

Lazio



The Lazio region and its 5.9 million inhabitants comprise the cradle of Western civilization and Christian culture. Lazio is a region of west-central Italy and it has borders with Tuscany, Umbria and Marche to the north, Abruzzo and Molise to the east, Campania to the south and the Tyrrhenian Sea to the west. The capital of Lazio is Rome which is also Italy's capital and the country's largest city. It is divided into five provinces, Viterbo, Rieti, Rome, Latina and Frosinone. Vatican City is technically located in this region and is physically surrounded by Rome but the Vatican is its own country and will be featured in a future article.

A QUICK HISTORY LESSON

Since the Bronze Age, there have been traces of human settlements in Lazio. From the 8th Century B.C, the Etruscans ruled the area. The Etruscans were eventually ousted by the founding of Rome. Lazio became the predominant province as the Romans, a people of soldiers, lawmakers, and rulers, gradually conquered the whole of Italy and eventually created the Roman Empire.

With the fall of the Roman Empire, political confusion ruled the land until the Pope took control. It was in that period that the only authority left in Lazio was the Bishop of Rome who strengthened the political power of the church in the area. With the introduction of Christianity as the state religion, the Catholic Church finally assumed total power in Rome after centuries of fighting against local lords and finally gained total supremacy over Lazio and surrounding territories.

Through taxation, military force and forced restitution of the lands and economic goods, the church established its control in the region and the current territory of Lazio became part of the State of the Church. The 8th through the 11th centuries AD witnessed an often, bloody power struggle between the Papacy and the landowners. The 16th Century ushered in more victories for the papacy and its stronghold on ruling the region. The struggles between feudal lords and the church continued for centuries.

In the 19th century when a strong movement for unity swept the Italian nation, patriots in the many Italian states looked at Rome as their future capital. In 1860, the Second War of Independence united many territories of the former State of the Church to the newborn Italian Kingdom but Rome wasn't taken until 1870 after the Third War of Independence. During the Second World War, the region suffered serious damage and

several cities were destroyed including Anzio. The war damaged, above all, the artistic heritage of the region. Various monuments, churches, and ancient urban sites were razed to the ground. Since 1948 after the approval of the Constitution, the Lazio region has witnessed considerable economic and social development.

DID YOU KNOW?

The region is home to many huge national parks. Apart from the area of Rome, Lazio is mostly mountains, plains, and hills. More than half of the population of the whole region lives in or around Rome. The western part of the region is coastal, mainly composed of sandy beaches.

The central Apennines is one of the most seismically active areas in Italy. An earthquake, measuring 6.2 magnitude on the Richter scale, hit Amatrice in the Province of Rieti, Lazio on August 24, 2016. The official figures reported that

REGIONS OF ITALY

By JIM SANO



the earthquake caused the death of 297 people in Amatrice and severe damage reduced the town's center to a massive pile of rubble with only a few structures still standing on the outskirts. The economic losses totaled more than 10 billion dollars.

The lowland area of Lazio (Pontine Marshes) was a swampy breeding ground for malarial until the land was successfully reclaimed during the reign of Mussolini. This resulted in the repopulation of the plain and transformed the region's agriculture.

The Lazio economy is based on governmental administration, agriculture, animal husbandry, crafts, and fishery. Agriculture products are olives, fruit, cereals, wine grapes and vegetables. Rome is the region's commercial and banking center but it has little industry apart from artisan and specialist industries, such as motion pictures and fashion. As the national and regional capital, there are large numbers of government employees. In the rest of the region, the economy is based on the paper, textile, petrochemical, engineering, automobile, and electronics sectors. Rome, including the Vatican, is Italy's largest tourist center and tourism is also important at the resorts in the Alban Hills, the Apennines, and along the coast.

The cuisine of Lazio is made up of strong and intense flavors characterized by their simplicity and the use of very poor ingredients. Roman artichokes, porchetta (delicious roasted pork), the black olives of Gaeta; the olive-oil of Sabina and the chestnuts of the Cimino Mountains are regional favorites. Some claim that Italy's most famous pasta dishes come from Lazio, while the four pasta sauces of Rome (carbonara, cacio e pepe, Amatriciana, and Gricia) are well-known around the world.

Pasta featured in Lazio cuisine is usually the bigger, chunkier types such as bucatini and conchiglie. In Lazio, one will find the true Carbonara sauce. It is made from guanciale (cured pig's cheek), eggs and Parmesan. Authentic versions of this classic sauce never contain cream; instead, the sauce is created by using pasta water to emulsify the egg and cheese without letting the eggs scramble.

