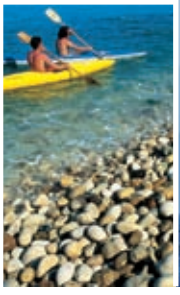

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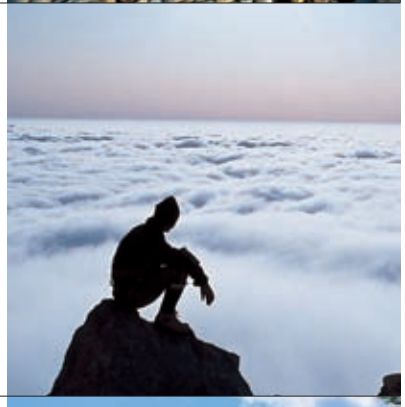

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ABRUZZO

An ideal scenario

The growing development of active, sports and adventure tourism is a challenge that Abruzzo has met by playing its trump cards of strong nature, unspoiled territories, countless trails through gullies, torrents, castles, retreats, peaks, highlands, woods, ancient villages: a thrilling mix for very much out-of-the-ordinary holidays.

Abruzzo's 130 kilometres of coastline, the tallest Apennine peaks soaring sheer above the sea, a boundless system of intramountain plateaux, three large National Parks and a Regional Park, not to mention over 30 Nature Reserves, are the perfect scenario for those who prefer an active holiday, where sport and movement are not only the end, but also the means for enjoying the extraordinary environmental resources of this region. If the truth be told, from the coast to the mountains there is no lack of choice, because Abruzzo

for every passion

destinations offer countless possibilities for spending free time immersed in nature and for doing what we like best. The almost unique aspect of this region is actually the way it encapsulates in what is not a particularly big territory, a system of very varied milieus, composing an anthology of the entire Italian landscape: ranging from typically Mediterranean marine and coastal habitats (with pine groves and coastal woods, dunes and cliffs, vast beaches and isolated coves) to what can only be called the alpine mountainscapes (including the tallest peaks on the Apennine), with a middle area of compact hills tidily furrowed by valleys, boasting a fine agricultural countryside dotted with tiny towns, and rising fast towards the mounts. The complex mountain system, comprising three great massifs, tall rocky peaks, vast plateaux and wooded crests, gazes across the Adriatic like some magical balcony: the sea is in the air even on the highest peaks, and is clearly visible just a few kilometres away, as the crow flies. If you feel so inclined, a stroll through the mountains in the morning, can be followed by a swim in the sea during the afternoon, and the day can close with a starlit dinner out in the countryside.

The mountains of Abruzzo

This is above all a mountain region. Wherever your gaze turns inland from any point on the coast, you will encounter an endless theory of rocky peaks soaring skywards: from north to south, the massifs of the Laga, Gran Sasso and Majella ranges.

A fantastic high-altitude universe that is the rocky backbone of this region, constituting the most formidable Apennine mountain complex (with obviously alpine features), in the heart of Italy and the Mediterranean. There are sharp peaks that skim 3,000 metres in height, immense intramountain plains, narrow gorges eroded by impetuous torrents and wide valleys cut by ancient glaciers, lakes, cascades, wild ravines and rolling pastures, endless woods, mugo pine grove and high-altitude steppe. All basking in the scent of sea air, because the Adriatic is only a few kilometres away. In between the gentle hillsides with their olive groves and vineyards, plunged in tradition and atmosphere.

The great plateaux are absolutely the most alluring aspect of the Abruzzo mountains: who would think of seeing Tibet just an hour

