



Winter in the mountains



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Skiing in Abruzzo



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Winter mountain resorts



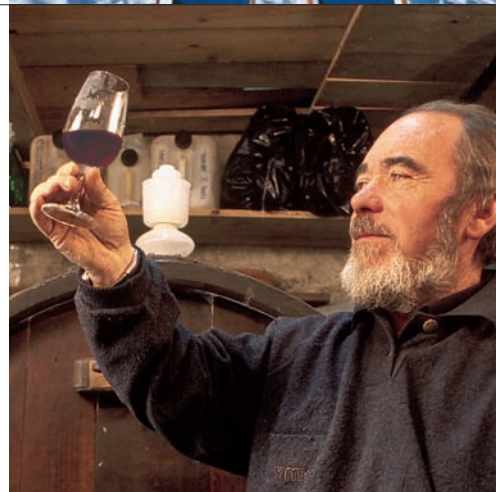
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The proverbial hospitality of the mountains of Abruzzo



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Treasures of skills & savours



Skiing in Abruzzo

THE MEDITERRANEAN



The biggest ski resorts in the Apennines, hundreds of kilometres of ski runs, excellent standards of snow, well-designed state-of-the-art facilities, a complete, efficient network of accessory structures and services. Abruzzo has no limits if you are a snow aficionado.



has a snowj heart

Abruzzo is a mountainous land. Just scan the horizon in any nook of this region and you will see rows of rocky peaks, lined up like tin soldiers, looking skywards. These are the Majella, Gran Sasso, Laga and Sirente-Velino group massifs, to name only the largest and most famous. A fantastic high-altitude universe that is the rocky backbone of this region, constituting the most formidable Apennine mountain complex (with obviously alpine features), in the heart of Italy and the Mediterranean. The mountains of Abruzzo have characteristically heavy, lasting snowfall, and offer plenty of tourist resorts and facilities, often of above-average quality. Primarily, there are many outstanding and well-differentiated environments for enjoying some good levels of both downhill and cross-country skiing. The areas with the tallest peaks are ideal for downhill skiing, while the numerous vast plateaux, with terrain of various levels of ruggedness, offer some lovely settings for cross-country skiing.

Hundreds of kilometres of ski runs are available to snow aficionados, with plenty of choice for fun. State-of-the-art facilities and a complete, resourceful network of accessory services have had an impact on the many tiny mountain towns, which have turned themselves around to valorize the snow and make a living from it, without sacrificing their identity. Thanks to the modern,

The underpinning to winter tourism in Abruzzo is the combination of excellent local resorts, the quality of the environment and sheer human warmth.





efficient inland road network, and extensive upgrading of snowplough equipment (by Italian road maintenance authorities, local authorities and ski facility management consortia), all resorts are now always easy to reach, even in the event of heavy snowfall. The motorway network (motorways A14, A24 and A25), and connecting clearways, ensures the region is accessible; moreover, you will find an equally widespread rail grid and Abruzzo Airport, in Pescara. This integrated transport system means that thousands of enthusiasts, especially those from the closer cities of Rome and Naples, can reach the Abruzzo slopes, even just for the day. The most prestigious tribute to this came from Pope John Paul II, who often travelled to these peaks for a few hours on Abruzzo snow, tempted by his famous love of skiing and mountains. What is more, the excellence of the snow on the slopes, often lasting well into spring, makes Abruzzo an attractive destination for a classic skiing holiday, where beginners can take lessons from qualified instructors, found in all the resorts. Most facilities are in the province of L'Aquila, with good amenities also found on the Teramo side of Gran Sasso and on Majella.

The most important resort in Abruzzo is the Alto Sangro ski district, which is the biggest in the centre-south of Italy, and actually ranked seventh at national level for the number and quality of slopes and services overall. This district includes the

municipalities of Roccaraso, with its elegant boutiques and the largest sports facilities; Rivisondoli, famous for its traditional Nativity Tableau; Pescocostanzo, whose historical centre is an extraordinary treasure of Renaissance and Baroque monuments. The range of winter sports practiced in Abruzzo includes more than just downhill skiing and snowboarding, since the striking variety of environments in the region's mountains provides scenarios for enjoying every other snow sport, above all cross-country skiing, which has a glorious tradition and first-rate theatres in Abruzzo, both at competitive and recreational level. Cross-country skiing can be undertaken in countless settings, often fascinating and steeped in history. The circuits in the ancient Sant'Antonio woods at Pescocostanzo, or those that wind their way through the beech woods in Abruzzo National Park, offer a memorable spectacle to the keen skier. Those who prefer their cross-country off the beaten track, on immaculate snow, will be spoiled for choice. Splendid itineraries are found more or less everywhere on Abruzzo's mountains and in its valleys; worthy of note are the Campo Imperatore plateau, the Altopiani Maggiori, the shores of lake Campotosto, or the boundless slopes that cross the thick beech groves in the Chiarano valley, known as the Piani di Pezza. The same settings attract fans of dog-sledging, a sport using sleds pulled by teams of dogs who are in their element during a pastime they adore. The energy of a team of



huskies can be unleashed across a landscape that conjures up the Great North, but in the warm Mediterranean sunlight of Abruzzo's plateaux. The dog-team driver who travels across this flat vastness cannot fail to be enchanted by the view of Corno Grande's snow-capped spires at Campo Imperatore, or the gentle slopes that frame the Cinquemiglia plain.

Then there is ski-touring to be had on the faces of Gran Sasso, on Majella's vast terrace overlooking the sea, or gazing on to other peaks, which offers splendid theatres but strictly for experts. All over Abruzzo, lovers of snow will be able to gratify their passion, thanks to the numerous schools, the ski instructors, the excellent mountain and mid-mountain guides, the men from CAI, the many dynamic associations of aficionados who are keen to try out the latest trend and, last but not least, an efficient mountain rescue service whose reliability has been proven in all sorts of emergencies.

