



Abruzzo Apennines

The Wildlife Sanctuary of Italy's Mountains

A stunning walking tour through the National Parks of Abruzzo, where wolves, bears and deer still wander around freely



TRIP NOTES

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GENIUS LOCI TRAVEL - The Real Spirit of Italy



INTRODUCTION

At just a short distance from Rome, the Abruzzo is one of the most interesting areas in Italy, featuring some amazing mountain scenery, not as famous as the Dolomites further north, but with a nature so precious that the region now even boasts three main national parks and a number of regional parks. You'll find some pieces of almost pristine landscape, where even wolves, deer and brown bears still wander around. The nature here is overwhelming and well protected. During this tour you'll visit all three national parks, each very different from the other, but all equally beautiful. You will of course make some wonderful walks through all of this abundant nature, which makes you feel like you're far away from everything else.

You visit some of Italy's most beautiful national parks, among which is the Gran Sasso National Park – featuring the highest peak in the Apennines – the savage Maiella National Park, dotted with remote medieval monasteries, some of which were founded by the famous Pope Celestine V, and of course the Abruzzo National Park, one of the oldest protected landscapes in Italy. But nature is not the only feature of this area, and we don't forget about the cultural treasures of this region either. You will walk through medieval villages scattered around the local hilltops, and past monasteries with beautiful frescos, as well as some of the beautiful little towns in this region. You spend some time in wonderful Sulmona – birthplace of the Roman writer Ovid and one of the most famous popes, Celestine V, mentioned in Dante's Divine Comedy – in amazing Scanno, favourite spot of the photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, in the beautifully restored Santo Stefano, and in Pacentro, with its wonderful castle. This journey takes you past abandoned castles on remote mountain peaks and amazing churches in the middle of nowhere.

From Rome, the 'Eternal City', a great metropolis where thousands of years of history can be found on every corner, we journey inland into the wild mountainous area of the Abruzzo. First you travel to the wonderful city of Sulmona, an ancient Roman city, and privileged residence of many popes. From here you visit the first of the three national parks, the savage Maiella National Park, with its amazing mountains and beautiful canyons, dotted with remote medieval monasteries.

Then you travel to the Gran Sasso Park, with the highest peak in the Apennines earning it its title: the 'Big Stone'. A great roundwalk here, starting from the amazing Campo Imperatore, makes you think you're somewhere in the Himalayas. During the final few days you'll travel to the southern part of the region. First through the amazing Sagittario canyon to the beautiful old village of Scanno, then on to the Abruzzo National Park, one of the oldest protected landscapes in Italy. Here you might encounter deer, and, if you're really lucky, even a wolf or brown bear. Some relaxed walks through nature and a last great meal looking out over the great lake of Barrea are a worthy end to this trip.

The Abruzzo area, yet to be discovered by mass tourism, presents its authentic character to the traveller, who is still treated like a guest. The premises where you'll be staying are all small, genuine, family-run hotels. The tour standard is 3/4 stars.



Please note: this is a moderately easy tour which is suitable for those who have some experience of walking and a good general physical condition. Most of the walks are on good paths, part of them waymarked. Average walking times: approx.. 5 hours each day.



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DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Day 1 – Arrival in Rome

You start the tour from Rome. You are free to arrive at any time. Towards the end of the afternoon we meet the rest of the group together with our tour leader. In the evening we have dinner in a nice restaurant near the hotel, which serves some good local cuisine.

Accommodation: Roma - Hotel ***

Total walking distance: 9,5 km. Approx. walking time: 4,5-5 h. Total driving time: about 1 h.

Or in Alternative: Day 1 - Rome to Sulmona

You start the tour from Rome. You are free to arrive at any time. Towards the end of the afternoon we meet the rest of the group together with our tour leader. In the early afternoon and then we travel by private bus to Caramanico Terme, our base for the next two nights. In the evening we have dinner in a nice restaurant near the hotel, which serves some good local cuisine.

Accommodation: Caramanico Terme - Hotel ***

Total walking distance: 12 km. Approx. walking time: 4-4,5 h. Total driving time: about 1 h.

Day 2 - Caramanico and the gorge of the River Orfento

Today will be dedicated to the wonderful nature of the Maiella National Park, discovering the area's biggest 'canyon', that of the River Orfento. The walking day begins straight from the hotel door. We walk to the upper end of Caramanico, and, after a short visit to the nature museum, we now walk right into the River Orfento canyon. Although the landscape is spectacular and wild, the walk is not difficult (and there are several walking options available). We will descend towards the river and then follow it all the way down through its narrow gorge. At the end of the canyon we walk through a surreal landscape of waterfalls and grottos. We have a nice picnic lunch somewhere along the river, before returning to the village of Caramanico. We then climb up to the old town of Caramanico and take a stroll through the historic town centre, beautifully located on the ridge above the river. The rest of the afternoon we are free to go for a stroll or have a drink. In the evening we have dinner together again.