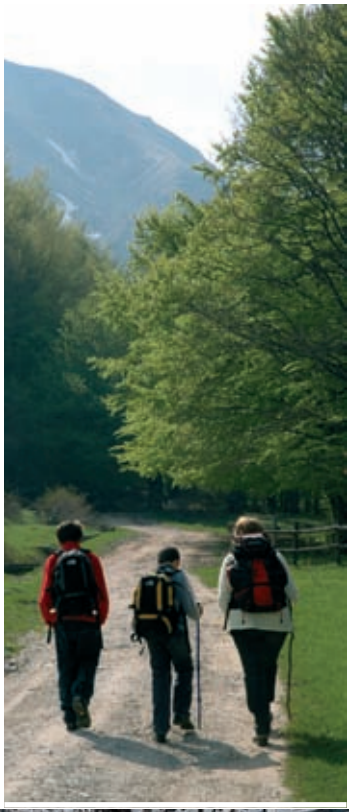
Anyone who wants hands-on contact with the environment should definitely explore the exciting options to be found in Abruzzo: there is no doubt that the region's hardy nature offers the most complete range of changing environments, both in summer and in winter.

from Rome. These huge intramountain plains, in some cases only a few kilometres wide, in other instances roll on for many kilometres, were formed during the geological eras by the action of glaciers and by the very karstic nature of these mountains. A first visit to one of the great highlands of Abruzzo, especially if we refer to Campo Imperatore (the most spectacular, with its breathtaking space so reminiscent of Tibet) is a fascinating experience and may well remain etched forever in your mind. Apart from Campo Imperatore, we could suggest Piano di Cascina, north of L'Aquila and near the Latium border; the Voltigno, looking over the province of Pescara from the crest of Gran Sasso; the delle Rocche plateaux, wedged between the Sirente and Velino peaks, with the neighbouring Piani di Pezza and Prati del Sirente; Passo San Leonardo, the Majella plateau; and to close, in the southern mountain area, another enormous complex, the articulated great plateaux or Altipiani Maggiori of Abruzzo: Piano delle Cinquemiglia, Piano d'Aremogna (above Roccaraso), the plains among Roccaraso, Rivisondoli, Pescocostanzo, the Sant'Antonio wood and the Forchetta pass. Then there are the plain-type environments amidst the peaks, which geologists and geographers call "high-altitude summit plains", which have in store some equally thrilling emotions, with their extreme moonscape atmosphere: we refer to the Femmina Morta ravine on Majella; Serra di Chiarano, connecting Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise National Park to Majella. Places that may be difficult to reach but which offer a unique experience in nature.

Park Abruzzo

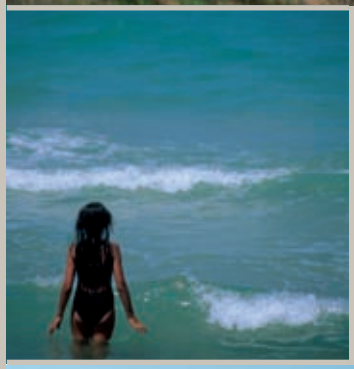
In Abruzzo, a third of the territory is set aside in protected areas, with three National Parks, a Regional Park, and more than30 Nature Reserves. Overall most – but not all – of this legacy is to be found in the mountains. Nature is indeed protected in Abruzzo, and has been for a while. Abruzzo National Park, (today named Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise National Park) was founded between 1922 and 1923, and has become the national symbol of commitment to effective protection of the Apennine environment. In recent years two more large National Parks have flanked it: the Gran Sasso-Laga and Majella. The Regional Council then also founded the vast Sirente-Velino Regional Park and a dense network of Nature Reserves, today numbering over 30, and still growing. Thanks to its Parks, Abruzzo's nature has been safeguarded and can be enjoyed and visited by all. The commitment to environmental conservation, together with the great area of the territory that is effectively protected, has earned Abruzzo the deserved title of "greenest region in Europe".
Abruzzo's Parks are certainly special places for an active holiday in contact with nature: the large number of paths and infrastructures, services and projects that they have created and made available, combined with the sheer amount of terrain they cover and the numerous municipalities included, mean that they are able to offer, on the while, a vast range of choices.
We can opt for any one of the hundreds of paths of all distances

It would be difficult to underestimate the national and international importance of the Abruzzo Parks in the protection of the environment and of biodiversity, bearing in mind that 75% of all Europe's flora and fauna species are represented in this region!



and difficulties, to be covered on foot, by mountain bike, on horseback; the wonderful trekking that is possible all year round, thanks to the many expert mountain and mid-mountain guides; then there are rock and competition climbing schools and practice walls; splendid watercourses for practising canyoning, canoeing, rafting; large and small lakes for windsurfing and canoeing; spectacular mountain balconies for leaping into the blue for hang gliding and paragliding.