Even those without ski equipment, who want to "sample" winter sports before investing, can find everything they need here, in the widespread network of hire equipment. Coffee bars and restaurants, chalets and refuges, all sited alongside the ski slopes, ensure you can relax with your skis off, catch a tan from the Mediterranean sun that shines on the Abruzzo mountains, or take the chill off around a blazing open hearth.

After the skiing, there is plenty more to fill in the day or the

evening, even for the night owls who enjoy music and fun. Many of Abruzzo's major ski resorts actually revolve around some lovely mountain towns and villages, many of which are thousands of years old. The old centres are well-provided with restaurants and pubs, coffee bars and rendezvous, but often also have mansions and castles, museums and churches, and a wealth of art treasures, all to be discovered and admired, not to mention exhibition centres and visitor centres in the Parks, revealing the marvels of nature that the territory holds dear. All this history explains the age-old traditions that drive the life of these locations: crafts, food and wine, events. After all the fun on the snow, the best is yet to come, with the delicious recipes served in the many restaurants and agritourisms that are found throughout the mountains of Abruzzo. A taste of which visitors can even take home if they shop in the stores of typical local products. Alongside the region's traditional gastronomy, there is also an interesting range of applied arts to be discovered: first the pottery, of which the town of Castelli is one of Europe's leading production centres; refined gold jewellery, made in towns of long tradition like Pescocostanzo, Scanno and Guardiaagrele, Orsogna, L'Aquila, Sulmona, Castel di Sangro. Then there are also important examples of pillow lace, wrought iron, copper, wood, leather: traditional art and manufacturing that is imprinted with the ability of generations of artisans.







“A fine descent, and very fast, certainly better than Nuvolau in Cortina”. It was back in 1923 when Lombard mountaineer and skier Aldo Bonacossa described the 2,912-metre descent of Corno Grande; he was the first skier to reach the “roof” of Abruzzo and the Apennines. Even today the descent from Gran Sasso’s highest peak is only for skilled skiers and climbers, but winter sports in general are the order of the day on the Abruzzo mountains. An extensive network of excellent ski resorts has developed to serve enthusiasts coming to Gran Sasso, Majella, Sirente-Velino and the Abruzzo National Park mountains, as well as to Cinquemiglia and the Carseolani and Simbruini mountains. Abruzzo’s extensive and varied panorama of skiing territories offers resorts that are ideal for the skier with sporting inclinations, and others that are more suited to beginners and family groups. Moreover, the Abruzzo snow scenario is more than just ski lifts and the slopes for each of the resorts, which are listed later in this section. A wide range of beaten circuits and trekking itineraries are available for cross-country fans, whilst ski-tourers can aim for slopes that are the highest in the region and in the entire Apennine.

ABRUZZO’S WINTER



DOWNHILL SKIING

San Giacomo - Monte Piselli

Mount Piselli's panoramic slopes wind down the northern slope of the Fiori Mountains calcareous slope, marking the border between Abruzzo and the Marche, and offering great, breathtaking views across the Tronto valley, the Laga and the Sibillini Mountains. The easiest route is up from Ascoli Piceno and the Adriatic coast bordering on the Marche, although the district is actually all in the province of Teramo. The 5km of ski runs are served by a chairlift, three ski lifts and tourist facilities comprising two hotels at San Giacomo. The lifts are located at 1,105 metres asl.

Prati di Tivo

Teramo's celebrated ski resort. Easy to reach from Pietracamela's charming old centre, the Prati di Tivo slopes skirt around the lower reaches of the northern slope of Corno Piccolo, the most elegant slope of the Gran Sasso massif. The Prati forecourt, at 1,450 metres, is the terminal for two chairlifts, two ski lifts and a chairlift that soars to the 2,000 metres of Arapietra, the crest at the foot of Corno Piccolo and overlooking Corno Grande. These facilities serve 10km of downhill slopes and also have a cross-country track. The area is famous for its summer trekking and climbing, and has a wealth of itineraries for off-track skiing and ski-touring. There are seven hotels operating between Prati di Tivo and nearby Pietracamela.



Downhill skiing resorts in Abruzzo

San Giacomo - Monte Piselli
Prati di Tivo
Prato Selva
C. Imperatore - Monte Cristo
Campo Felice
Ovindoli - La Magnola
Marsia
Campo Rotondo
Pescasseroli

Scanno
Roccaraso
Rivisondoli
Pescocostanzo
Pizzoferrato and Gamberale
Passolanciano - La Majelletta
Campo di Giove
Pacentro - Passo San
Leonardo

mountain resorts

Prato Selva

This small, charming ski resort is located at the foot of the Mount Corvo woods, deep in Gran Sasso's teramo slopes, at 1,400 metres asl, and offering ski aficionados some of the longest descents on the massif. A long, picturesque chairlift rises into the woods at 1,800 metres on Colle Abetone, and is flanked by a modern chairlift and a tapis roulant for teaching further down valley. There are also one hotel at the foot of the runs and four B&Bs in the old centre of Fano Adriano.