Fettuccine Alfredo is a pasta dish named after Roman restaurateur Alfredo di Lelio, who featured the "ceremony" of tableside preparation as an integral part of the dish. Arrabbiata is a popular pasta sauce from this region too. Arrabbiata, which means 'angry', comes from this region. It is so named because



of the flakes of hot peperoncino chili peppers added to the tomato sauce. Bucatini all'Amatriciana is a traditional sauce dish from Amatrice based on guanciale (cured pork cheek), pecorino cheese, tomato, and, in some variations, onion, flavored with chili and white wine. This is usually served over Bucatini pasta, Lazio's most famous pasta shape. Gnocchi alla Romana is made of semolina flour combined with milk, butter, egg and nutmeg and not potatoes.



Lazio is home to some of Italy's most famous meat dishes such as Saltimbocca alla Romana, veal cutlets topped with raw ham and sage and simmered with white wine and butter, and Coda all'vaccinara (Roman oxtail stew), meat gently braised in a tomato and red wine sauce with plenty of celery until melted. One of the regional chicken dishes is Pollo alla Romana where the chicken is cut into pieces and braised in white wine with tomatoes and peppers until tender with a little oregano sprinkled over the top.



Trevi's Fountain

The vegetables of Lazio start with the Roman artichoke or the “Giant Green.” Lazio is also important for its fruit, such as the kiwi, the chestnuts of Vallerano, larger and heavier than normal chestnuts, and the wild strawberries of Nemi. The most famous vegetable dish is Roman-style artichokes, (*carciofi alla giudia*). Roman-style artichokes are filled with fragrant herbs and either marinated in olive oil or deep-fried whole. *Vignarola* is a Roman vegetable stew that is a pure taste of Italian springtime with fresh artichokes, broad beans and peas cooked in white wine and lemon juice.

As stated in an earlier edition of the “Siamo Qui”, Lazio is also famous for sheep’s milk pecorinos and buffalo’s milk mozzarella. The Pecorino Romano (DOP registered), is arguably the most popular variety. It is a very tasty grated cheese.

Olive oil from this area has a pungent pepperiness, tempered by the delicate flavors of wild herbs. The most noteworthy is extra virgin olive oil “Canino” D.O.P. with its green color and fresh taste and the extra virgin olive oil “Sabina” D.O.P.

The Lazio region has a remarkable variety of wines with over 25 licensed wines. Some of the most popular are the dry Frascati, the dry white Marino, the dry white Colli Albani (which can be also sparkling) and Aprilia, a garnet red wine.

Grattachecca is a cold dessert originating in Rome, Italy. Commonly sold in kiosks and bars, it consists of hand-shaved ice flavored with various flavors of sweet syrup. Think of it as an artisan version of a “Slurpy”.

SITES TO SEE

The heart of Lazio is Rome and the heart of Rome is the Colosseum. One must see the ancient site of gladiator combat and Christian sacrifice. Close by is the Theatre of Marcellus and the famous Mouth of Truth, a marble carving representing the face of a faun near the Church of Santa Maria. This mouth, according to legend, swallows the hands of liars. The Pantheon, Roman Forum, Palatine Hill, and the Villa/ Galleria Borghese, Rome’s second-largest public park containing landscaped gardens buildings, museums, and other attractions are all sites to be visited.

Rome is the main seat of State institutions and because of this distinction has many buildings, basilicas, and piazzas. Some famous piazzas are the Piazza di Spagna with the famous “Spanish Steps”, Piazza Farnese and Piazza Navona with Bernini’s Fountain of the Four Rivers. Don’t miss the 18th-Century Trevi Fountain where tourists throw a trinity of coins and express their wish to return to the Eternal City.

Vatican City, the seat of the Papal State, the famous St. Peter’s Basilica with the 16th-Century colonnade by Bernini and the magnificent Sistine Chapel by Michelangelo are all must-see places for any tourist but will be discussed in detail when we spotlight the Vatican since technically it is not part of Lazio or the Italian republic.

While most tours concentrate on Rome and the Vatican, visitors to the region often overlook the rest of Lazio. Lazio is a very rich region with picturesque little coast towns, Etruscan relics, Roman architecture, historic villas, and beautiful countryside. Just like those who visit New York City and claim they’ve been to the State of New York, Rome is not a true visit to Lazio. There is much more to see in this region than a famous metropolitan mecca. For many visitors, Lazio remains a mystery.