



Art Cities in Abruzzo

CHIETI

So ancient that its origins blur into mythology, Chieti – once the capital of the Italic Marrucini people and later a Roman city known as *Teate* – boasts a stunning panoramic location that likely captivated ancient peoples long ago. Today, it is an open-air museum of timeless charm, just waiting to be explored.

Ready for a journey through history and art? Begin your visit by crossing **Porta Pescara**, the only surviving gate of the original eight that once punctuated the city's defensive walls. Built during the Angevin rule in the second half of the 13th century, the gate features a typical Gothic arch from the 13th century with Angevin elements. A second, more monumental gate—widened in the 19th century – is located in the Santa Maria district and features a semi-circular arch.

In the 1st century BC, Chieti was an important Roman *municipium*. To explore Roman Chieti, start with the Roman Temples, the Roman Theatre (1st century AD), and the ancient bathhouse cistern. Do not miss the archaeological site of **La Civitella**, home to a Roman Amphitheatre and a museum housing a rich collection of artifacts from prehistory through ancient Rome.

After immersing yourself in the city's remarkable past, treat yourself to the region's traditional food and wine. Try *maccheroni alla chitarra*, a delicious homemade pasta served with ragout, and *fiadoni*, savory cheese-filled pies – best enjoyed with a glass of local wine.

- **The impressive Cathedral of San Giustino**, featuring a 14th-century bell tower designed by Bartolomeo Di Giacomo. Inside, you can admire remarkable artworks, including a 15-meter *Adoration of the Magi* from the Flemish School.
- **The 16th-century Palazzo del Comune**, with its late medieval courtyard that includes a column supporting a statue of Achilles – one of Chieti's enduring symbols.
- **The Palace of Justice and Palazzo Mezzanotte**, notable examples of the city's institutional architecture.
- **Corso Marrucino**, the city's historic main street, home to the **13th-century Church of San Francesco della Scarpa**, one of the oldest in Chieti. Built in 1239 in Gothic style over the remains of an ancient chapel, the church has undergone many transformations over the centuries and is currently closed for restoration.
- **Palazzo de Majo**, a monumental building and a striking example of Baroque architecture in Abruzzo.
- **Villa Frigerj**, located in the public gardens (Villa Comunale), houses the **National Archaeological Museum of Abruzzo**, which preserves valuable Italic and Roman artefacts from across the region – including the iconic **Capestrano Warrior** (6th century BC), now a symbol of Abruzzo.
- **The Costantino Barbella Museum**, named after the 19th-century sculptor from Chieti, is located in a wing of the 18th-century Palazzo Martinetti-Bianchi. The museum showcases a diverse collection of paintings, sculptures, and ceramics spanning from the 15th to the 20th century.
- **The University Museum**, housed in the *Arnaldo Mussolini* Palace, features several collections ranging from anthropology to palaeontology, and the history of medicine.



Pescara

Pescara is the youngest city in Abruzzo, established in 1927 from the union of two smaller towns located on either side of the **Pescara River**. It is also the most dynamic city – youthful, vibrant, always in a hurry, and looking confidently toward the future. As journalist Giorgio Manganelli, who was not originally from Abruzzo but fell in love with it, once said.

Discover the city of Gabriele D’Annunzio, “il Vate,” with its beautiful marina – one of the largest in Italy – its excellent museums, and a lively scene of bars and restaurants.

A tour of Pescara can begin at **Piazza della Rinascita**, also known as Piazza Salotto (the “living room” square), the trendy heart of the city and a bustling social hub. Within walking distance, be sure to visit the CLAP Museum, created by the Fondazione Pescaraabruzzo, which is entirely dedicated to the art of comics and features a vast permanent collection of works by Andrea Pazienza.

Nearby, the **Imago Museum** is housed in the former Banco di Napoli building, an impressive example of Italian Rationalist architecture. Also established by the Fondazione Pescaraabruzzo, this three-floor gallery showcases an outstanding permanent collection of modern and contemporary art, alongside engaging temporary exhibitions.

The **Mediamuseum** and the **National Cinema Museum** are also worth visiting. The National Cinema Museum is located near the **Cathedral of San Cetto** – where Gabriele D’Annunzio’s mother is buried – and will soon be transformed into the Cinema Museum and Workshop, named after Ennio Flaiano, a renowned writer and famous citizen of Pescara.