Campo Imperatore - Monte Cristo

At 2,130 metres, the legendary Campo Imperatore hotel offers a view of the 2,912 metres of Corno Grande, the highest peak on Gran Sasso and the entire Apennine. The hotel is at the heart of Abruzzo's highest ski district and its ski lifts set off for the 2,233 metres of Mount Scindarella. In summer, Campo Imperatore can be reached along a stunning route that winds through the tall peaks and narrow valleys; in winter, snowfall closes off this road and the area can only be reached by the cableway that starts at the Fonte Cerreto base (1,120 metres), just above the Assergi exit on the A24 Roma-Teramo motorway. The high altitude fosters good snow levels throughout winter. Down valley of Campo Imperatore, there are another four ski lifts and several short runs at Mount Cristo (1,450 metres). The Campo Imperatore plateau offers some wonderful excursions for cross-

country fans, whilst the Gran Sasso gullies have countless itineraries for off-track and ski-touring. The classic decent is down Tre Valloni, from the hotel to the cableway station. Campo Imperatore has a hotel and a hostel, while another four hotels can be found at Fonte Cerreto, where the cableway starts. Other accommodation options, since they are so close at hand, are in L'Aquila and its villages, including Assergi, Camarda and Paganica.

Campo Felice

This is a favourite ski resort with skiers from Rome, who have a handy route and less than an hour's journey along the A24 Roma-Teramo motorway. The Campo Felice district stretches just south of L'Aquila, on the slopes of the Velino massif. The facilities here are located from 1,400 to 2,064 metres asl, and include eight chairlifts (five of these are for four persons), two ski tows and two hand drags, which serve 20 downhill runs for a total of 40km, including five shorter slopes used by the ski schools. The cross-country skier will find tracks that wind through the Campo Felice plateau and also some trekking routes. Anyone opting for a longer stay might be advised to look into the two hotels at Lucoli and nearby Casamaina, the two hotels at Rocca di Cambio, and the one hotel in the Campo Felice basin.

Ovindoli - La Magnola

Ovindoli is one of Abruzzo's most famous and popular ski resorts: it is the gateway to the lovely Altopiano delle Rocche, a huge plain



that separates the Velino and Sirente massifs. It is easily reached from the A25 Roma-Pescara motorway. The facilities here are located from 1,450 to 2,220 metres, on the crest of Mount Magnola, and include a state-of-the-art telecabin, (automatic connection, capability 8 persons, 3000 persons per hour) four chairlifts and four drag lifts, and a covered tapis roulant, the longest in Europe (235 metres) all serving about 20 interesting and panoramic downhill slopes, for a total of almost 30km. The resort also has 10km of slopes with artificial snow and a sequence of cross-country routes with 3km and 5km circuits at 1,900 metres asl. There are 11 hotels here, and it is also possible to use the many amenities to be found in nearby towns like Rovere and Rocca di Mezzo.

Marsia

Marsia is a small ski resort that can be found amidst the dense beech woods of the Carseolani and Simbruini Mountains; its lovely ski runs are immersed in quiet, timeless atmospheres. A chairlift and three ski lifts are located at the resort height of 1,450 metres, and connect with the 1,740 metres of Mount Midia, serving three downhill slopes flanked by a beaten circuit and numerous trekking routes for cross-country skiers. The town has one hotel and there is other accommodation available at nearby Tagliacozzo.

Campo Rotondo

The resort can be reached quickly from the centre of Cappadocia and offers some lovely descents amongst the dense Carseolani

Mountain woods. Three ski lifts travel from Campo Rotondo at 1,450 metres to the 1,750 metres of Monna Rosa, and serve various ski runs. The area is excellent for cross-country skiing. Campo Rotondo has two hotels.

Pescasseroli

This tourist and ski venue is right at the heart of Abruzzo, L. M. National Park, amongst the woods and peaks populated by chamois and bears, with slopes that wind down over Mount delle Vitelle, west of the Sangro valley and the old centre of Pescasseroli. Two chairlifts and five ski lifts provide access to 12 ski runs that address all levels of difficulty (3 black, 6 red and 4 blue slopes), 2 learner slopes, a snowpark and a slope for snow rafts. Cross-country fans can choose from the Opi-Macchiarvana tracks and the many trekking itineraries that start near the town. There are more than 40 accommodation facilities, someone with wellness centers.

Scanno

The town is known worldwide because of its splendid old centre, photographed by important international names including Cartier Bresson and Giacomelli, but also for its lake, which separates the mountains of Abruzzo National Park from the wild Mount Genzana massif. In winter, Scanno gives keen skiers the choice of two ski zones, with different features. The main chairlift starts at the town's 1,050 metres and goes up as far as the 1,615 metres of the Mount Rotondo refuge; there are another three chairlifts





serving the biggest winter sports district in the area. Four ski lifts start at 1,560 metres, at the nearby Passo Godi site, and serve several of the shorter runs; there is also a moving walkway here and a snow dinghy park. On this pass there is a cross-country circuit operating, flanked by various trekking routes. Scanno and the banks of the lake offer about 25 accommodation facilities of various types.

Roccaraso

Roccaraso may be considered the gateway to the Cinquemiglia plateau for those arriving from Campania and from Molise; it is one of Abruzzo's most famous and best-equipped ski resorts. Several plants and a number of short slopes are near the town, at 1,236 metres, but the most interesting district is the Aremogna-Pizzalto plateau, rising from 1,500 metres to 2,140 metres at Toppe del Tesoro. The skiing area has a state-of-the-art six-seater cableway with automatic hook-up, eight chairlifts and 12 ski lifts that serve more than 60km to address all levels of difficulty, and ranging from the learner slope to the runs approved for national and international competitions. The latter are connected to another 48km of slopes served by facilities at the nearby winter resort of Rivisondoli-Monte Pratello; the Alto Sangro Skipass is accepted here, as it is on the Pescasseroli and Pescocostanzo slopes. The plateau areas, at various altitudes, offer interesting circuits for cross-country skiing. The district has an excellent range of accommodation with about 30 3 star-

accommodation facilities, and various B&Bs. There are leisure and sports facilities, as well as excellent boutiques, often offering special deals with the hotels. The most noteworthy are the indoor ice rink; heated indoor swimming pool with slides, whirlpool and various types of water games; a bowling alley; cinema; amusement arcade; coffee bars; restaurants; various night spots; a wide range of stores and luxury boutiques.

