

TRAVEL HISTORY CULTURE PEOPLE FOOD

ABRUZZISSIMO

MAGAZINE



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in Villa San Sebastiano**

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ON THE COVER:

Corvara Vecchia. Read the story on page 16. Photo by Anna Lebedeva.

LEFT:

Corvara Vecchia. Photos by Anna Lebedeva.

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While working on this issue, I went to visit **Corvara Vecchia** (see my article about the town on page 16) in Pescara province. I noticed how the abandoned medieval *borgo* had deteriorated since my last visit six years ago. It reminded me that there is no poetry in abandoned villages; there is sadness, emptiness, rejection and something akin to betrayal as they crumble silently, forgotten by the world. If you have been reading ABRUZZISSIMO for a while, you will know that in my articles about little-known and half-deserted towns and villages (which are far too many in the mountain inland areas of Abruzzo) I never romanticise them. Instead, I always strive to find hope that soon people will return and fill these beautiful places with love and laughter again. My story about Lucia Tellone (see page 5), a young chef, who ditched a promising career abroad and returned to her small hometown of **Villa San Sebastiano (AQ)** will surely warm the cockles of your heart. It is Abruzzese people like her who make this region so beautiful and give us all hope for a revival of small mountain towns.

In this issue, you'll discover stories about the beautiful but lesser-known Easter procession in **Scurcola Marsicana (AQ)**, the restoration of the Madonna di Pietranico statue with the assistance of Italian-Americans, a young couple who has made **Corvara** their home, and much more.

Please remember that ABRUZZISSIMO is a reader-supported publication, the only one in English entirely dedicated to Abruzzo. If you enjoy reading the magazine, please consider purchasing a [premium subscription](#) or making a [donation](#).

Enjoy the March issue!

Anna Lebedeva
Founder & Editor



NEW TOURIST TRAIN INAUGURATED

Abruzzo has new a tourist train that will run from the coast to the mountain towns. TUA, the region's major transportation company, created what they call the *Orient Express of Abruzzo*. They purchased train cars from Ferrovie Central Umbria and completely renovated both the interior and mechanism. The train can transport 210 passengers in new, red, leather seats and is scheduled to begin operating in May between **Lanciano to Castel di Sangro**. The train has been named *Juan Carrito and Amarena*, after the two beloved Marsican bears who were tragically killed last year.

ABRUZZO LOSING ARTISANS AND TRADESMEN

According to a report by the organization CAN Imprenditori d'Italia Abruzzo, between the end of December, 2018, and the end of December, 2023, the region lost 2,728 practicing artisans and tradesmen such as plumbers, stone masons, hairdressers, blacksmiths, carpenters, ceramists, and others. This is a decrease of 9.12% of artisanal activity.

Among the factors cited as contributing to this downturn is the fact that regulations protect corporations more than small businesses, and the lack of support in the form of policies that favour micro enterprises. Reform and aid in both these sectors is needed to preserve Abruzzo's cultural traditions and small trades.

ABRUZZO TAKES LEAD IN SOUTHERN ITALY'S ECONOMIC GROWTH

Recent data from the Research Center of the Chambers of Commerce has revealed a promising economic trend in Abruzzo. The region has notably closed the income gap with the rest of Italy, emerging as the leading southern region for per capita income. Over the period from 2019 to 2022, family incomes in Abruzzo surged by +9.1%, outpacing growth rates in other Italian regions. Particularly impressive is the substantial increase in disposable income among consumer households placing Abruzzo at the top among the southern regions and ranking sixth nationally for economic growth.



L'AQUILA FINALIST FOR ITALIAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2026

The city of L'Aquila is among ten finalists for the prestigious title of Italian Capital of Culture 2026. All finalists have presented development programmes and the one for L'Aquila is focused on health, social cohesion, creativity, and sustainability. L'Aquila's bid is pivotal for rejuvenating the inland areas of Abruzzo and emphasises the city's goal to leverage culture for renewal and economic growth. The winning city will be announced by the Ministry of Culture on March 29 and receive a one-million-euro grant to execute its cultural vision.

See the beautiful video supporting its candidacy [here](#).



HONEY FROM TORNARECCIO AMONG THE WORLD'S BEST

Apicoltura Luca Finocchio from Tornareccio (CH) clinched top honours at the prestigious Paris international honey awards competing against 19 nations. Luca Finocchio (in the photo above), the most awarded among Italian honey producers, won a platinum and gold medal for his *Acacia* and *Millefiori Montagne d'Abruzzo* varieties. The event sets the standard for global honey quality, assessing products through a "blind" evaluation method that disregards packaging and brand identity. The company has been Abruzzo's leader in quality honey production for over 50 years.

ABRUZZO'S POPULATION SHRINKING AND GETTING OLDER

According to Abruzzo-based economist Aldo Ronci, by the end of 2041, Abruzzo stands to lose over 100,000 inhabitants. This will put its population at the size it was 100 years ago.

Another worrying trend is the demographic shift, with a decline of 200,000 in the working-age population and a simultaneous growth of 100,000 individuals aged 65 and above. It presents pressing economic and social challenges, particularly in managing healthcare costs for an aging population with an average age exceeding 81 years.

DID YOU KNOW?

THE FOUNTAIN OF THE SHAMELESS IN MANOPPELLO



If you take the road from the famous medieval Abbey of Santa Maria Arabona towards the ruins of the Roman Villa, you'll see the Fountain of the Shameless (*la Fonte degli Svergognati*).

The fountain is in a desperate state of disrepair, but you can still see the figurines and an inscription in rather clumsy Latin that reveals it was built in 1827 by a certain F.S. who dedicated it to his children. On a triangular cement plaque some words have been erased and one has been scratched over at a later date. There is also a written dedication to his wife, with wishes for fidelity and love. Seems rather touching... until you look closer. Two figures adorning the fountain are wearing the iconic Phrygian caps of liberated slaves, with water bubbling forth from... their anus and genitals. The third, female figure, has water gushing from her mouth.