L'Aquila

The birthplace of artists, saints, kings, queens, and daring knights, L'Aquila has a centuries-old history. It was founded between 1250 and 1254, and as the 14th-century chronicler Buccio di Ranallo recounts, King Manfred launched an assault on it in 1259.

Surrounded by mountains, the capital of Abruzzo will amaze you with its vibrant artistic and cultural life.

Begin your walking tour at **Porta Napoli**, the most imposing of the city gates, built in 1820. Follow **Corso Federico II** and you will arrive at the magnificent **Piazza Duomo**, the city's main square, where a true masterpiece of 18th-century architecture stands – the Church of the Holy Souls (*Chiesa delle Anime Sante* or *Santa Maria del Suffragio*).

A must-see in the city centre is the **Fontana Luminosa**: created by sculptor Nicola d'Antino in 1934, it features two female figures holding the local water jug (*conca*).

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The **Spanish Fort**, an excellent example of 16th-century military architecture, is currently under restoration.

The **Auditorium del Parco**, designed by renowned architect Renzo Piano, serves as a venue for cultural events.

Just outside the city centre, be sure to visit the **Basilica of Santa Maria di Collemaggio**. Built between the 13th and 14th centuries on the site of an earlier place of worship dedicated to the Assumption of Mary, it became a pilgrimage destination due to the presence of a miraculous image of the Virgin. Every year, the Basilica hosts the *Perdonanza Celestiniana*, a solemn rite recognised by UNESCO in 2019 as Intangible Cultural Heritage. During this ceremony, pilgrims who pass through the Basilica's Holy Door receive plenary indulgence, as decreed by Pope Celestine V. The church is a precious blend of architectural styles, with a stunning facade made entirely of local pink and white stone arranged in a geometric pattern, reminiscent of the famous **Fontana delle 99 Cannelle**, designed by Tancredi da Pentima in 1272.

For lovers of modern and contemporary art, a visit to the **MuNDA Museum** and the **MAXXI**, housed in the Baroque **Palazzo Ardinghelli**, is highly recommended.

Archaeological sites around L'Aquila are also worth visiting, especially **Amiternum**, **Peltuinum**, **Aveia**, and the **Necropolis of Fossa**, which offer insights into significant Italic and Roman settlements in the area.

The local traditional cuisine is renowned for its legume-based dishes, with lentil cultivation mentioned in monastic records dating back to before the year 1000. A regional highlight is the fragrant **L'Aquila PDO saffron**, known as Abruzzo's "red gold." If you enjoy bold flavors, do not miss the local liver sausages (*salsiccia di fegato*), and try a slice of **caciofiore**, a soft sheep's milk cheese with a delicate aroma reminiscent of artichoke and wild herbs, best served with **pane casereccio**, a rustic bread made from high-quality flour and natural sourdough. Before you leave, be sure to try L'Aquila's soft nougat (*torrone tenero aquilano*), a delicious treat lovingly handcrafted by the Nurzia family, who have guarded its secret recipe for over a century.



Teramo

Teramo is located in the northern part of Abruzzo, between the sea and the mountains, in a place of outstanding natural beauty and rich history. The Romans called it *Interamnina*, the “city between two rivers”, namely the Tordino and Vezzola; its ruins, D’Annunzio once said, bear witness to its ancient greatness.

Your visit starts from the city’s most iconic site: the majestic Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta. Built in 1158, it has undergone extensive restoration and is now in its original splendour, home to a spectacular array of art, from the beautiful altar, decorated by the 15th century goldsmith Nicola da Guardiagrele to the amazing Polyptych of Saint Augustine by the Venetian painter Jacobello del Fiore.

A few minutes’ walk from the cathedral are the Roman Theatre, built in the 2nd century AD, and some interesting archaeological sites, as well as the ruins of the Byzantine church of Sant’Anna dei Pompetti (6th century), burnt by the Normans in 1155. You can also pre-book a visit to the House of the Melatino Family, which supposedly contains a bust of Septimius Severus and other artworks.

Before lunch, on a nice day, you can choose to take a walk in the *Riverside Park*, a green route along the banks of the rivers Tordino and Vezzola, or to go for a stroll in the Municipal Villa, formerly a botanical garden and today still rich in rare species of flora. Here you will also find the Civic Art Gallery (Pinacoteca Civica), which holds a good collection of artworks, from the 18th century Neapolitan school to 19th century local artists such as Pasquale Celommi.

When it's time to eat, Teramo and its environs are the most exciting food scene, a paradise for food lovers. Do not miss the local specialties, like the superb *Timballo teramano*, the *Scrippelle 'mbusse* and the wonderful *Bocconotti*.