Rivisondoli

Rivisondoli is located on the east of the Cinquemiglia plateau and is the gateway to the important ski district that covers the area from the base facilities at 1,390 metres, to the 2,056 metres of Mount Pratello. The district's cableway with automatic hook-up, the two chairlifts and six ski lifts, are an excellent underpinning to the 48km of downhill slopes, many of which have been extensively developed, and which are connected to those at Roccaraso Aremogna-Pizzalto, covering a further 60km. The Pratello runs offer various levels of difficulty, starting with learner slopes and ending with national and international competitions slopes. Accommodation can be chosen between ten hotels – mainly 3-stars – in the centre of Rivisondoli. Apart from the leisure and sports facilities at Roccaraso, which is only two kilometres away, we might mention the charming traditional

Nativity Tableau that is held on the Piè Lucente plain, at the foot of Rivisondoli itself, every 5 January.



Pescocostanzo

Pescocostanzo is famous for its perfectly preserved 16th-century historical centre and also offers skiers some fine runs from the 1,395 metres of its altitude to the 1,743 metres of Mount Calvario, soaring over to the west. The chairlift and two ski lifts here serve 15km of slopes for different levels of expertise. In Pescocostanzo, cross-country fans will discover some interesting circuits, created in the lovely landscape of the Sant'Antonio woods. Accommodation includes several hotels and an endless choice of B&Bs, all charming and of a good standard.

Pizzoferrato and Gamberale

Amongst the rocks and woods of the Pizi Mountains, all part of Majella National Park, we find some interesting and spectacular downhill slopes (two blue and two red) in this ski district, set on the dividing line between the municipalities of Pizzoferrato and Gamberale, served by two ski lifts. The area is of great appeal for the cross-country skiing enthusiast. Each town has its own hotel.

Passolanciano - La Majelletta

Passolanciano-La Majelletta is one of the most spectacular ski districts in Abruzzo, at the northern tip of Majella's main crest: it is popular thanks to its fantastic views. Certainly the panorama here has made it famous, with a view that ranges from the slopes as far as the Adriatic, but it also has excellent snow cover; the ski basin stretches from 1,306 metres at Passolanciano as far as the 1,995

metres of the Majelletta peak. The chairlift and eight ski lift in this area serve a total of 16 slopes for all levels of expertise: a black slope, 8 red slopes, 7 blue slopes. Two extensive cross-country ski circuits also exist. The area offers six hotels, a refuge managed by the Club Alpino Italiano and a camping.

Campo di Giove

The Campo di Giove ski facilities are found at the foot of Majella's steep western slope. The highest point of the runs is at 2,350 metres, on the Tavola Rotonda slopes, allowing skiers to reach the maximum height served by mechanical ascent systems in Abruzzo: a record! A cableway travels from 1,150 to 1,652 metres, at Guado di Coccia, the passage point from Tavola Rotonda to Mount Porrara, where there are three ski lifts in operation, serving overall 20km of slopes. There are also 12km of cross-country itineraries. The town and the ski lift station areas have a wide range of hotels and B&Bs.

Pacentro - Passo San Leonardo

Guado San Leonardo, at 1,282 metres asl, is the SS487 highway pass between Caramanico Terme and Pacentro, and is the location of a small ski station that has two ski lifts and a beginners' conveyor serving its seven kilometres of slopes. Despite not being exceptionally high up, the area enjoys good snowfall and is an ideal cross-country and ski-touring location, as it is a starting point for excursions up to Mount Morrone and Mount Amaro, on the Majella range. There is one hotel here.







CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING

The valleys and plateaux that typify Abruzzo terrain offer the perfect setting for cross-country skiing. Gently rolling plateaux, thick woods crossed by dirt roads and mule tracks, the gentle valley slopes, all of which can offer an extraordinary range of cross-country itineraries. Apart from the beaten tracks around the traditional ski resorts, where we find downhill runs and cross-country circuits that we have described above, there are also some ski districts dedicated to cross-country activities.

Il Ceppo

A spectacular pass set at 1,334 metres of altitude and located in the heart of the Laga Mountains. A 6km cross-country track leads to the heart of bosco Martese, the densest and most striking of the many woods on Laga's eastern slopes. The locality is reached from Teramo (36km) or Valle Castellana (17km).

Santo Stefano di Sessanio

The village, dominated by the massive Medici tower, is one of the most famous in Italy, and is built in the Gran Sasso foothills, whilst the ski district is found in the fantastic scenario of the plain at the heart of Campo Imperatore. The cross-country circuits in Santo Stefano di Sessanio territory are 13km from the old centre, and wind up to 1,573 metres in altitude, near lake Racollo.

Castel del Monte

The Castel del Monte cross-country tracks, at the eastern tip of Campo Imperatore's enormous plain, between Piano di Cretarola

and Fonte Pietrattina, are very famous and popular amongst cross-country skiers in central Italy. The town has two hotels and several B&Bs.

Piano di Pezza

This large valley is easy to reach from Rocca di Mezzo and Rovere, but also from Ovindoli, with tracks winding through one of the most suggestive and untouched plateaux in the Sirente-Velino Park, and which access the splendid valle Cerchiata beech woods. There is a small refuge at the entrance to the valley, where the road ends.

Opi

The most interesting cross-country tracks in the entire Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park are located around Opi. They wind through the magnificent Macchiarvana plateau, with its thick beech woods, between the town and the Forca d'Acero pass. The access to the slopes is a kilometre down valley of Forca d'Acero.