The beaches and the sea that laps them are certainly one of Abruzzo's most famous and popular attractions. From the river Tronto, which is the northern geographical and also historical boundary with the Marches, down as far as the Trigno, which marked the southern administrative frontier with the lands of Molise, the coast offers mile upon mile of wide sandy shores, steep bluffs and maritime pine groves.



The sea in Abruzzo

From the river Tronto as far as Francavilla al Mare, south of Pescara, the coast is uniform: a steady golden strip, wide and welcoming soft sands; from the mouth of the river Foro, south of Francavilla, the coastline changes to cliffs, rich with harbours, reefs, coves and long sections of shingle, that roll back into wide sandy beaches as we reach Vasto and the Molise boundary. So the characteristic feature of this shore is the variety, with settings and environments for all tastes. This twofold peculiarity of the riviera, as well as the very geographical conformation of the Abruzzo hills, create a tourist district that is utterly unique and which offers some truly exclusive aspects: a coast that is the gateway to the entire territory and two very complementary local realities, coexisting in just a few kilometres of territory.

A flight over the Abruzzo coast would show us quite clearly how it blends quickly into the hinterland of rolling farmlands, set across rounded hillsides, and tended with age-old agricultural care. Farms

and tiny towns can be glimpsed everywhere amongst cultivated fields and blossoming meadows; in the background, the powerful backbone of the mountain that runs parallel to the coast. This particular geographical structure means that the territory is furrowed by a dense chain of long valleys set perpendicular to the sea and mountains, creating a fishbone effect. The major communication routes connecting the interior with the coast were installed along these valleys because of the ease with which they could be travelled. Originally tracks, these routes became roads under the Romans and in the Middle Ages, and are now important arteries that underpin the region's road network; a grid that in less than an hour connects all of Abruzzo's inland and mountain areas via the SS 16 Adriatica coast road and the A14 motorway. This fishbone structure means that the coast has become a convenient access gate to the entire region as far as tourism is concerned: in fact, countless itineraries start in the seaside resorts, setting out to explore the marvels of inland landscape, nature, environment and culture.

ACTIVE HOLIDAYS

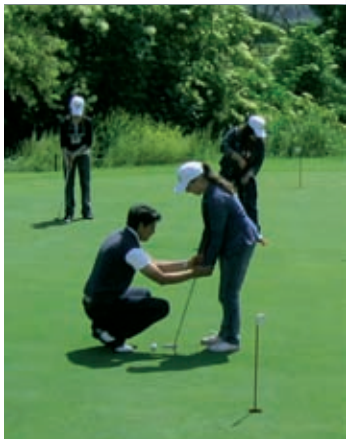
In proportion to the region's relatively small surface, the coast seems endless: an astonishing 133 kilometres of beaches, washed by unpolluted waters and drenched in sun for months on end.

Abruzzo's dual sea: a coast with two faces

The coast is low and sandy from the mouth of the Tronto, which marks the Marches boundary, as far as the mouth of the river Foro, between Francavilla al Mare and Ortona. The beach appears as a wide, regular strip of fine golden sand, the shore up to 300 metres deep; in some stretches typical Mediterranean maquis survives, with dunes marking the border between the beach and the green pine groves behind, offering resin-scented respite in their shade. A splendid and famous pine grove escorts the town of Pineto as far as its beach; a little further on thick umbrella and Aleppo pine groves embrace the mighty and enigmatic Torre di Cerrano, once a watchtower and bastion against Moorish pirates. The heart of Pescara, for example, offers the large and well-used d'Avalos and Santa Filomena pine groves, the latter is now a State Nature Riserve that separates Montesilvano from its beach. It is a lively coast, driven by an enormous selection of entertainments