Nobody knows the exact story behind the fountain. Some say it's a symbolic alchemical-Masonic monument, others think it might be a remnant of a fertility cult associated with water. There is also a curious legend saying that the fountain might have been constructed by a cheated husband. In a mischievous act, he chose to immortalise the betrayal by depicting the female figure in the centre as his wife, symbolising her availability to all, akin to water. This portrayal served as a perpetual reminder for his wife to confront the deceit daily. Or was it his way of laughing at the local petty gossip?

La Fonte degli Svergognati is privately owned, but easily accessible without the need to ask for permission.



BAKING BREAD TOGETHER IN VILLA SAN SEBASTIANO

By Anna Lebedeva

In the small town of Villa San Sebastiano, a young chef, who made the bold decision to return to her native town, has revived an age-old bread oven, reigniting community spirit.

After many years of travelling and working in restaurants in Venice, Padua, Milan, Tuscany, Oslo, and Stockholm, Lucia Tellone decided to go back to her hometown, Villa San Sebastiano, in L'Aquila Province. "It is not a choice that is easy to understand for some people," admits Lucia in our phone interview. "My town is very small, with only 300 residents, but I want to lead by example and encourage other young people to return – otherwise small villages and towns like mine will die."

OLD OVEN

A ball of energy and ideas that she is, Lucia immediately embarked on a new project: reviving the tradition of communal baking. She decided to bring back to life the neglected communal bread oven that once served as the social hub of the town.

Photo above: freshly baked bread at the communal oven

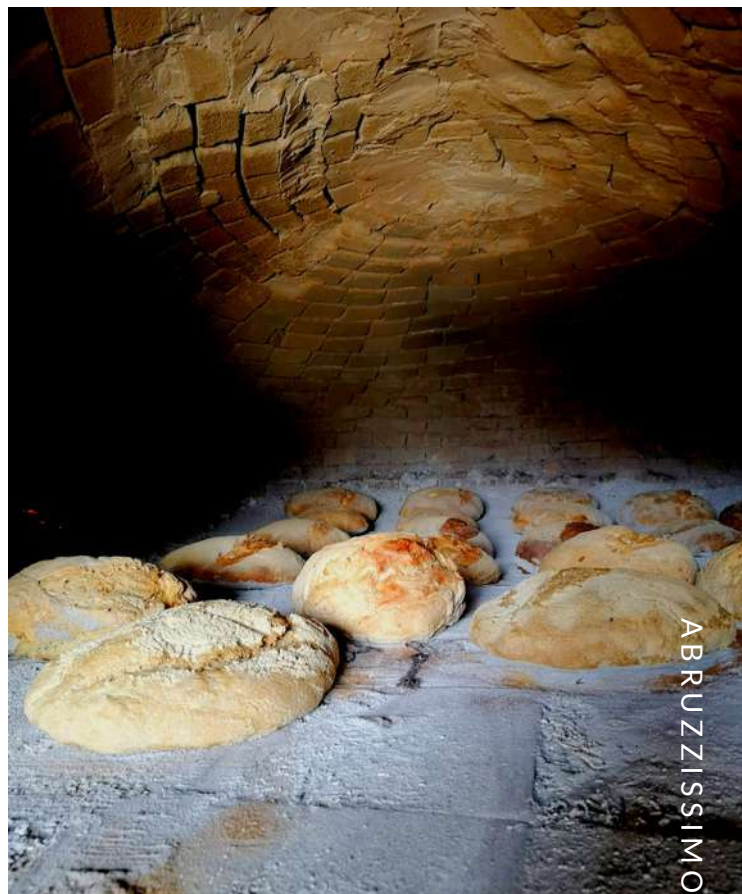
“When I first opened the door of the little room with the oven, it was not pretty,” recalls Lucia. “Full of charcoal, grime, and dirt because it had been more than 15 years since the oven was last lit, on the occasion of a festival in the town.” Undeterred by the daunting task ahead, Lucia rolled up her sleeves, cleaned the oven, gave the room a lick of paint and re-opened its doors. “Two years later, with the help of some villagers, we did a proper renovation.”

The oven dates back to the 1960s when Villa San Sebastiano Nuova was built after a massive flood washed away part of the old village. In the old days, a local baker ran the oven. “Everyone paid for baking their bread. You would bring 10 loaves, for instance, pay a little and leave two to the baker who would sell them and earn some extra money,” explains Lucia. She says her 83-year-old aunt still remembers baking bread in the communal oven in the 1980s. And like all small towns, the communal oven was the hub of social life for women at the time. That is where they not only exchanged yeast, flour, and recipes but also talked about births, deaths, life, work, and worries. The oven shut down as the pace of life changed and nobody had the time to make bread and shopping in a supermarket became more convenient.

BACK TO BASICS

When Lucia returned to her hometown and lit up the oven, it took some time for the locals to embrace her project. “Everyone thought I was a bit crazy because they were not sure about me coming back after living abroad and lighting the oven after all these years,” remembers Lucia with a laugh. “At first no one came, so I started stopping people on the street to ask why they didn’t want to bake bread. And most of them said the same thing: because we don’t know how to make bread.” Lucia realised that there was a knowledge gap since the grandmothers or mothers did not see it necessary to teach their children bread making. Unfazed, Lucia began to teach the basics.

“Eventually, they saw that I genuinely wanted to give my time to others, bring people together, and make good bread.” In a time when everything is driven by monetization and commodification, Tellone sees her project as revolutionary.