Bosco di Sant'Antonio

The cross-country area is just north of Pescocostanzo, roadside, and includes a splendid track that unwinds through the age-old Sant'Antonio beech trees and the great grassy valley that separate the woods from the steep slopes of Mount Rotella.

CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING EXCURSIONS

Any cross-country skiing fan is well aware that beaten circuits and equipped tracks are certainly not all there is available for



undertaking this sport on the Abruzzo mountains and around its protected areas. The countless woods and ample highlands on the region's massifs offer trouble-free and thrilling journeys for cross-country skiers, as long as they are sufficiently expert in the sport.

Tre Laghetti circuit

This encircles the boundaries of Campo Imperatore and is an itinerary that is easily reached from Fonte Cerreto or Santo Stefano di Sessanio; its 16km offer some stunning views across to Corno Grande, the tallest, most spectacular peak on Gran Sasso.

Piano del Voltigno

This area is reached from Villa Celiera, although the road is not always open in winter. This is a huge plain on the eastern edge of Gran Sasso, with some splendid routes through a solitary, spellbinding scenario, with itineraries of 10-14km.

The Mount Puzzillo tour

This circular route unwinds for almost 15km, between Campo Felice and the Velino massif, crossing the Morretano pass. This is one of the most varied and entertaining circuits in Abruzzo. A detour leads to the 2,102-metre Sebastiani refuge.

Valle della Dogana

In the heart of the Simbruini Mountains, offering a splendid itinerary of about 15km, that begins at Marsia. The area can be also reached from Campo Rotondo or Pereto.

Fosso Fioio

The starting point is Campo Rotondo, or the Campo Staffi resort

(in the province of Frosinone), and a quality slope of 14km reaches the Campo Ceraso refuge, in the heart of the Simbruini Mountains.

Valle d'Arano

This valley is located at the foot of Mount Sirente and offers an accessible 8km of itinerary that starts at Ovindoli. A steep detour, for another 6km-return trip, leads to Bocchetta Prato del Popolo, where the ski-touring ascent starts for the Sirente peak.

La Cicerana

From Passo del Diavolo, and the refuge of the same name, there is a slope of 8km that follows the fine cart road and leads to one of the loveliest plains in Abruzzo National Park. The area is popular with the Marsica bear, the real master of these lands.

From Macchiarvana to Pescasseroli

A lovely route of 9km, amongst highlands and beech woods, in the heart of the Park. The itinerary allows skiers to move on from the cross-country circuits near Opi and reach Pescasseroli, the capital of the protected area. A steep detour will add 6km (return) to the trip and takes in the Mount Tranquillo sanctuary.

From Pescasseroli to Piano di Terraegna

A lovely and quite long itinerary: 12km amidst the woods of Mount Marsicano, touching the Prato Rosso refuge and crossing the wooded pass at Valico di Terraegna.

Val Fondillo

Certainly one of the most famous valleys in the Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park, offering an easy and panoramic crossing



as far as the foot of Opi's Mount Amaro and Mount Marsicano.

From Passo Godi to Ferroio di Scanno

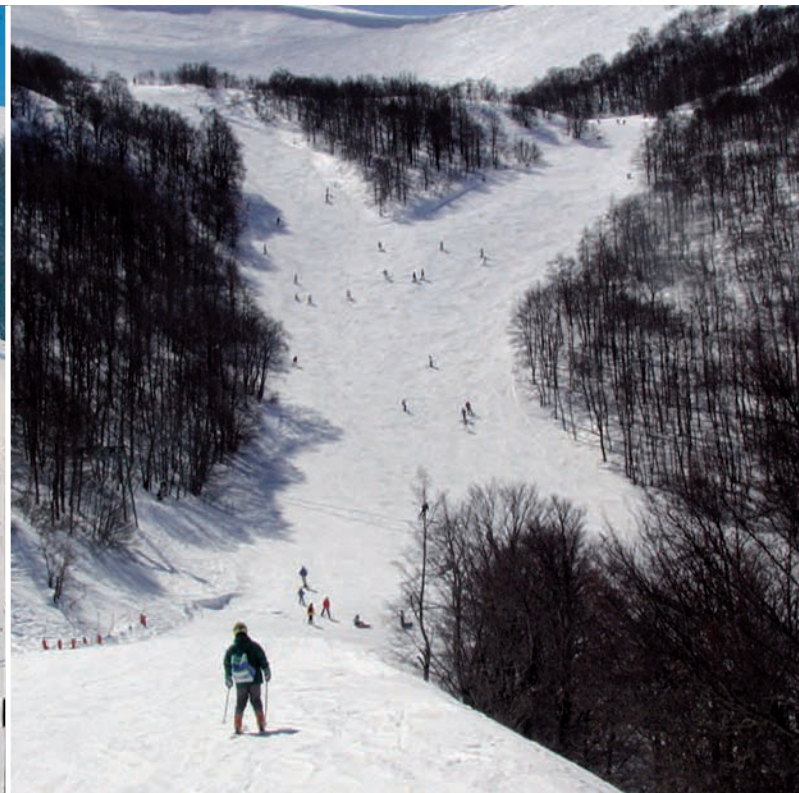
Just north of Passo Godi we find the start of a spectacular itinerary that takes the skier to the edge of the Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park Riserva Integrale.

Valle di Chiarano

Starting at the Cinquemiglia plateau, the skier crosses the rocky Bocche di Chiarano, then continues up to the Imposto refuge, as far as the 1,818 metres of lake Pantaniello, protected by a small nature reserve. The route is about 20km and the area can be reached by descending from Toppe del Tesoro or Mount Pratello.

