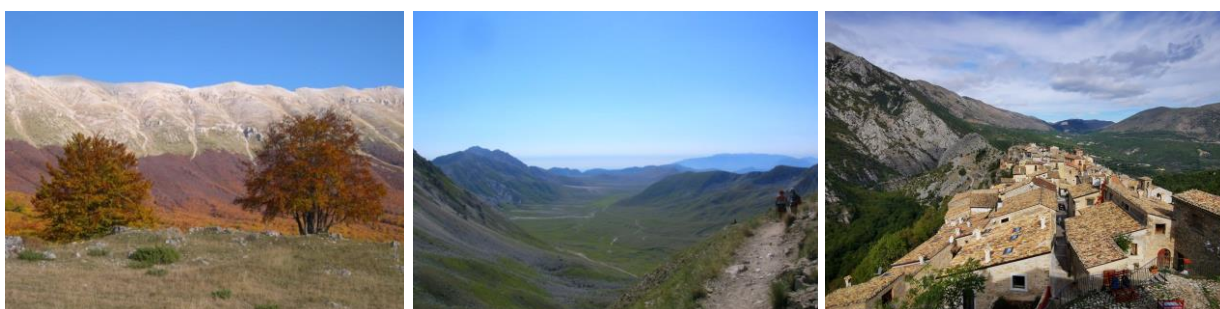
Day 7 – Scanno and the Abruzzo National Park

Today you drive through the canyon of the Sagittario Valley towards the third and maybe most famous of the national parks in the area, the Abruzzo National Park. A number of places along the road are worth stopping at, such as Anversa degli Abruzzi and the tiny hamlet of Castrovalva, nestled on the ridge like an eagle's nest.

From here you can make a beautiful walk along the ridge, through a nice open landscape of mountain meadows and forest, with spectacular views of the canyon. Then you drive on to the village of Scanno, maybe the most picturesque village of the Abruzzo range, famous for the women's traditional dress, immortalised by the photographer Cartier-Bresson. Take your time to stroll through its characteristic streets and maybe have lunch or a drink on a terrace. In the afternoon you make a very scenic drive along the Passo Godi, and then down to the Lake of Barrea, in the very heart of the Abruzzo National Park. Here you will stay for the last two nights, either in the village of Civitella Alfedena, right above the lake, or in the stunning village of Opi.

Hotel in Civitella Alfedena or Pescasseroli - HB

Total walking time: several shorter walks: around 2 h. (Castrovalva) + 1,5 h. in Scanno + sightseeing time + extra optional walk around Passo Godi (1-3 h.).



Day 8 – The heart of the Abruzzo National Park

Today you have the time to explore the Abruzzo National Park. A number of wonderful round walks can be made here, ranging from the easier to the more difficult. The best option might be to do one of the most famous trails of the park, the Camosciara, where it's possible to see the chamois wandering around freely. Another beautiful walk is the walk from Opi into the Val Fondillo or, alternatively, the Val di Rose walk, which starts from Civitella Alfedena. The real hikers can opt for a challenging roundwalk to the Monte Greco. If instead you want to relax you can opt for an easy walk around the lake of Barrea and a visit to the museum dedicated to wolves, an animal which still populates the mountains in this area.

Hotel in Opi, Civitella Alfedena or Pescasseroli - BB

Total walking time: many possible options, ranging between 1-7 h. Possibility to combine a few shorter walks.

Day 9 – Departure

Your tour ends after breakfast today. By car you return to the airport or on to your next destination.



TOUR DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

All nights are spent in beautiful hotels (generally 3-star). All rooms have en-suite facilities.

Dinners (4) are included in the tour price. On the other evenings you have an ample choice of good typical restaurants in the towns where you'll be staying. No picnic lunches are included in the tour price, but these can be prepared for you by the accommodation holders, or materials for picnics can be purchased in the villages which you will be passing through.

Night 1 : The first night is spent in a beautifully located hotel at Fonte Cerreto, at the foot of the Gran Sasso Mountains or in alternative in a hotel (according to your request) right on the Campo Imperatore.

Nights 2 & 3: These nights are spent in the beautiful village of Santa Stefano di Sessanio.

Nights 4 & 5: These nights are spent in a nice hotel in the spa town of Caramanico Terme in the heart of the Maiella National Park, right above the canyon of the Orfento River.

Night 6: This night is spent in a central hotel in the beautiful city of Sulmona.

Nights 7 & 8: The last two nights you stay in a nice hotel in the heart of the Abruzzo National Park. Either in the village of Civitella Alfedena, Opi or Pescasseroli (on request).

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Easy/moderate (2/3): Easy to moderate walks without any real technical difficulties. Remember that you decide the difficulty level of the excursions yourself. In early spring and late autumn temperatures are cooler.

Fitness: All walks are feasible for those with some walking experience and in a good physical condition. During summer you should be able to walk for a few hours a day even in hot dry weather conditions.

FOOTPATHS & WAYMARKING

Most paths are relatively well maintained & waymarked, but during the season some paths can get overgrown.

Waymarking: Although an important part of the route is waymarked, it is important to follow the route descriptions provided together with the maps. With these it is always possible to find your route.



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INCLUDED

- Accommodation in good 3-star hotels: 2 nights Fonte Cerreto/Campo Imperatore, 3 nights Caramanico Terme, 1 night Sulmona, 2 nights Pescasseroli
- Meals: all breakfasts, 2 dinners
- Extensive route notes, with description of the route & tourist information
- Maps at 1:25.000 scale (or better)
- 24/7 local assistance

NOT INCLUDED

- Departure taxes & Visas
- Travel Insurance
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Tips
- Items of personal nature
- Car rental

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

Arrival: The tour starts in FONTE CERRETO, which can easily be reached from Rome (daily flights, also low-cost, from all major European cities) and Pescara (daily low-cost flights from several major European cities) in around 1 hour 20 minutes (mostly 'Autostrada' - highway).

Departure: The tour ends in PESCASSEROLI after breakfast on day 9. From here you can reach Rome in just over 2 hours, Pescara in slightly less than 2 hours.

TOUR VARIATIONS

One of the main characteristics of a Genius Loci Travel 'Drive & Hike, Walk & Discover' Tour is the freedom you have in putting together not only your own daily programme, but also the length of the tour and the places to visit.

The above programme is only an example of what is possible. It is a well-balanced programme, which shows you the great variety of this part of southern Italy, both the authentic inland areas, as well as the stupendous coastline. However, according to your interests we can easily adapt the programme to your demands. More mountains, more sea, more culture, more relax.... You decide!

EXTRA NIGHTS

It is possible to extend your tour with a few days in Rome, other towns in Central Italy, or towns elsewhere throughout the country. Details and prices on request.

UPGRADE

It is possible to book an upgrade in some of the places en route. Details and prices on request.

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