Photos: Lucia Tellone at the communal oven; bread baking in the oven

RETURN TO THE LAND

Four years since Lucia reopened the oven, it has become more than just a place to bake bread – it has become a symbol of unity, tradition, and community spirit. Twice a month (every week in summer), villagers young and old gather around the oven to knead dough, share stories, and reconnect with one another. Kids get their hands dirty kneading the dough and learning the art of bread making. Lucia bakes anywhere from 25 to 60 loaves at a time. “Some people knead at home using their own ingredients, but I always have local heritage flour and yeast starter for anyone, if needed,” explains Lucia. She also makes delicious baked goodies to be shared on the day: “Every time I arrive at the oven, I make a snack for the children – pancakes or pastries – and everyone always asks me for the recipe, so I now have a notebook at the oven where everyone can write their family recipes for everyone to try.”

Lucia's efforts have not only revitalised the local community but have also attracted visitors from far and wide. The aroma of freshly baked bread wafting from the oven has become a beacon, drawing curious travellers and food enthusiasts to Villa San Sebastiano who want to knead or pick up a freshly baked loaf.

Kids from Villa San Sebastiano with their freshly-baked bread at the communal oven

In addition to her work at the communal oven, Lucia has embarked on another ambitious project: opening her own restaurant in the centre of Villa San Sebastiano. Here, she plans to blend traditional flavours and local ingredients with culinary inspirations gathered from her years of travel experiences.

Lucia Tellone is part of a small but tenacious movement in Abruzzo – and the wider rural area in the Appennines – the so-called *restanza*, which represents a conscious choice made by young professionals, often armed with impressive qualifications and promising job opportunities in bigger cities and abroad, to return to their roots in small towns and villages. Rather than pursuing the urban success and corporate ladder climbing, they choose to settle in their hometowns in search of a deeper connection to community. By choosing to stay and invest in these often-overlooked territories, they aim to revitalise local economies and preserve traditions. Lucia's brother, Michel, also decided to return to his hometown after studying political science to work at their family farm. Lucia also helps to harvest potatoes, make cheese, and



whatever else the job requires. When her restaurant opens, many of the ingredients will be sourced direct from the Tellone farm. "It is a courageous choice, but I believe we must all return to the land," declares Lucia. Through her unwavering dedication to her hometown, Lucia Tellone has not only revived a long-forgotten tradition of bread-making, but has also reignited the spirit of Villa San Sebastiano, one loaf of bread at a time.

You can follow the Forno di Villa San Sebastiano on [Facebook](#).

See Lucia Tellone's recipe for Easter *fiadoni* on page 27.

Photos courtesy of Lucia Tellone.

Photos (top right clockwise): the communal oven in Villa San Sebastiano; a loaf of bread waiting to be baked; the recipe notebook from the the Forno di Villa San Sebastiano





THE GOOD FRIDAY PROCESSION IN SCURCOLA MARSICANA

By Paolo Di Menna

Since the beginning of the 18th century, the small town of Scurcola Marsicana (AQ) has commemorated Good Friday with a solemn procession, *La processione del Calvario*. Despite the passage of time, this annual event continues to resonate deeply with both locals and visitors, serving as a powerful symbol of the town's centuries-old spiritual traditions.

The Calvary procession (Calvary is the place just outside the walls of Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified; also called Golgotha) in Scurcola Marsicana is an event rich in tradition and religious significance, involving the four historical brotherhoods of the town, SS. Trinità, SS. Sacramento, San Bernardino da Siena and Suffragio. Each brotherhood, identified by the colour of its garments and cord belts, plays a specific role in the context of the procession, contributing to its solemnity and symbolic richness.

Photo above: a brotherhood group waiting for the procession to start

The ritual begins early in the morning of Good Friday, when members of the four brotherhoods gather at the Church of the Holy Trinity to prepare for the procession. The music of the Miserere marks the beginning of the event, accompanying the faithful in a moment of prayer and reflection before embarking on the journey.

The town's four brotherhoods separate and start walking along predetermined routes, stopping at the seven churches of the town. Along the way, the brothers sing hymns and sacred songs that recount the Passion of Christ, recalling the events related to his death and resurrection. The stops along the route offer moments of meditation and active participation of the faithful, with the choral interpretation of the pieces led by a soloist.

Photos (from top right clockwise): a brotherhood group waiting for the procession to start; a brotherhood is singing in front of a church; during La processione del Calvario in Scurcola Marsicana





The overlapping of the polyphonies of the different brotherhoods during the journey adds further intensity and emotional depth to the atmosphere of the procession, creating an emotional atmosphere on the town's streets filled with the locals and visitors.

The procession lasts several hours and at the end the brothers gather at the headquarters of their respective brotherhoods for a *cenacolo*, a humble meal of a dish of spaghetti with tuna sauce, *baccalà*, anchovies and broccoli is eaten. The meal is reserved exclusively for men, thus consolidating the fraternal and spiritual bond that unites them.





La processione del Calvario holds a special place in the hearts of the Scurcola Marsicana community. Many who have family ties to the town but live elsewhere make a pilgrimage back to watch the procession and celebrate Easter with their loved ones.

Paolo Di Menna works in the police force in Sulmona and devotes his spare time to photography. You can follow him on [Instagram](#).



GOOD FRIDAY PROCESSIONS IN ABRUZZO

LA PROCESSIONE DI CRISTO MORTO IN CHIETI

One of the oldest in Italy, the Good Friday procession in Chieti is certainly one of the most solemn and spectacular Easter events in the region. Local confraternities dressed in hooded tunics walk through the dark streets of the historic centre carrying various symbols of the stations of the cross accompanied by 150-member strong orchestra and choir, who perform the poignant *Miserere*, an 18th-century composition by Saverio Selecchy.



VENERDI SANTO IN ORTONA (CH)

On Good Friday, early risers can see the processions of the symbols of the stations of the cross, which starts at 5am at the Chiesa del Purgatorio. In the evening at 8pm, another procession departs from the Chiesa di Santa Maria delle Grazie. It is led by a group of 250 women, all in black. In the past, they were mostly widows, who lost their husbands at sea. See the details of this year's procession on the organisers' Facebook [page](#).