From Decontra to Majelletta's Piana Grande

This tiny hamlet, part of Caramanico Terme is the starting point for a fine excursion of 15km, leading to the foot of Majella's western slope; the views over valle dell'Orfento are quite splendid and the pyramid peak of Gran Sasso can be seen in the distance.





SKI-TOURING

Increasing numbers of snow fans, in Italy and in Europe, after some preparation on the slopes, endeavour the thrilling experience of high-mountain skiing that takes them up to the tallest peaks. For these sports fans, Abruzzo is an excellent field thanks to numerous natural resources and ideal districts for this sort of pastime.

Nonetheless, ski-touring is a tough discipline and no one should improvise if they wish to discover all its many satisfactions in safety. This sport is actually undertaken on open mountain terrain that can be hazardous under snow conditions. So those approaching this sport should either sign up for a specific Club Alpino Italiano course or ensure the service of a local mountain guide.

Abruzzo's best ski-touring routes are:

Mount Gorzano

An easy and very panoramic outing that takes the skier up to Cesacastina, a village at 2,458 metres on the highest of the Laga slopes, with a stunning view as far as lake Campotosto.

Low crossing on Gran Sasso

A fantastic ski trek across Campo Imperatore to Prati di Tivo,

taking in the Mount Aquila pass, the Garibaldi refuge, and finally returning down lovely Val Maone.

High crossing on Gran Sasso

This is certainly an itinerary of many satisfactions, but decidedly more challenging than the one mentioned above on the same slope. Here the objective is an altitude of 2,912 metres, on the Corno Grande slope. The uphill approach can be made along the Direttissima canal, and the downhill return is along the Calderone glacier, passing the Franchetti refuge and the Arapietra.

Mount Camicia

This solitary peak at 2,564 metres asl is the destination of the most famous on the eastern side of Gran Sasso. The itinerary starts at Fonte Vetica, on the Campo Imperatore plain.

La Tavola

A large slope that offers an easy, classic route around the Magnola and Piano di Pezza lift facilities.

Canalone Majori del Sirente

This splendid but challenging itinerary leads uphill on a north-facing steep, tough gully that reaches the 2,358 metres of the Sirente peak.





Southern slope of Sirente

An approachable itinerary starting point in Ovindoli and moving uphill to Bocchetta Prato del Popolo, then proceeding along the mountain's easy slopes.

Val di Rose

The distinguishing feature of this valley is that it is populated by the most famous herd of chamois in the Park; it offers a classic ski-touring trip through Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park, arriving at the Forca Resuni refuge.

Lake Vivo and Mount Tartaro

Another splendid trip, in the heart of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park, with splendid panoramas on Mount Petroso's western slope.

Western slope of Mount Amaro

This is the tallest peak in the Majella range and it can be approached from Caramanico Terme, moving uphill along the Mount Rapina and Mount Pescofalcone ridge. The panoramic return downhill is great fun.

Eastern slope of Mount Amaro

Definitely the loveliest itinerary possible on Majella's Adriatic side.

It begins at Lama dei Peligni and exploits the natural corridor offered by the wild Vallone di Taranta ravine. The cableway that takes tourists to Grotta del Cavallone will shorten the route, but it is only open in summer.

Vallone Fondo di Majella

A spectacular itinerary for ski-tourers, taking in the western side of the Majella massif, and which can be reached from downhill or using the ski lift at Campo di Giove.

Mount Greco

The route begins at the Toppe del Tesoro crest and offers a short route to the highest peak in southern Marsica.

EXPLORING WITH SNOWSHOES

This simple, effective tool will allow users to walk on the surface of the snow, without sinking, and is increasingly popular in the mountains, while began to appear on the Abruzzo massif in the early 1990s; snowshoes, called "ciàspole" in dialect, are perfect for short, easy winter excursions in the region's woods and highlands.

Unlike cross-country skiing and ski-touring, the use of snowshoes



does not require specific expertise in progression techniques. Nevertheless, it is important to have at least basic notions and some experience in winter mountain aspects; if not, you should attend a CAI course or go on guided excursions.

Laga Mountains

The vast woods and many cart tracks found across the Laga Mountains are ideal for creating a whole range of lovely trips in a solitary scenario. The best areas on the Abruzzo side of the massif are at Cesacastina, Il Ceppo and at Padula, for heading uphill to the Tordino valley.

Gran Sasso

The endless spaces and steep ravines on this massif are natural borders for snowshoe fans. There are actually suitable areas around Prati di Tivo and Prato Selva, as well as the gorges at the foot of Mount Corvo and the Voltigno area, above.

Velino-Sirente

The Piano di Pezza and the Campo Felice area, traditionally popular with skiers, are ideal for snowshoes too. The woods at the foot of Sirente are lovely, as are the “pagliare” [rural stone huts] areas near the villages of Tione and Fontecchio.

Simbruini and Ernici Mountains

Here we have an exquisite, natural theatre for snowshoe excursions, especially around Marsia, Pereto and Campo Rotondo. The Zompo lo Schioppo nature reserve, at Morino, in Valle Roveto, is also recommended.

Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park

Abruzzo's first protected area is a true heaven for snowshoe walkers. The many destinations possible here include the interesting landscapes of the Cicerana, the Tranquillo Sanctuary, Val Fondillo and lake Vivo.

Majella

Its layout makes it rather unsuitable for this sport but nonetheless, the massif offers several options for “ciàspole” (snowshoes in dialect) on the peripheral areas of the mountain chain, including Pizzalto or around Passolanciano and Fonte Romana. Excellent areas are available on the nearby Pizi Mountains, however; and around Mount Sècine.