Accommodation: Caramanico Terme - Hotel ***

Total walking distance: 10-14 km. Approx. walking time: 4-5,5 h.



Day 3 - From Caramanico through the heart of the Maiella to Sulmona

This morning, after breakfast, we make a short scenic ride through the heart of the Maiella National Park, one of the last remaining bits of real wilderness in central Italy. Our minibus takes us to the small hamlet of San Giacomo, from where we start a pleasant walk to Rocca Caramanico, dominating the valley from its lonesome rock high above. From



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here we start our walk through the mountain pastures and forest to the San Leonardo Pass, highest point of the route today. From here we start walking downhill to Pacentro, a very scenic medieval village on the edge of the mountain chain, dominated by the impressive towers of its medieval castle. We arrive at the higher part of the village, and traverse the whole historic village centre downhill and have a drink in the square. Then our minibus picks us up and brings us to the beautiful city of Sulmona – birthplace of the Roman writer Ovidius and one of the most famous popes, Celestine V, mentioned by Dante in his Divine Comedy – yet virtually undiscovered by mass tourism, despite its many cultural treasures. Our hotel is right in the heart of the medieval centre. city. We eat together in the nice restaurant at the hotel and then we have time for a stroll and perhaps a 'gelato'.

Accommodation: Sulmona - Hotel ***



Day 4 - The Canyon of the Sagittario River

Following a leisurely breakfast, we travel by private minibus to Anversa degli Abruzzi, another nice medieval town dominating the spectacular canyon of the Sagittario River. Here we have a short break and buy some picnic supplies, before our bus brings us up to the hamlet of Castrovalva, nestled on the ridge like an eagle's nest. From here we make a beautiful walk, first along the ridge through a nice open landscape of mountain meadows and forest, with spectacular views over the canyon.

The walk leads us to the abandoned village of Frattura Vecchia ('old Frattura'), a very scenic spot, and continues to the charming little village of Frattura (Nuovo), with marvellous views of Lake Scanno. From here we either walk down or take the local bus down into the valley, to the village of Scanno. We have time to explore the historical heart of this village, maybe the most picturesque in the Abruzzo range, famous for the women's traditional dresses, immortalised by the photographer Cartier-Bresson back in the 1950s. After a short stroll through its characteristic streets, and maybe a drink, we can settle in our centrally located hotel.

Accommodation: Scanno - Hotel ***

Day 5 – Along the ridge of Monte Greco to the lake of Barrea

After breakfast, we travel by private minibus up to the Passo Godi, through stupendous mountain scenery. After a last coffee here, we hike up to the stunning mountain ridge of the Monte Greco, through beech forests and alpine meadows. After a short, steep climb we'll reach the ridge, from where we'll have spectacular views all around. We then walk along easy trails to the beautiful little mountain lake of Pantaniello. In the shadow of the Monte Greco, we then walk down to the beautiful medieval village of Barrea, at the edge of another spectacular canyon, and overlooking its beautiful lake. Here we settle in a comfortable hotel. At night we can go into town for a nice dinner.

Accommodation: Barrea - Hotel ***



Day 6 – Along the ridge of Monte Greco to the lake of Barrea

Today we start walking directly from our hotel heading for Lago Vivo, the 'Living Lake', one of the best areas to spot wildlife. After a rest here, through the Valle dell'Inferno (Hell's Gorge), we'll walk on to yet another beautiful small village, Civitella Alfedena. This village is famous for its wildlife sanctuaries, and here it's definitely possible to see wolves, while the chance of encountering deer in the middle of the street is pretty high too! Here we settle in at the hotel in the town centre. We have dinner in the hotel tonight.

Accommodation: Civitella Alfedena - Hotel ***

Total walking distance: 9/15 km. Approx. walking time: 4/5,5 h. Total driving time: about 1 h.

Day 5 - The heart of the Abruzzo National Park

After a nice breakfast, we have several options for exploring the Abruzzo National Park. A number of wonderful roundwalks can be made here, ranging from easier to more difficult. A good option could be one of the most famous trails in the National Park, the Camosciara, where it's possible to see chamois wandering freely, or alternatively, the Val di Rose walk, which starts directly from Civitella. The serious hikers can opt for a challenging roundwalk to Monte Greco. If instead you want to relax we can opt for an easy walk along the lakeside and a visit to a museum dedicated to the wolf, an animal which still populates the mountains of this area. In the evening we go out for our last great meal together.

Accommodation: Civitella Alfedena - Hotel ***

Total walking distance 5/15 km. Approx. walking time: several options, between 2/5,5 h.



Day 8 - Departure to Rome

After breakfast this morning, your trip ends. From Civitella we transfer back to Rome by private bus. Those who want to extend their stay can either book some extra days in the Abruzzo National Park, in Sulmona, or in Rome.

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