Other things to see:

- The Church of Sant'Antonio
- The Church of the Madonna delle Grazie
- The Archaeological Museum
- Castello della Monica



Lanciano

Your walking tour of the beautiful town of Lanciano begins from its very heart: the Piazza del Plebiscito, with the *Universitas Lancianese* and the 11th century Cathedral of Santa Maria del Ponte.

From the Bridge of Diocletian you can discover Lanciano Underground, an interesting archaeological tour across corridors, passages, and chambers beneath the ancient square and the magnificent Church of San Francesco. Built in 1258 in Romanesque-Burgundian style located on the same site of the Church of San Legonziano (7th-8th century), this church is a pilgrimage destination and holds the relics of the oldest recorded Eucharistic miracle in the Catholic world.

Other places to visit in Lanciano:

- the old quarters (Lanciano Vecchia, Civitanova, Sacca, and Borgo).
- The city walls and the Porta San Biagio.
- The Fenaroli Theatre.
- The churches of *San Biagio* (12th century), *San Giovina* (16th century), *Santa Lucia* (13th century), and *San Nicola* (15th century)

- The *Fountain of the Borgo* (16th century) and the *Civitanova Fountain* (rebuilt in 1825)

If you want to try the local cuisine, there is a great choice of delicious food and a wide variety of restaurants or traditional *osterie*, serving the traditional *rintrocilo*, handmade pasta with meat sauce and pecorino cheese, and the savoury side dish *rape strascinate* with a glass of Montepulciano d'Abruzzo wine.



Sulmona

Sulmona is a charming town, located in an area of outstanding natural beauty, the Peligna Valley. It is also culturally rich: once called the “Siena of Abruzzo”, for the wealth of churches and historical buildings, it is most famous for being the birthplace of the poet Ovid “*Sulmo mihi patria est*”, he wrote, “*gelidis uberrimus undis*” (Sulmona is my homeland, rich in cool waters).

The grandeur of Roman *Sulmo* can still be felt in sites such as the **Domus of Ariadne** (1st century BC–2nd century AD) and the **Sanctuary of Hercules Curinus** (4th–2nd century BC), nestling at the foot of Mount Morrone.

Must-see places in Sulmona

The **Civic Museum Complex of the Annunziata**

The **Cathedral of San Panfilo**

The **Church of San Francesco della Scarpa**,

The **Abbey of Santo Spirito al Morrone**, also known as the **Celestinian Abbey**, located in the Badia Valley about 5 km from the city center. It's the starting point of the **Sentiero dello Spirito** (Spirit Trail), a 70-kilometer trekking route that connects all the Celestinian hermitages of the Morrone and Maiella

mountains. Pope Celestine V chose Sulmona as the seat of his religious order and founded his abbey as well as the small Hermitage of Sant'Onofrio on the Mount Morrone.

Before lunch or dinner, enjoy your shopping on **Corso Ovidio**, where you can also buy the local speciality, the *confetti* (sugared almonds). There is also a museum dedicated to the art of making confetti, an old tradition dating back to the 14th century.

Food in Sulmona is delicious: for dessert, beside the confetti, you can try the *ferratelle* (waffle-like cookies) and the *cassata sulmonese*. Try the regional pasta dish as well, the *maccheroni alla chitarra* with lamb ragout, or *sagne e fagioli* (hand-cut pasta with beans), and, of course, the iconic *arrosticini* (grilled mutton skewers).

Have a wonderful stay!

Other places to see in Sulmona:

- The **Medieval Aqueduct**
- **Palazzo Sanità**
- **Porta Romana**
- The **Church of Santa Maria della Tomba**
- The **Civic and Diocesan Cultural Center of Santa Chiara**
- The **Fountain of the Old Man (Fontana del Vecchio)**
- The **Giostra Cavalleresca** (Knightly Joust)





National Parks and Marine Protected Areas

With three national parks and one marine protected area, Abruzzo holds a unique cultural and civil record in environmental protection in Europe. Inaugurated on September 9, 1922, the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise is Italy's oldest protected area, home to natural wonders such as five ancient beech forests, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2017. On the Maiella, a UNESCO Global Geopark since April 2021, there are 95 geosites, including sites of international relevance.

National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise

Overview

Founded in 1922 and officially established by Royal Decree the following year, the park has a variety of flora and fauna typical of the central Apennines, including endemic or rare species. For its exceptionally beautiful natural landscapes, it attracts over a million visitors annually.