CORTEO DEI TRE CACIAROTTI IN SAN VALENTINO IN ABRUZZO CITERIORE (PE)

This solemn procession takes place in the evening of *Venerdi Santo*. A group of barefoot and hooded men carry a heavy cross on their shoulders. The men are tied by a heavy rope around their waists and necks. They are followed by a group of women dressed in black and carrying a statue of the grieving Madonna.

VENERDI SANTO IN SULMONA (AQ)

The Good Friday processions in Sulmona are a deeply moving spectacle, comprising two distinct events. The afternoon procession, commencing at 5pm from the Church of S. Maria della Tomba, features solemn confreres clad in mourning attire, escorting the statues of the Dead Christ and the Sorrowful Madonna amidst the melancholic melodies of the band. At 8pm another procession begins illuminated by lanterns and led by a centuries-old cross veiled in velvet. The processions are characterised by the slow rhythmic footsteps of the confreres imitating a person moving in chains or in a penitential gait.



Photos (from top): *La Processione di Cristo Morto* in Chieti; *Venerdi Santo* in Ortona; *Corteo Dei Tre Caciarotti* In San Valentino In Abruzzo Citeriore

HOME COMING: THE MANY JOURNEYS OF MADONNA DI PIETRANICO

By Teresa Mastrobuono

A small church in the town of Pietranico (PE) is home to a beautiful statue of the Virgin Mary known as the “Madonna di Pietranico”. It has been moved, restored, and moved again from one city to another many times over the last 100 years, finally, returning to its original home with the help of the Italian American Museum in New York in conjunction with the “Save Art in Abruzzo” fund of the Ministry for Cultural Heritage.

The humble terracotta statue of the Madonna, by an unknown artist, dates back to the beginning of the 16th century. Standing 105 cm (41.3 inches) high, it has delicate features and graceful praying hands. According to Lucia Arbace, Cultural Superintendent of the Abruzzo Region these features were “key in conveying to the faithful a sense of intense spirituality”.

SAVING MADONNA

Looking at the statue you notice the unusual absence of the infant Jesus in her lap. It is unclear when and how it was lost but the missing infant makes the statue and the story of its long and complicated way home even more touching.

Madonna di Pietranico has lived through several moves and incarnations. First housed in the small town of Pietranico (PE), it was damaged in the earthquake in 1915. The ruined chapel was demolished in 1925, but the statue, dear to the many generations of town’s residents, was preserved and transferred to the Abbazia di San Clemente a Casauria where it was repaired. It is thought that monks at the abbey had attempted the repair with



Madonna di Pietranico

materials at hand – another factor that contributed to the complexity of discovering and recreating how the original looked. When the museum there closed, the statue was moved to L’Aquila, to the National Museum of Abruzzo inside the Spanish fort.

Umberto Mucci, founder and CEO of the media company We The Italians, which served as a liaison between US and Italian organizations involved in the project, explained to me over the phone from his office in Rome: “During a visit, a guest at the National Museum recognised the statue as being the one he saw as a child in his hometown of Pietranico. After research to verify this, the National Museum realised it was an important piece of art for the Abruzzese community. However, it had been altered over the years by modifications, which weakened it structurally.”

When the 2009 L’Aquila earthquake struck, the statue broke into 24 fragments. This is when the Italian American Museum in New York intervened. The organization and its members raised \$110,000 via many small donations, which meant the importance of supporting the restoration was shared by many people. The New York Museum recognised that the sum was not sufficient to restore a major piece of art but felt for the people of

Pietranico and the sadness of their loss of a significant part of their spiritual life. Funding the project demonstrated a commitment to preserving art that has deep ties to the culture and traditions of the region.

RETURNING HOME

The restoration of the Madonna di Pietranico was a delicate and complex process. The Italian coordinators of the project, Lucia Arbace, mentioned above, and Elizabetta Sonnino, one of the restoration specialists, had originally planned to employ traditional materials and techniques commonly used in this type of restoration. However, the intricate task of piecing together an often-modified terracotta form required additional means. It was decided to also use digital technology to manage reassembling the pieces.

The larger fragments were carefully and painstakingly put together. The smaller fragments, however, posed more of a challenge. These were first assembled digitally in 3D, which not only avoided physical manipulation of the pieces and risk of further damage but allowed restorers to test and evaluate different assembly options. Another 3D model allowed restorers and technicians to print a solid shape of the interior cavity of the statue and to use this to create a rigid support of the fragments. The colour of the statue had been repainted in several layers. Digital technology also enabled reproduction of the polychrome decoration of the statue, in the end giving it a semblance of its original appearance.

To document the complex process, professional film director Michele Bevilacqua made a layman-friendly, fascinating documentary chronicling the restoration. It was originally presented as part of museum exhibitions, and now can be viewed on [YouTube](#).

When the restoration was completed in 2011, the Madonna was shipped to the Italian American Museum in New York to be displayed there for two months. It required four hours of meticulous packing to place her in a crate for safe passage.



During the restorations of Madonna di Pietranico. Screenshots from the documentary by Michele Bevilacqua

After that, the Madonna finally returned home to Pietranico. The statue is displayed in the little church of San Rocco. "There it takes its rightful place among other treasures of our area, such as the two-sided processional cross from the 1300s," said Alfonso Creato, retired vice mayor of the town, in a telephone interview. He added that the Madonna is an integral part not only of the cultural history of Pietranico, but important to its spiritual motivation and inspiration. "The statue is considered so significant that it is protected by a plexiglass case," proudly explained Creato. "Busloads of tourists now come to view our Madonna."

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Chiesa di San Rocco is located on Via Umberto, 1, across the road from the Vecchio Bar. To see the Madonna di Pietranico statue call the town hall at 0039 085 8884795 at least a few hours before your visit and they will send someone to open the church.

CORVARA VECCHIA: AWAITING TOMORROW

By Anna Lebedeva

Corvara has witnessed a gradual exodus since the last century, echoing the stark realities of rural decline in Abruzzo. Now, amidst whispers of revival, the medieval borgo awaits its next chapter with hope and uncertainty.