Frentani Mountains

Not very interesting for the skier, but the most eastern of Abruzzo's mountains are perfect for snowshoe walking in the Rosello fir woods, around Castel Fraiano Mountain.





THE PROVERBIAL

hospitality of the

Where to sleep

The accommodation on offer is extensive and varied, with quite a high overall standard. Most of the hotels are located in the major mountain district resorts, like those in the Altopiani Maggiori, with Roccaraso, Rivisondoli and Pescocostanzo, certainly the most famous and popular; but we could also mention Altopiano delle Rocche, between Sirente and Velino, deep in the eponymous Regional Park, with Ovindoli, Rocca di Mezzo, Rovere and Rocca di Cambio, as well as Abruzzo Lazio and Molise National Park tourist towns like Scanno, Pescasseroli, Villetta Barrea and others, or the Pretoro-Passo Lanciano-Majelletta district. Smaller districts are those of Campo di Giove, Caramanico Terme, Pizzoferrato-Gamberale, Passo San Leonardo, Marsia, Prati di Tivo-Prato Selva, with the towns of Pietracamela and Fano Adriano, and that of Fonte Cerreto, the base camp for the Campo Imperatore cableway. These are all mountain tourist localities with an abundance of amenities that are open all year round. Almost all Abruzzo mountain towns and villages offer some sort of facility for visitors. Over the last 10-15 years, B&Bs and agritourism farms have increased in number and have achieved a truly admirable level of quality. These are generally old stone dwellings located in historical centres, farmsteads that gaze out over unspoiled landscapes, often even original Medieval and Renaissance buildings, all finely refurbished to preserve their historical identity and initial architecture, but introducing the elements of comfort and liveability that are crucial for ensuring a successful holiday.



mountains of Abruzzo



Given the attention to detail, the price list is then a pleasant surprise. Compared to other solutions, the circuit of rental houses offers very good value for money, especially if you are on a tight budget, but more than this, it is a chance to experience the lifestyle and pace of the place.

Anyone who wants to spend a few nights in a very special venue might like to consider the various solutions in Abruzzo offered by historical homes and convents, converted to tourist accommodation. And if you think a night on the roof of Abruzzo is your thing, Campo Imperatore offers a historic hotel, the one where Mussolini was imprisoned at the end of the war, and from which he was freed by a daring German commando raid. So not just leisure time in the mountains, but also a step back in time to visit the room where "Il Duce" slept, with original furnishings, and which can be reserved like any other room in the hotel. One very unusual – especially for the experience – and top-quality type of hospitality comes from the village of Santo Stefano di Sessanio, at the foot of Campo Imperatore. The Medieval hamlet, once owned by the Medici family, has been recovered and converted to tourist services thanks to a joint venture between foreign entrepreneurs and local owners, who have transformed the site into a splendid multi-site hotel. The ancient stone houses have been rebuilt with a meticulous attention to detail and to preserve historical memory, resembling restoration of a monument, and creating countless restful, cosy lodgings, fragrant with wood and wax, able to offer the utmost comfort combined with all the charm of tradition.

At table

Every village and town is bursting with a vast range of local traditional dishes, varying surprisingly often from place to place, and closely tied to seasonal produce. Just a short journey to another valley, crossing a crest or passing a high-altitude col is enough to discover different recipes and products.

This is precisely the peculiarity of Abruzzo mountain cuisine: local diversification of recipes. Anyone who is a frequent visitor to mountain Abruzzo learns to distinguish the subtle and yet significant differences in flavour and aroma that exist even in the same recipes (and decide which they prefer) prepared in different kitchens. Sometimes the differences are the cause for curious arguments that animate many a supper table on long winter nights.

A winter holiday in the Abruzzo mountains offers an endless choice of places to stay. There really is something for all tastes and all budgets: large luxury hotels, charming family-run boarding houses, bed & breakfast, hillside agritourism holiday farms, refurbished convents offering accommodation, even a multi-site hotel that has breathed new life into fantastic medieval villages.



The cuisine of mountain Abruzzo derives from an age-old tradition rooted in the skilled use of typical local products, combining the nutritional peculiarities of a Mediterranean diet with the flavours of agropastoral practices. It is not difficult to choose a restaurant: food is good everywhere. There really is not much risk of being disappointed at table.





On the mountains OF ABRUZZO



No other Italian region has equalled the leaps and bounds made by Abruzzo to improve its wines in recent years. The proof lies in the growing interest being encountered in all European markets for the region's DOC products (whites, reds and rosés): Abruzzo's best wineries have collected numerous awards and recognition in the last few years.



treasures of skills & savours

CULINARY DELIGHTS

Wines

Abruzzo's traditional vines are Trebbiano d'Abruzzo for white wine and Montepulciano d'Abruzzo for red. Although there has been a recent recovery of minor cultivars that include Passerina, Pecorino and Cococciola. The most important production district is at the foot of the mountain chains, for instance in the Pescara valley, between Popoli and the capital, the foothills of Teramo, Pescara and Chieti, the Peligna and Ofena basins. The list of DOC wines produced in the region includes Montepulciano d'Abruzzo (including the rosé known as Cerasuolo), an aromatic and sturdy red that is dry to the palate; Trebbiano d'Abruzzo, a dry and delicately scented white; Controguerra, both the red and white, specific to a precise district of Teramo.