at the seaside

and fun activities: popular, enjoyable, and with plenty of accommodation and pleasure options, perfect for those seeking large beaches and suitable structures, for the younger age groups and for sports lovers. The beach amenities include beach volley and beach soccer areas for the endless tournaments; some private lidos even have open-air fitness facilities with spin bikes, or offer aquagym sessions to exploit the beneficial effects of seawater. The south coast starts to become rocky near Ortona, soaring out of the sea to form the stunning reefs of Punta di Ferruccio and Punta di Acquabella, Punta del Cavalluccio and Punta Aderci (or Punta d'Erce). In many spots the coast is jagged with cliffs and small bays, concealing beaches and coves, combined with lovely pebbly areas. Thanks also to the clean waters here, the seas are a firm favourite for underwater sports: a dive with goggles and flippers to gaze on the busy seabed, rich in marine life; just diving in for a swim; fishing; underwater photography. Amidst these tall

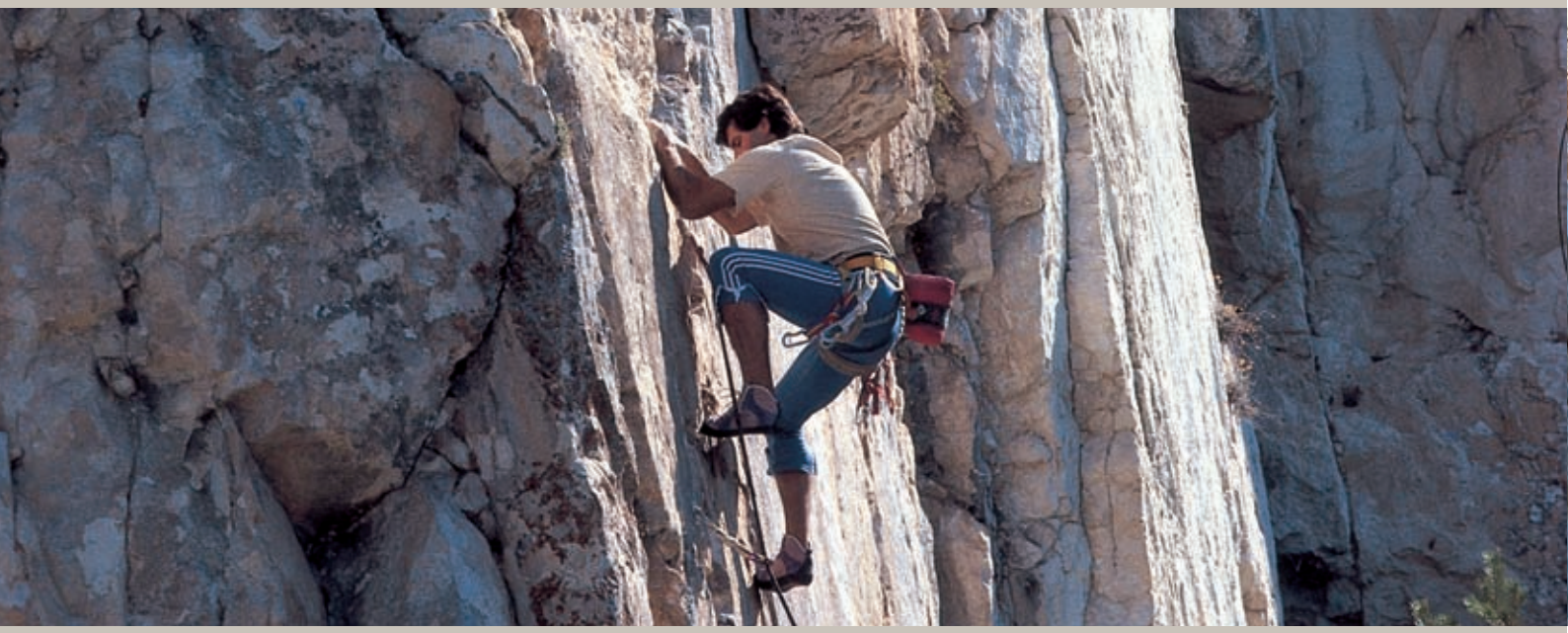


cliffs and bluffs, we will discover the gentle Venere gulf, and slightly south the bigger, livelier gulf of Vasto, whose large beaches are again sandy as far as the Molise border. The gentle, cultivated hills sometimes roll all the way down to the coast, with its ancient *trabocchi* (fishing huts on stilts) that keep watch over this scenic location. This is a more natural and untamed coast, its charm enhanced by the peaceful niches of isolated coves and beaches protected by tall cliffs, and by the unique atmospheres of the little seaside towns.

Sailing and ports

Sailing enthusiasts in particular will find excellent facilities for their boats along the Abruzzo coast: in fact, trade ports and marinas are installed along the whole shoreline, from north to south. The ports begin at Martinsicuro, a recently-opened and prevalently fishing port, then Giulianova, with excellent berthing and mooring facilities; then comes Roseto with a characteristic small marina; at the centre of the coast we find the large Marina di Pescara, one of the largest in the Mediterranean; further south there are the

important trade ports and marinas of Ortona and Vasto, where it is also possible to visit the splendid Tremiti islands, a Marine Nature Reserve, even just for the day; between these two, Fossacesia, which has a newly-installed marina.