Clinging to a rocky spur of Mount Queglia, the ancient borgo of Corvara Vecchia boasts one of the most dramatic and picturesque locations in Abruzzo. Time has not been kind to this tiny medieval town. Many of its ancient stone houses have collapsed, while others still standing have been patched up with unsightly cement or extended with cheap brick structures. Some buildings stand with gaping doors and windows, revealing scenes of rotting furniture, caved-in roofs, and piles of rubble. The stone-paved streets are gradually succumbing to weeds, and rusty scaffolding obstructs some passageways.

And yet, there is still plenty of beauty in this little town, waiting to be loved again. Narrow cobbled streets, seldom wider than two meters, small squares, steep endless steps remain the same and the old centre can still only be accessed on foot or on a donkey's back, like in the old days.

Corvara Vecchia

HISTORY

The town's origins date back to ancient times, where the nearby strategic Forca di Penne pass served as a crucial point for Roman troops traversing towards the Adriatic, notably towards the ancient port of Adria (where the modern-day Silvi Marina and Pineto stand). The town of Corvara was born to control this important stretch of the military road. Over time, Corvara witnessed the marches of armies led by legendary figures like Hannibal and Julius Caesar.

"The famous Casauriense Monastic Chronicles attribute the foundation of the town to Abbot Adamo I from the Abbey di San Clemente in Castiglione a Casauria, around 980 CE," explains Gregorio Di Benigno, a Corvara native and local history enthusiast. "We also know from historical documents that around the 12th century, local lords, emboldened by Norman support, refused to pay tax. They rose against the monastery's authority, securing autonomy recognized both locally and by royal decree. But that also meant that they were left to fight for themselves in case of trouble."





Photos (from top left clockwise): Chiesa di Santa Maria di Costantinopoli; a fragment of the carved doorway of the church; on the streets of Corvara Vecchia

Throughout the medieval and Renaissance eras, Corvara's fate shifted hands among noble families, from the Cantelmos to the D'Afflittos, reflecting the ebb and flow of power dynamics in central Italy. Despite changing rulers and political landscapes, Corvara endured, adapting to the tides of history while retaining its rugged charm.

"It was a town of peasants and farmers. Sheep farming here especially flourished in the 1700s and farmers from Corvara sold their sheep and goats at the fairs around the region," says Di Benigno. "I remember, when I was little, Corvara Vecchia was lively, and the animal trade was still thriving in the 1950s. The old houses in the town were built so the animals were in the barn on the ground floor, and the families lived upstairs."

NEW TOWN

In the mid-1950s, many residents moved to the lower part of Corvara, taking advantage of the newly built public housing. Due to the hard to access location, emigration and short-sighted political decisions by the local and regional authorities, the medieval section of the town gradually became depopulated over the following decades. Today, the town has approximately 200 residents, with only three elderly people living in the medieval part, Corvara Vecchia. One of them is 78-year-old Giovannino, the last shepherd of Corvara (see his fan Facebook page [here](#)) whose goats, like in the old days, live in a barn on the ground floor of an old house greeting passers-by with friendly bleats.

In 2016, the village of Corvara became the setting for the comedy *Omicidio all'italiana*, which tells the fictional story of a remote village called Acitrullo. In the film, the mayor and his brother stage a murder to attract attention from the media and tourists (see the [trailer](#) on YouTube).

While *Omicidio all'italiana* is a black comedy, it aptly portrays the challenges faced by small, remote villages in Abruzzo in their struggle for survival. The murals and signs used as props for the film still adorn the main piazza and the streets around it.

Photos (from top): a scene from *Omicidio all'italiana* shot in Corvara; a sign from the film set still remains in town; a mural in Corvara



HOPES

In recent years, foreigners have been buying country houses in the new part of Corvara (see our story on page 23). “We have Polish, Dutch, British, Belgians, Swedish, and Norwegians here,” says Gregorio Di Benigno. What attracts them to Corvara, I ask. “Our people are very hospitable and everyone is warmly welcomed. And the views! From here you can see the Gran Sasso and the Majella mountains, the sea, the whole valley. Life is good here,” responds Di Benigno.

A few years ago, a businessman from Rome bought several properties in the old part of the town and started a renovation with a promise to open a “scattered hotel”, but the plan came to a halt for political and economic reasons. Gregorio Di Benigno tells me that there is a new, ambitious project underway with several investors hoping to revive the dilapidated medieval borgo and turn it into a thriving tourist destination. Will it succeed? It is hard to know. Small towns and villages like Corvara in Abruzzo’s hinterland frequently find themselves in the centre of grand plans and pro-

On the streets of Corvara Vecchia

posals that appear promising on paper. However, in reality, many of these schemes stall at the fundraising stage, or worse, witness funds being squandered senselessly.

In the meantime, Corvara Vecchia remains abandoned. Its last three residents shuffle along the cobbled streets, Giovannino’s goats bleat from the dark of an old barn, and a small gang of loud but friendly dogs announce the arrival of curious tourists on weekends.



WHAT TO DO AND SEE IN CORVARA

BORGO MEDIEVALE

The medieval part of Corvara can only be accessed on foot. Park on the road, near the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, and walk up the steps to the top of the borgo. Alternatively, you can drive to the cemetery (marked as Cimitero di Corvara), continue forward to the end of the road and access the borgo medievale from there (follow the paved path with the street lamps).

On the little central piazza you will see two benches and a building with the fading sign, *Bar Ferramenta Lavanderia*, which was part of the props from the *Omicidio all'italiana* film set (see above). Walk down the street on the right to see a few pretty murals and a bell tower and a small belvedere with spectacular views of the surrounding countryside.

CAMPANILE DI SANT'ANDREA

The bell tower is all that remains from the 14th-century church of Sant'Andrea, destroyed by the earthquake of 1933.