Extra-virgin olive oil

In the provinces of Teramo, Pescara and Chieti, the olive tree is a familiar figure across the gentle rolling hillsides. Three local oils have achieved European PDO recognition, certainly on a par with any of Italy's champion products. The first is "Aprutino-Pescarese" PDO, found mainly in the so-called "gold triangle" of Loreto Aprutino, Pianella and Moscufo and on the Val Pescara hillside; the second is "Colline Teatine" PDO, produced in the province of Chieti (where 65% of regional production is concentrated), with two sub zones –

Frentano and Vasto; the newcomer is "Pretuziano Colline Teramane" PDO. L'Aquila also has some excellent oil, although the altitude limits quantities. Abruzzo oil is generally full of flavour, with low acidity and rich in polyphenols that ensure the product has a good shelf, life as well as providing important nutritional and health-giving substances. Notwithstanding the local variations, the aroma is always fragrant and fruity, well-balanced so it can be used in all types of cuisine, but also appreciable used cold directly for dressing at table.

Pasta

Abruzzo is home to a capital of Italian pasta production: Fara San Martino, a town at the foot of Majella's eastern slope, where the presence of ultra pure mountain water fostered the development of a flourishing pasta industry from ancient times and nowadays its products are exported worldwide.

Charcuterie

Pork processing here produces some excellent hams and a wide range of charcuterie, beginning with the classic sausage, including a tasty liver variety, often preserved in oil or in lard. The most typical cured meat products are *smoked hams* made at Introdacqua and Cansano; delicious *Campotosto mortadella*, also called "mule's balls"; a soft "ventricina" for spreading on bread, produced around Teramo; another fabulous "ventricina" – this one from the Vasto area – that is a unique, coarse-





grained product flavoured with chopped mild and hot red chilli pepper and fennel seed. “soppressata” – with its fragrant aroma and mild, delicate taste – is another Abruzzo delicacy, as is the “salsicciotto” or sausage typical of Pennapiedimonte, and the “salsicciotto frentano”, considered the least fatty of cured pork products. A place of honour is held by L’Aquila salami and “salame abruzzese”.

Cheese

The most common stock reared in Abruzzo was and still is sheep. Fresh and mature *pecorino* cheeses, as well as ewe’s-milk *ricotta*, thus represent an essential ingredient in Abruzzo’s gastronomic palette. Each Abruzzo mountain area has its own type of *pecorino*. However, the most noteworthy are “pecorino di Farindola”, unique since it is made with pork rennet; a compact, mature “canestrato di Castel del Monte” and the “marcetto di Castel del Monte” (a cheese attacked by larva during its maturing phase, so the body becomes creamy and very piquant: a prized item with real connoisseurs). Cow’s milk (which may be mixed with goat’s milk) is used to make traditional “scamorza”, eaten raw, grilled or baked. On Mount Majella’s main highlands, especially at Rivisondoli and Pescocostanzo, wonderful “caciocavallo” is made from raw milk produced by the local cows that pasture on the high-altitude meadows.



Truffles and saffron

Abruzzo is a big truffle production area, since all the precious varieties of the item are endemic to the region's woods. Marsica, Teramo, upper L'Aquila and the mid-Sangro valley are the main production areas. The heart of one of Abruzzo's most interesting traditional products is on the Navelli plateau, between the Gran Sasso and the Sirente massifs, where L'Aquila PDO saffron is made from whole stigma and is unanimously voted the best in the world.

Meat

Like cheese, meat produced from sheep is also fundamental in Abruzzo cuisine. The most commonly consumed are lamb and mutton (from adult males), barbecued or roasted. One well-known and successful item is the "arrosticino", a small skewer of cubed mutton, char-grilled and eaten when piping hot. Rather more complex to prepare are "agnello incaporchiato", served with roast potatoes, lamb "trippette" and "matassine" or "torcinelli", made with lamb pluck and belly, then wrapped in the "rizza" (fat from the intestines) and barbecued. Typical of the Abruzzo mountains is an excellent stew called "pecora alla cottora" in L'Aquila, or "pecora alla callara" in Teramo. Specialities worth mentioning are pork

"ndocca 'ndocca" (made from muzzle, trotters, ribs and pork rind), a poor but very elaborate stew, and "tacchino alla canzanese" (turkey), a refined dish in gelatine, of French origin.

Vegetables

The stony fields of L'Aquila's mountains still produce barley, fantastic Santo Stefano di Sessanio lentils and Navelli chickling peas. Sulmona's red garlic has been famous for centuries for its curative properties. Of the many wild greens that grow here, it is worth mentioning a spinach known locally as "òrapi", used to flavour pasta and frittata. Then there are excellent mushrooms, especially ceps, gathered mainly in the woods on the Laga slopes, and autumn chestnuts from Laga and the valle Roveto.

Honey

Excellent and aromatic honey is produced almost everywhere in Abruzzo, a leading manufacturer. Typical of the region is the specialist production of monofloral honeys.

Liqueurs

The most famous of the distillates produced with Abruzzo mountain herbs is the very strong (72 proof) *Centerbe*, from Tocco da Casauria, a locality at the foot of Majella; *genziana* and *ratafia* are another two liqueurs.



APPLIED ARTS

Like all of the regions that crossed the threshold of modernity barely half a century ago, Abruzzo has also retained an extensive and varied craft tradition, which includes wrought iron and copper, textiles and lace, wood and stone carving, goldsmithery and pottery. The finest quality and the most original of the craft items are certainly gold jewellery, lace and pottery. Extremely refined pillow lace and splendid gold and silver jewellery are produced in Pescocostanzo and Scanno, modelled on ancient designs and often using filigree. One well-known item is the “presentosa”, the brooch that symbolises love for all Abruzzo women. Pottery, which has been a typical product in Abruzzo since the Middle Ages, has its capital in Castelli, one of the most important production centres in Europe; its Renaissance and Baroque pieces, once coveted and sought after by many of Europe’s princely courts, are now included in collections in some of the most prestigious museums worldwide. Nowadays, the art of pottery is alive as never before in Castelli.





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