Anyone seeking a dynamic and sports-based summer will be spoiled for choice with the vast selection of pastimes available, including sailing, windsurfing, canoeing and fishing, all sorts of power watersports (including jet ski and waterskiing), fishing and underwater photography, diving, snorkelling. And there is more: Abruzzo's coast, with all that hinterland of rolling farm hills lading to the mountains, offers countless opportunities for enthusiasts of horseriding, golf, mountain bike, cycling tourism, motorcycling, motocross and off-road, kayaking, archery and many other sports. There are also two large aqua parks in the region (one at Tortoreto, one at Vasto), whose exciting and fun activities add an extra dimension to seaside holidays.
Each coastal town will offer numerous sports facilities, including tennis courts, five-a-side football, athletics tracks, gyms, with air-conditioned indoor and open-air structures.



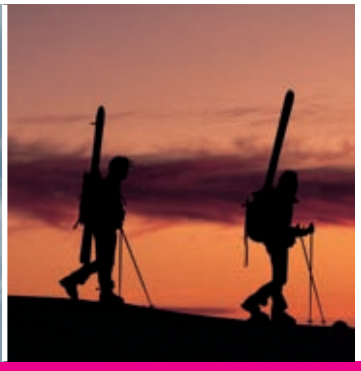
Mountaineering is the main sport famous in this region: thanks to the many, tall mountains, historically it has contributed significantly to the evolution of this discipline. The first documented "sport ascent" was actually in Abruzzo, on Gran Sasso in 1573. The great tradition of Abruzzese mountain climbing, which has brought forth names and actions of international renown, reflects very positively on today's practice of this sport in the region. Above all it has trained a huge number of mountain and mid-mountain guides, all highly experienced, authorized and joined in a guild. Two accomplished rock-climbing schools (one at Assergi, on Gran Sasso, and one at Abbateggio, on Majella) flank the mountain guides, and teach both classic and modern freeclimbing techniques, whereas the mid-mountain guides are linked to four nature trekking schools (L'Aquila, Spoltore, Villetta Barrea and Caramanico). There are also many very active sections of the CAI (Italian Alpine Club), a historical association that has also operated in Abruzzo for over a century to support the thousands of enthusiasts exploring the mountains, teaching them to know, respect and love them. This overview of organized practice and training dedicated to mountain sports is completed by several hiking associations active on regional territory, who organize excursions, climbs, high-altitude hikes. There are countless climbing scenarios of all types and levels of difficulty: the tormented, vertical orography of the Gran Sasso massif has some typically alpine environments and settings, with rock faces, pinnacles, aiguilles and even the Calderone glacier, Europe's southernmost. Conversely the other mountains complexes, especially Majella, are rounded by erosion phenomena and are more suitable for trekking, whereas the rock faces of several ravines are amazing theatres for stimulating quality climbs.