CHIESA DI SANTA MARIA DELLE GRAZIE

The town's main church, Chiesa di Santa Maria delle Grazie, is at the foot of the *borgo medievale* where

Photos (below): the view from Monte Quegлия; a small cat mural in Corvara Vecchia



you can park. It is open on Sunday morning for a mass. During the week, you can call the town hall (tel. 0039 085 8889104) to arrange for access.

WALKS

From the town's cemetery, you can hike up to Monte Quegлия. It is a relatively easy trail that runs to the mountain top in about one hour. The views from there are magnificent.

If you follow the trail going to the right, before arriving to the top of Monte Quegлия, it will take you to Pescosansonesco (read about the town in the March, 2023 issue of *ABRUZZISSIMO* available here).

FORCA DI PENNE

20 minutes by car from Corvara, you will find the historical site of Forca di Penne (marked on Google Maps). It once served as a strategic passage point from inland Abruzzo to the Adriatic coast. For centuries, it facilitated the movement of sheep flocks along the *Tratturo Magno*. It also historically delineated the boundary between the Vestini people residing on opposing sides, now representing the provincial border between L'Aquila and Pescara. Today, only one watchtower remains standing from the ancient mountain pass complex.





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ABRUZZISSIMO
MAGAZINE

FINDING THE SIMPLE LIFE IN CORVARA

By Anna Lebedeva

A young couple discovered the peaceful allure of Abruzzo, making Corvara (PE) their home. They embraced simplicity helping to revive the town's community gatherings and documenting their rural adventures through YouTube videos.

Tatiana Cupcea and Lukasz Słupski, both in their 30s, embarked on their Abruzzo adventure in the spring of 2023, driven by an irresistible pull towards the tranquil charm of the region. Tatiana, originally from Moldova, and Lukasz, hailing from Poland, first met in India a few years ago and fell in love. After a year in Poland, they felt drawn to Abruzzo, where Tatiana's mother and her partner resided.

All together they were looking for a house and were smitten by an old country house in the town of Corvara which they ended up buying. The rolling countryside and serene atmosphere stole their hearts. "What struck me when we arrived here the first time was the silence and stillness, and extraordinary nature, even though Corvara is only 40 minutes from Pescara, a big city, which we can see from here at a distance" recalls Lucasz. Tatiana echoes his sentiment: "The only noises that you hear are the tractors from time to time when there is harvest time or when somebody is ploughing a field."

OLD HOUSE

Their new home, an old stone house complete with a small private chapel, is somewhat shrouded in mystery, which only adds to the allure of their Corvara experience. "We tried to find out how old the house was, but nobody seems to know as there are no written records of its construction," says Lucasz. "One of our friends from the town said it was here forever. It



Tatiana Cupcea and Lukasz Słupski in their home

is definitely a very old construction because it doesn't even have a proper foundation, just stones laying on the soil."

The couple's house is surrounded by 100 olive trees which had been neglected for many years, but last year, after a good spring pruning, they produced an impressive crop – over half a ton of olives. "When we went to the local olive mill, the owner told us that we broke a record with our olives yielding 18 litres per 100 kilograms, while the average for the area was 12 litres," says Lucasz proudly.

COMMUNITY

Beyond the tranquil olive groves and rolling hills, the heartbeat of Corvara lies in its people—the warm-hearted locals have welcomed the couple

with open arms. As newcomers to Corvara, Lukasz and Tatiana took it upon themselves to bring fresh energy into the community. “Shortly after we moved here, the town celebrated its patron saint’s festival with processions, music, food,” recalls Tatiana. “We met many locals in those two days of celebrations, but after that nothing else was happening, so we spoke with our mayor and with his help set up a WhatsApp group which most town’s residents joined and started organising small events, informal gatherings, table games. Everyone brings food and drinks, someone gets the stove going to heat the room, others organise small prizes for the games.” In February, the young couple helped to revive the long-forgotten Carnival celebration that involved all Corvara’s neighbourhoods. Lukasz notes the strong bond across generations: “No matter the age, old, young, teenagers, kids, - they all get together, laugh and celebrate. I have never seen such unity anywhere else.”

RURAL LIFE

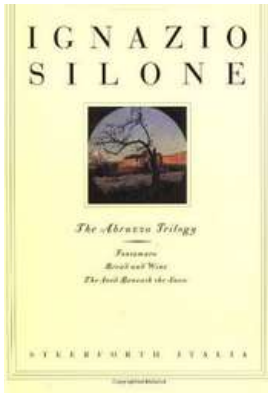
Transitioning to life in Corvara meant embracing a fresh start for the couple. Lukasz, with a background in brand design and marketing, now channels his creative energy into filmmaking, documenting their Corvara experience through a YouTube channel, [Say Ciao](#). In the videos they show their rural life, simple quotidian jobs undertaken without any rush, and their continuous research about the house’s history. While the channel is still in its infancy, it has already attracted a lot of attention with one of the videos hitting half a million views and providing a small income stream for the couple.

While there are no bars or shops in Corvara, the towns nearby offer all essential amenities. “We have a supermarket within a 15-minute drive, a shopping mall less than 30 minutes,” says Lukasz. “In a big city you would spend time in traffic jams, while here it is a short, pleasant drive with a beautiful scenery around you.”



Tatiana and Lukasz riding a tractor together with Tatiana’s mother Marina and her partner Sergio; the couple’s home in Corvara

The couple lives simply, heating their house with a wood stove and using the fire to heat water. They are planning to start a vegetable garden this year and will be busy cleaning and restoring the well on their property. “We enjoy this simplicity. We are thinking about starting workshops during which people can stay with us to taste a simple rural life” says Lukasz. “The world should know about this place, this hidden gem.”



