



# ABRUZZO



Abruzzo Flag

**A**bruzzo (Italian: [a 'bruttso]; also called **Abruzzi**). Abruzzo, although geographically it may also be considered central Italy, it is also considered a region of Southern Italy in terms of its culture, language, history, and economy, and historic association with the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Abruzzo occupies 4,156 square miles and has a population of 1.2 million people. It is divided into four provinces: L'Aquila, Teramo, Pescara, and Chieti. Most of the region is mountainous, stretching from the heart of the Apennines mountains to the Adriatic Sea. This mountainous land is occupied by a vast plateau, and home to the highest peak of the Apennines, the Gran Sasso, at 9,554 feet above sea level. Abruzzo is known as the "greenest region in Europe" due to its large number of national parks, landscapes, and natural beauties. Nearly one-third of Abruzzo's territory is set aside for these parks and reserves, including the National Park of Abruzzo, the Gran Sasso National Park, and the Maiella National Park. Abruzzo's Adriatic coastline is characterized by long sandy beaches to the North and pebbly beaches to the South. Abruzzo's characteristic hillside areas have some of the best vineyards and olive groves in all of Italy.

## History

Human settlements in Abruzzo have existed since at least the Neolithic times dating back 5,000 years. These early inhabitants developed a thriving agricultural economy which consisted of farming and raising sheep. The Metal Age brought the arrival of people from Asia. Sheep farming and herding developed even more. In fact, traditions of sheep-herding are still present in modern-day Abruzzo.

While the tribes of Abruzzo flourished independently, the Roman Empire on the opposite side of the Apennines was becoming stronger and growing larger. Romans began to conquer the tribes of the Italic period around 300-400 BC. However, the tribes of this region were known for their aggressiveness and fiercely opposed their new enemy. The greatest piece of artwork from this time period is the incredible statue Warrior of Capestrano. This statue can be viewed at the National Archaeology Museum of Abruzzo in Chieti.

Eventually, the Romans overcame the tribes and by the Augustan era, all of Abruzzo was considered Roman territory. While the road to Roman colonization was costly to the local inhabitants of early Abruzzo, the influence the Romans had on the area was highly impactful. The Romans destroyed existing cities to create new city-colonies that featured theaters, spas, baths, amphitheaters, and other important public spaces and buildings. The most important role the Romans played in advancing Abruzzo and the Roman Empire, however, was the construction of new roads which would connect Rome to the Adriatic Coast.

The productivity of Abruzzo's expansion was stopped at the fall of the Roman Empire. After the fall of the Roman Empire, there were a string of invasions and rulers in the region. In the 6th century, the Lombardi arrived and colonized the area calling it Apurantium. Under the rule of Charlemagne, some of the area's most notable architecture was built. Many of the important buildings from this time are still around to be seen today including various abbeys and religious structures.

Around 1000 AD, the Normans arrived and would take control of Abruzzo in a little over a century. Frederick II of Sweden unified the territory of Abruzzo, reorganizing the region and naming Sulmona as the capital city. The city of L'Aquila was founded in 1254 and would become one of the main cities of Italy second only to Naples. For the next few centuries, the region flourished both culturally and politically. Abruzzo went through economic highs and lows as it transitioned from being dominated by the French to being taken over by the Spanish who would rule until the early 1700s.



Following the Spanish rule, Austria ruled Abruzzo until 1734. Napoleon took over in 1815 establishing the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and ruling until Italian unification. During his time as the leader of the region, Napoleon would abolish feudalism and reform the region in a variety of ways. The economy of Abruzzo thrived, but mainly near the coast.

After World War I, fascism thrived in Abruzzo due to the vast gap between the region's social classes. During World War II, the region was devastated by the Nazi army, who killed many of Abruzzo's civilians and destroyed a large portion of the area. The reconstruction and rebuilding of the region was slow and the bulk of its repairs didn't occur until the '60s. Until 1963, Abruzzo was part of the Abruzzi region with Molise. The term Abruzzi (plural of Abruzzo) derives from the time when the region was part of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. The pinnacle of the area's growth was in the mid-'70s to '80s. Today, Abruzzo is a developed area that preserves its agrarian and rural background.

# REGIONS OF ITALY

By JIM SANO



## Culture

The Abruzzo culture equates an artist with a craftsman. The region's tools of craftsmanship are varied, including precious metals, lace, copper, and wrought iron. The grand architecture is example enough of this as Abruzzo features art in the form of castles, monasteries, and medieval villages. Stone and wood carvers, master goldsmiths, and blacksmiths built the town one magnificent building at a time. The province of L'Aquila is home to one of the grandest churches in the area, Basilica of San Bernardino. It was built in the mid to late 1400s in honor of St. Bernardino of Siena. The building houses the saint's body still today inside the mausoleum. The Teramo Cathedral is one of the Teramo province's most notable landmarks. The Roman Catholic cathedral boasts a Romanesque architecture that is just slightly more beautiful than its mountainous backdrop. Pescara offers one of the most breathtaking views of the city and the Adriatic Sea when strolling down the Ponte del Mare, a pedestrian bridge over the Pescara River. The view of the sea at dawn, dusk, or during the day is simply unparalleled with the blue expanse melting into the sky on the horizon. One of Chieti's most popular landmarks is the Museo Archeologico Nazionale d'Abruzzo. The building, dating back to the 1830s, is a neoclassical villa that sits atop a hill, offering a grandiose view of Abruzzo's mountains. The Art Nouveau style structure was a school before it became a museum in 1959. On the outside, the simple but well-crafted brick exterior features beautiful arched windows that offer a breathtaking view of the countryside. On the inside, the museum offers visitors a view of the ethnic and topographical aspects of Abruzzo's history.