The mountains of Abruzzo, the Tibet of Europe

Especially in winter, aficionados will certainly be guaranteed thrilling moments on the Abruzzo mountains.
Peaks, crests and frozen waterfalls are the fascinating itineraries for experts with an ice axe and crampons, gullies that shoot down more than 1,000 metres from the taller pinnacles are amazing challenges for ski touring, on a par with Scandinavia or the Alps,

ACTIVE HOLIDAYS

in the mountains



Anyone who conquers any peak in Abruzzo and takes the time to take in the horizon, will perceive the truth of the words uttered by the famous Orientalist Giuseppe Tucci, who was convinced that no other landscape in the world resembled Tibet as much as the mountains of Abruzzo. Both in summer and winter, fans of even the most demanding mountain sports, will find Abruzzo's massifs offer not only a worthy challenge, but also marvellous surroundings. Classic mountaineering, freeclimbing, ski touring, are all catered for in Abruzzo, whose scenarios require different levels of expertise.

and Abruzzo's top-notch mountain guides are available to accompany, suggest and teach.
Of all the mountains present, Gran Sasso is the quintessential realm of adventure. Here skiers, trekkers and mountaineers are sure to find surroundings that withstand any comparison with the Alps, both in summer and in winter. For instance the snowy expanse of Campo Imperatore offers the perfect environment for cross-country skiers, who can choose between the handy circuits and the long, off-track crossings in the heart of the plain. During the summer the steep faces of Corno Grande and Corno Piccolo offer a challenging climb for mountaineers of different levels of expertise. The panorama is breathtaking for those who complete the climb, taking in all of Abruzzo: from the Adriatic to the mountains that mark the boundary with Latium. In winter these same rock faces are perfect for the more skilled off-track skiers who want some added thrills, after their crampons have pierced the snow that cloaks the grass where flocks will graze a few months later.
If Campo Imperatore conjures up images of the Central Asian steppe and Corno Grande has a look of the Dolomites to it, then Majella's rocks and enormous stone pits are a far more typically Mediterranean landscape, although no less stirring for those who climb its slopes both in summer and in winter. Trekkings to its

peaks and, in general, to the upper areas of the massif, are always long and tiring, are will test even to the fittest climber. Cool, feathery, untouched: the beech woods on this "mother mountain" embrace the boundaries, suddenly opening upwards, on crests scented with mugho pine, rugged gorges at high altitude and on vast stone-pits on the Cannella, delle Mandrelle, Taranta valleys. Higher still, between Tavola Rotonda and Mount Amaro, the Femmina Morta plateau: a balcony floating in the sky of Abruzzo. At our fingertips, the backdrop of sea.

On the mountains of Abruzzo in winter

The mountains of Abruzzo have characteristically heavy, lasting snowfall, and offer plentiful tourist resorts and facilities, often of excellent quality. Above all, we can find a whole range of outstanding and well-differentiated environments for enjoying some good levels of both types of skiing: downhill and cross-country. The areas with the tallest peaks are ideal for downhill skiing, while the vast and numerous plateaux, with less chequered terrain, offers some lovely settings for cross-country skiing. Abruzzo has the largest number of ski resorts on the entire Apennine, with hundreds of kilometres of slopes available, as well as great quality natural snow that can be enhanced with snow cannons, not to mention modern, functional ski lifts, and a truly efficient and complete network of auxiliary structures and services.

The most important resort in Abruzzo is the Alto Sangro-Altipiani Maggiori d'Abruzzo ski district, on the boundary of Abruzzo National Park, which is the biggest in the centre-south of Italy, and actually ranked 7th at national level for the number and quality of slopes and services overall. This district includes the municipalities of Roccaraso, with its elegant boutiques and the largest sports facilities; Rivisondoli, famous for a celebrated Nativity Tableau; and Pescocostanzo whose historical centre is an extraordinary treasure of Renaissance and Baroque monuments.