THE ABRUZZO TRILOGY

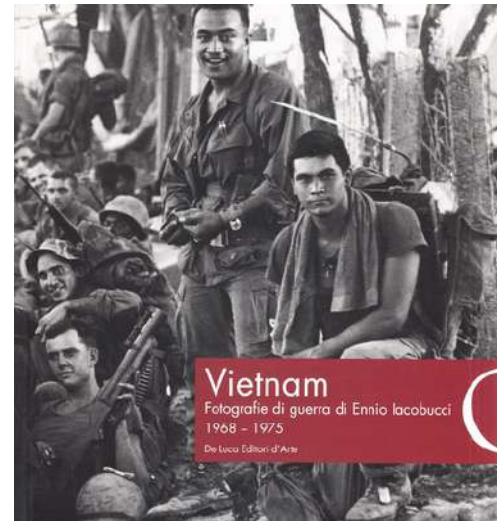
by Ignazio Silone

Set against the backdrop of impoverished Abruzzo mountain regions during Mussolini's era, Ignazio Silone's three acclaimed novels - Fontamara, Bread and Wine, and The Seed Beneath the Snow - chronicle the plight of *cafoni*, local farmers, and peasants, grappling with poverty, natural calamities, and totalitarian rule. Fontamara, the inaugural novel, unfolds as a political allegory, depicting the villagers' of Pescina (Silone's hometown) struggling against landowners usurping their water rights. Initially published during his exile in Zurich in 1933 and subsequently banned in Italy, the novel was translated into twenty languages and won Silone international fame.

Silone's magnum opus, Bread and Wine, follows anti-Fascist revolutionary Pietro Spina's return from exile, masquerading as priest Don Paolo Spada among Abruzzo's peasants. The trilogy's climax, The Seed Beneath the Snow, sees Pietro seeking sanctuary with his grandmother Donna Maria Vincenza, risking her life to shield him from authorities.

Ignazio Silone, born Secondo Tranquilli in L'Aquila province of Abruzzo, was an influential Italian author known for his profound exploration of social and political themes in his novels. His books reflect his own experiences and struggles against fascism and a deep connection to his homeland.

The trilogy is a weighty read, but it's highly rewarding for those who want to learn about Abruzzo's contemporary history. Combine it with a visit to the writer's museum in Pescina (AQ).



VIETNAM. FOTOGRAFIE DI GUERRA DI ENNIO IACOBUCCI 1968-1975

Few have heard of Ennio Iacobucci, a war photographer born in Abruzzo who, for eight years, documented the wars in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. His work was published in prestigious magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Famiglia Cristiana*. In 1975, *The New York Times* nominated him for the Pulitzer Prize. Notably, Iacobucci was the sole Western photographer to capture the Khmer Rouge's takeover of Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital. Despite his international recognition, he remained relatively unknown in Italy. Born into poverty in San Vincenzo Valle Roveto, Iacobucci's journey was extraordinary, transitioning from shoe-shiner to self-taught photographer.

The book is a curated collection of Iacobucci's photos. Through his lens, readers are transported to the heart of conflict, witnessing the struggles and triumphs of individuals amidst the chaos of war. Each photograph offers a poignant reflection of Iacobucci's deep empathy and keen observational skills. The introduction talks about the photographer's short and tragic life. The book is available on [Amazon](#).

You can visit a small museum dedicated to Ennio Iacobucci's war photography in Morrea (AQ) where he grew up (read more in the October 2023 issue of ABRUZZISSIMO available [here](#)).

FRESH CHEESES OF ABRUZZO

By Anna Swann

Isn't it exciting to go to the cheese counter in a shop in Abruzzo and see all the goodness on display?! One part of the counter is always filled with aged cheeses and the other, with a range of fresh, soft cheeses. There are so many! How do you choose?!

Fresh cheese (*formaggio fresco*) is young, days or not more than a few weeks old, and is not meant to be aged or preserved for long. *Formaggio fresco* has a delicate, mild flavour and is often served on hot summer days with tomatoes or a green salad.

Giuncata is my favourite fresh cheese in Abruzzo. Shepherds, in ancient times, ate it warm, soon after production. Any excess quantities were wrapped in wild plant leaves and sold. The name derives from the type of container made of woven rush or reed (*giunco*). In Abruzzo, the cheese is normally made with cow's milk and sometimes called *lo sprisciocco*, meaning "pressing" because, traditionally, it was consumed immediately after manual pressing using a linen cloth.

Today, to prolong its shelf life, the cheese undergoes a refreshing soak in cold water before being stored in plastic containers that look like little baskets. It may be seasoned with rocket and pink pepper or with chili pepper. Delicate and slightly sweet, I love eating it drizzled with fruity olive oil.

While Campania might be the renowned for its **mozzarella**, in Abruzzo we also have some excellent producers. Classified as a *pasta filata* cheese, the curds for *mozzarella* are heated and stretched. In Abruzzo, the town of Tornareccio is famous for its quality *pasta filata* cheeses such as *mozzarella*, *la treccia* (shaped as a braid and is slightly more dense than *mozzarella*), *fior di latte* (soft *mozzarella*-like cheese made with cow's milk).

Primo sale is another fresh cheese, ripened for up to two weeks. It is denser, and slightly squeaky when you eat it. Sold by the slice, it can be eaten fresh, grilled, or cooked in a frying pan (2-3 minutes on each side).



Technically, **ricotta** is not a cheese, but rather a by-product of cheese production, but you will always find it among *formaggi freschi*. It is made by re-heating the whey (hence the name, ricotta which means "twice cooked"). In Abruzzo, you can buy cow's milk, sheep, or goat *ricotta*.

WHERE TO BUY FRESH CHEESES

Any supermarket or delicatessen will have a cheese counter stocked with fresh cheeses, but for the best taste, seek out cheese makers who have their own farms across the region. Below are some of my favourites.

AZIENDA AGRICOLA GENNARO PIGLIACAMPO

This family-run farm produces excellent fresh and aged cheeses, soon to be officially labelled as organic, using milk from their ethically-raised cows, goats, and sheep. You can purchase their cheeses in their farm shop. **Address:** Zona Industriale Colleranese, Giulianova (TE)

CASEIFICIO CARDINALE ALESSIO

Hidden on a small side road, this tiny shop sells fresh cow's milk (from their own family farm herds) *ricotta*, *fior di latte*, and *nodini* (mozzarella-like cheese shaped as little knots). You can choose between *mozzarella* in a salty or unsalted brine. **Address:** Via Monte Sirente, 5, Manoppello (PE).