The park covers 50,500 hectares, stretching into Molise and Lazio. The Abruzzo portion, accounting for three-quarters of the park, is located in the province of L'Aquila and includes the municipalities of Alfedena, Barrea, Bisegna, Civitella Alfedena, Gioia dei Marsi, Lecce dei Marsi, Opi, Ortona dei Marsi, Pescasseroli, Scanno, Villavallelonga, and Villetta Barrea.

Rich and diverse vegetation thrives in this wonderful place. In lower, sunnier areas, field maples, ash trees, hornbeams, downy oaks, holm oaks, wild plums, hawthorns, wild roses, and brambles can be found.

Ground-level blooms include "Lady's slipper" orchids, Marsican iris, red lilies, and many species of wild orchids. Higher up are oak forests, wild apple trees, rowan trees, and other broadleaved trees. Near the peaks, ancient beech forests—now UNESCO World Heritage Sites—give way to juniper and mountain pine shrubs, and alpine grasslands on the highest slopes.

The park's biodiversity is equally rich in wildlife. Here, you can spot the Marsican brown bear (which is also the symbol of the park), as well as the Apennine wolf, the Abruzzo chamois, deers, lynxes, foxes, wild boars, badgers, beech martens, weasels, and Southern squirrels.

The park also provides the possibility to observe a variety of birds, such as golden eagles, buzzards, falcons, eagle owls, little owls, griffon vultures and the very rare white-backed woodpecker.

The heart of the National Park is the town of Pescasseroli, known for its excellent tourist facilities. The surrounding area is rich in history as proved by the fascinating necropolises of Barrea and of Amplero and by the Samnite acropolis of Alfedena. The charming villages of Bisegna, San Sebastiano, Gioia Vecchio, Opi, Villetta Barrea, Barrea (with its lake), Civitella Alfedena and Scontrone are worth visiting. In addition, be sure to visit Scanno, a village that is famous for its age-old tradition of goldsmiths and lacemaking, and for its lake, an ideal place for canoeing, windsurfing, birdwatching, and leisurely cycling.

With over 150 hiking trails and approximately ten nature paths, the park offers countless opportunities for trekking, horseback riding, and mountain biking. Educational facilities include the Birds of Prey Center in Barrea, Chamois Wildlife Areas in Opi and Bisegna, Wolf and Lynx Wildlife Areas in Civitella Alfedena, the Insect Museum, and the Roe Deer Area in San Sebastiano.

Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga National Park

“As close to Tibet as you can find in Europe”

Overview

Established in 1995, this is one of Italy's largest national parks since it covers an area of 150,000 hectares. It extends also into two other regions: Lazio and Marche. Its Abruzzo section includes the provinces of Teramo, L'Aquila, Pescara and 41 other municipalities. Its territory is mountainous featuring almost alpine-like scenery and comprising two distinct ranges: the Gran Sasso d'Italia massif and the Monti della Laga.

Gran Sasso is Abruzzo's most iconic mountain, featuring the highest peaks in the Apennines: Corno Grande (2,912 m), Corno Piccolo, Pizzo d'Intermesoli, and Monte Camicia. It hosts the Calderone Glacier, the only glacier in the Apennines and the southernmost in Europe. To the south lies Campo Imperatore, a breathtaking plateau — Europe's own Tibet.

The park hosts about 2,300 higher plant species, as well as a wide variety of animals, including the chamois, the Apennine wolf, and the Marsican brown bear.

While enjoying the natural wonders of the park, you can also walk in the footsteps of history in:

- the province of Teramo, famous for its Medieval hamlets amid the Laga woods, its fortresses and its magnificent Medieval castles, such as Castel di Luco and Piano di Roseto. There are many picturesque villages to visit in the area, such as Castelli –

known for its fine ceramics, Isola del Gran Sasso, Cortino, Valle Castellana, Tossicia, Pietracamela.

- The province of L'Aquila, famous for its postcard-picture villages, like Santo Stefano di Sessanio, Castel del Monte, Campostosto (which is close to a lake), and Calascio (famous for its splendid castle). The city of L'Aquila itself is worth visiting.
- The province of Pescara, which offers wonderful views (for example, from the Tower of Forca di Penne) and attractive villages, such as Farindola that is famous for its delicious pecorino cheese.