## Climate

The Abruzzo region has two types of climate, maritime along its Adriatic Coast and its interior Apennine mountainous climate which is continental. Coastal areas have a Mediterranean climate with hot dry summers and mild winters. The Apennine mountainous areas' average annual temperature is between 46- and 54-degrees F with the warmest temperatures in the summer months, around 68 degrees F.

## Language

The dialects spoken in the Abruzzo region can be divided into three main groups: Sabine dialect, in the province of L'Aquila (central Italian dialects) Abruzzo Adriatic dialect, in the province of Teramo, Pescara and Chieti, (southern Italian dialects) and Abruzzo western dialect, in the province of L'Aquila.

## Food and Wines

One of the most popular regional dishes is Spaghetti alla chitarra which is made by pressing or cutting pasta through a chitarra, an implement to form long thin noodles like spaghetti. The pasta is served with a tomato-based sauce, often flavored with peppers, pork, goose, or lamb. This dish is complemented by regional side dishes, such as the bean and noodle soup, *sagne e fagioli*. This soup is traditionally flavored with tomatoes, garlic, oil, and peperoncini.

Other popular dishes include Gnocchi carrati, flavored with bacon, eggs, and pecorino cheese. Scrippelle, a rustic French-style crêpe served either as a soup (a type of soup) or used to form a sort of soufflé with some ragù and stuffed with chicken liver, meatballs, hard-boiled eggs, and cheese. Pastuccia, a polenta stew with sausage, eggs, and cheese. Rustic Easter pizzas are also very common. Across the region, roast lamb is enjoyed in several variations. Some of these variations include Arrosticini, a skewered lamb dish. Pecora al cotturo, lamb stuffed with a variety of mountain herbs and cooked in a copper pot. Seafood is also popular, especially in coastal areas. The variety of fish available to the area has resulted in several fish-based Brodetti (broths). These broths are often made by cooking fish, flavored with tomatoes, herbs, and peperoncino in an earthenware pot.

Organic wineries can be found throughout Abruzzo but particularly in Chieti and Teramo. Abruzzo wine is recognized both nationally and internationally. One of Abruzzo's most famous wines is Montepulciano, which is named as such because it is produced with the Montepulciano grape. Most of this wine is made in the Chieti province and is famous and highly revered by wine connoisseurs. This medium-bodied red wine is divine with meats and roasted winter vegetable dishes. Trebbiano and Sangiovese are also popular wine varieties found in the region. Trebbiano white wine pairs fabulously with seafood, pastas, and risottos. Sangiovese is a dry red wine that pairs splendidly with hard cheeses, rich meats, and cured sausages.

## Desserts

Sweets have been part of the Italian culinary tradition forever. The ancient Romans covered fruit, flowers, nuts, and kernels in honey to make sweet treats. Most of the sweet treats of Abruzzo are almond-based and often have a hint of honey.

Perhaps one of the most colorful and aesthetically beautiful almond desserts is Italian Confetti (Jordan Almonds), a traditional offering of the city of Sulmona. It was in Abruzzo where confetti were first invented in Sulmona. In the 15th century, the nuns at Santa Chiara monastery wrapped pieces of almond candy in silk and gave it in homage to noble brides, bishops and royalty. Ordinary people's only chance to taste the sweet was during the Ferragosto processions when the magistrate threw confetti to the crowds. The almonds are peeled and coated in sugar and come in virtually every color of the rainbow. While this dessert can be served loose in a bowl, both the eyes and taste buds delight at confetti that is fashioned into gorgeous bright flower bouquets and other aesthetically pleasing designs. Sulmona is home to this exquisite combination of food and art.



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Another favorite in the Abruzzo region is torrone, or nougat. These can be found in almost any restaurant in a variety of flavor combinations. Pastries are a given in this region of Italy. Rustic pastries called Bocconotti are often stuffed with almonds and chocolate, although they can be found in a variety of flavors. Cicerchiata are small balls of fried pastry with accents of honey served as an oval-shaped cake. A more unassuming dessert category that is often underestimated is that of cookies. Ferratelle, also known as Pizzelle, is a light, wafer-thin cookie flavored with anise. The Ravioli Dolci or pasta with sugar, is much like the classic international version of ravioli, except larger and with some unusual additions such as sugar, lemon, and cinnamon.

## Conclusion

Abruzzo is truly a year-round destination with ancient villages, castles, lakes, and rivers nestling between soaring mountains. Many people flock here in the winter months since this area offers some of the best skiing. Some think late April to mid-May is the best time to visit Abruzzo for a holiday or long weekend break to witness the many flowers in their full spring blooming state. Others believe the summer and the beaches are the perfect time to visit. Whatever your preference, Abruzzo is certainly a unique province and one worth visiting. If you or your ancestors are from this region in Italy, we would love to know that so please contact us.