LA FATTORIA DEL NONNO

Goat cheese galore! Exquisite *ricotta*, delicate *primo sale* (this one is not for grilling), *fiocco di neve* (soft cheese covered in pink pepper or herbs) – all made with milk of beautiful goats farmed by the De Vitis family. For a special treat, call Giampietro to order *ricotta calda* (warm *ricotta*) to eat it before it cools down. **Address:** via San Nicola 18, Fara Filiorum Petri (CH).



PIZZA DI PASQUA SALATA

By Teresa Mastrobuono

This traditional Easter dish has another name – *pizza rustica*. My grandmother called it *pizzagaina*. It is a rich, savory pie perfect for breaking the Lenten fasting on Easter day.

In the past, the dough was made with lard, but butter is used more often nowadays.

The filling can be varied according to taste and/or ingredients on hand. My grandmother added sausage to the mix, as well as hard boiled eggs. It is usually eaten cold, and traditionally packed to take along on picnic lunches on increasingly delightful spring days. It can also be served with a green side salad or as a hearty starter.

INGREDIENTS

Makes 8-9 servings

For the crust

- 450 g flour (it's best to weigh it for a good crust)
- 2 eggs
- ½ tsp salt
- 225 g (2 sticks) cold butter, cut into small pieces
- ¼ cup of whole or skin milk, plus a little more if needed at the end
- 1 beaten egg with a pinch of salt to brush the crust

For the filling

- 8 eggs
- 250g *ricotta*
- ½ cup grated *caciocavallo* cheese
- 240g *prosciutto*, cubed
- 200g *scarmorza* cheese
- 115g *capocollo*, cubed
- ¼ tsp ground black pepper

PREPARATION

Prepare the crust:

In either a stand mixer with a dough hook, or a food processor with a blade, add all the flour and salt. Mix slightly. Add the pieces of butter. Mix or pulse until the mixture starts coming together. Avoid overmixing, as that will make the dough tough instead of flaky.

Drizzle in the ¼ cup of milk. This should make the dough form a ball as you continue to mix/pulse. If the ball doesn't quite form, add a little more milk, but stop as soon as the ball forms.

With your hands, without kneading, press the dough into a large ball, then flatten it into a thick disk. Wrap the disk in plastic wrap and set aside to rest at room temperature for at least 1 hour.

Prepare the filling:

In a large bowl, beat the 8 eggs with the ricotta until they are well mixed with no lumps. Add the cubed meats, the *scamorza*, the *caciocavallo*, and the pepper.

Grease a springform pan or deep dish pie plate with butter.

Cut off about 1/5 of the dough for a lattice top and set aside in plastic wrap. Place the rest of the dough disk on the floured working surface. Cover the dough with a sheet of parchment paper and roll it into a large round disk, a little larger than the size of your baking pan. Remove the parchment paper.

Place the dough onto the pan, leaving a 10 cm flap and gently press it to the bottom and the sides. Trim the excess dough from the sides. Fill the dough with the cheese/meat filling. Press down gently to smooth it.

Using a pastry or pizza cutter, cut the remaining dough into 2 cm strips a little longer than the size of the pie pan.

Make a lattice top with the strips by weaving them over and under each other on top of the pizza. With your fingers or a spoon press the strips down into the edges of the crust. Alternatively, roll the dough and use as a lid (as in the photo).

Beat one egg with a pinch of salt and brush the egg onto all the lattice strips with a pastry brush.

Bake at 180C (350 F) for 50 minutes. Allow to cool for 15 – 20 minutes before serving.

EASTER FIADONI

By Lucia Tellone

The origins of *fiadoni* (or *fiàuni* in dialetto in my area) can be traced back to the Renaissance period when they were prepared by the famous chef Cristofaro di Messisbugo, who worked at the court of Ferrara. The recipe later arrived in Abruzzo, most likely because it included saffron among the main ingredients and Abruzzo was one of the leaders in saffron cultivation in the past. It became a traditional Easter treat.

I have beautiful childhood memories about *fiadoni* because both of my nonnas made them for Easter, but in two different shapes: one grandmother used to close them like little bundles (in the photo), and the other one like small cups or baskets. The more common shape for *fiadoni* is like half-moon ravioli.

Fiadoni can be eaten warm or cold.

Lucia Tellone is a young chef who runs a communal bread oven in Villa San Sebastiano (see our article on page 5) and will shortly open her restaurant in the town.

INGREDIENTS

Makes 30-40 *fiadoni* (depending on the size)

- 500 grams type wheat 0 flour
- 2 whole eggs
- 100 ml extra virgin olive oil
- 100 ml white wine
- For the filling:
- 250g grated medium-aged *pecorino* cheese
- 250g grated *rigatino* cheese (or *parmigiano*)
- 5 whole eggs (one will be used to brush the *fiadoni* before baking)
- Black pepper to taste



PREPARATION

To make the dough, put all the ingredients in a bowl and knead as if making fresh pasta dough. When the dough is smooth and homogeneous, let it rest for half an hour in a covered container.

To make the filling, mix the cheeses, black pepper, and whole eggs in a bowl. Mix well with a spoon or by hand.

Roll the dough as thin as fresh pasta dough. Cut it into small squares (about 10cm x 10cm or bigger) and spoon some filling on each square. Close each of them by taking the outer edges and bringing them to the centre. You can wrap a "tie" strip around each of them (like in the photo).

If making *fiadoni* in the shape of ravioli, cut dough into disks, place the filling on one half and close the other half over, sealing the edges by pressing them with a fork or your fingers.

Brush each with a beaten egg before baking at a temperature of 185°C (365F) for about 20 minutes.

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