Maiella National Park — UNESCO Geopark

“Maiella wilderness, one of Europe’s top wildlife reserves”

Overview

Established in 1995, the Maiella National Park covers an area of 74,095 hectares and includes 39 municipalities in L'Aquila, Chieti, and Pescara provinces. The park also encompasses the Morrone ridge and the Pizi mountains, forming one of Europe’s top wildlife reserves.

Human presence here dates back to the Palaeolithic: caves, shepherds' inscriptions, tholos huts, and numerous hermitages are the vestiges of a deep-rooted interaction between nature and culture. The Maiella, which was anciently seen as a sacred, maternal mountain, takes its name from Maja, goddess of crops.

Its altitude (30+ peaks over 2,000 m), ruggedness, and climate make it a biodiversity hotspot. It hosts an incredible diversity of animals, including wolves, bears, chamois, otters, roe deer, red deer, and 130 bird species (such as the golden eagle, the peregrine falcon, the eagle owl, the lanner falcon, the goshawk, and the dotterel among many other). Over 1,700 plant species are recorded, many of them being endemic plants as well.

In this area be sure to visit: Pacentro, Caramanico Terme, Guardiagrele, and Pescocostanzo, famous for its Baroque and Renaissance charm. There are also some interesting sacred sites in the area, including Maiella’s Abbey of San Liberatore, the Celestinian Hermitage on the Morrone, the Heracles Curinus Sanctuary, the Church of San Tommaso in Salle and many others.

In 2021 the Park was designated a UNESCO Global Geopark on Earth Day, and it is now part of a network promoting geodiversity protection, education, and sustainable development in cooperation with local communities. The goal is to raise awareness on the value of geodiversity and foster good practices in conservation and tourism.

Torre del Cerrano Marine Protected Area

A biodiversity paradise

Overview

Established in 2009 by the Ministry of the Environment, the Torre del Cerrano Marine Protected Area (MPA) features typical sandy Adriatic seabed and some submerged rocky

areas. It hosts a wide range of marine species and a rich set of underwater flora, including the Adriatic gastropod, the *Trivia adriatica*, and the *Sabellaria halcocki*.

The coastal dunes shelter rare species of insects, like the *Scarabeus semipunctatus* and the *Lamprinodes pictus*, and bird species such as the Kentish plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*), which nests here from April through late September. There is also a remarkable variety of vegetation, including the sea daffodil (*Pancratium maritimum*) and the sand spurge (*Euphorbia psammogeton*).

Just offshore there is what researchers believe to be the ancient Roman port of Hadria.

The Cerrano Tower (between Silvi and Pineto, within the province of Teramo) was built as a defence against Turkish and Saracen attacks and has remained intact since the times of the Kingdom of Naples. Now it hosts the International Veterinary Training Center, a Marine Library, and a Sea Museum.

Recognised as a Site of Community Importance within the EU Natura 2000 network, the MPA contributes significantly to the maintenance of sandbanks, submerged *Sabellaria* bioconstructions, and the biodiversity of the sand dunes.





All the Magic of Winter in Abruzzo

Description

Winter is just around the corner and on December 8th (the day of the Immaculate Conception) Abruzzo is ready to kick off the new ski season. With its 21 resorts and 9 ski areas, Abruzzo is the perfect place for snow lovers, offering a wide range of winter sports, from alpine skiing to snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. Alternatives to winter sports may be adventurous experiences such as ice climbing, snowkiting, snowtubing and sleddog.

Roccaraso, a ski resort in the province of L'Aquila, is undoubtedly one of the top destinations for winter sports fans. It has been a favourite of ski lovers for over 90 years and it has been listed by *Forbes* magazine as one of the top spots for a perfect snow holiday. Unsurprisingly, Roccaraso is also the birthplace of Italian Alpine Skiing since Italy's first skiing competitions were held there in 1929.

Ovindoli and Campo Felice ski areas are also very popular, especially among snowboarders and cross-country skiers. They are among the best-equipped snow parks for freestyle snowboarding in Central Italy.

There are many other destinations for winter sports lovers in Abruzzo, including Prati di Tivo and Passolanciano-La Majelletta. Download our free app Ski Abruzzo to find out more and to keep updated.

Sport & Adventure

Be sure to take part in the numerous outdoor activities that are available in the area: from horseback riding along the Gran Sasso Trail to rock climbing in the Sangro Valley, from thrilling rafting down the Aventino River to adrenaline-pumping bungee jumps over the Orta River. Outdoor activity in Abruzzo is not just a goal—it's a means of fully experiencing the incredible natural beauty of this magical land.