Winter sports in Abruzzo mean downhill skiing, of course, but not only. If anything, the exceptional variety of natural scenery make the Abruzzo mountains excellent scenarios for cross-

Downhill skiing resorts in Abruzzo

San Giacomo - Monte Piselli
Prati di Tivo
Prato Selva
Campo Imperatore - Monte Cristo
Campo Felice
Ovindoli - La Magnola
Marsia
Campo Rotondo
Pescasseroli
Scanno
Roccaraso
Rivisondoli
Pescocostanzo
Pizzoferrato and Gamberale
Passolanciano - La Majelletta
Campo di Giove
Pacentro - Passo San Leonardo

country skiing, snowboarding, ski touring, snowrafting, sledging and telemark skiing; anyone who enjoys these disciplines can enjoy them in total safety on the region's snow.
The valleys and plateaux nestling amidst the mountains of Abruzzo are the ideal setting for cross-country skiing aficionados, who will find tracks mapped out in almost all the resorts. The circuits in the ancient Sant'Antonio woods at Pescocostanzo, or those that wind their way through the beech woods in Abruzzo National Park, offer a memorable spectacle to the keen skier; there are also some circuits on the boundless panorama of Campo Imperatore, a scenario worthy of the Great North. Those who prefer their cross-country off the beaten track, on virgin snow, will be spoiled for choice: gently rolling plateaux, thick woods crossed by dirt roads and mule tracks, the gentle slopes of valleys, all of which can offer an extraordinary range of itineraries. As most fans know, the defined circuits and marked tracks for cross-country skiing are not the only opportunities available on the mountains of Abruzzo for those who enjoy this discipline. The countless woods and ample highlands on the region's massifs offer easy and thrilling journeys for cross-country skiers, as long as they are sufficiently expert in the technique.
The same settings attract fans of dog-sledging, a pursuit with sleds pulled by teams of dogs who are in their element during this favourite sport of theirs. The energy of a team of huskies can be unleashed across a landscape that conjures up the Great North, but bathed in the warm Mediterranean sunlight of Abruzzo's plateaux.
Ski-touring fans will be in their element in Abruzzo, with its countless mountain scenarios, like the higher altitude slopes of Gran Sasso or Majella, perfect for this sport. However, it is still a very challenging type of sport and although it offers great satisfaction, you should never improvise. In fact, it is undertaken on a free mountain terrain that can be dangerous in specific snow conditions, so to venture into it, a mountain guide is required, or you should first take a special course organized by the CAI – Italian Alpine Club.
Snow shoes, called *ciàspole* in dialect, began to appear on the Abruzzo massif in the early 1990s: they are becoming increasingly popular thanks to the freedom of movement they allow without risk of sinking, in fresh, deep snow, and without being particularly expert in headway techniques required for cross-country skiing. Nevertheless, it is important to have at least basic notions and some experience in winter mountain aspects; if not, you should attend a CAI course or go on guided excursions.

On the mountains of Abruzzo in summer

The fact that the Abruzzo mountains are easy-going and tourist-friendly can also be inferred from the huge number of marked paths and trails, including ferratas at high altitudes; there are excursion aids for the physically challenged and tracks for various kinds of sports including horse riding, and off-road vehicle and Enduro bike tours. The many and assorted paths are variously challenging and found in every location of Abruzzo mountain districts. There are relatively easy options, designed for relaxing walks through fields and woods, suitable for beginners, families, children and the elderly, or simply anyone who prefers a quiet ramble to breathe some fresh air in the country. Then there are more difficult ones leading up to higher altitudes and which require a minimum of experience, equipment and physical preparation in order to tackle routes that take a few hours. Finally, there are really demanding paths for experienced and athletically-prepared mountain lovers who are able to undertake excursions and treks, using the proper equipment and staying out all day, reaching some really special places. In all of the above, the network of paths, managed by the CAI, Parks, Reserves or sometimes even local authorities, is generally well-kept with strategically placed colour trail markers where clear indications are needed. Guidebooks and path network maps are available in all the Park Visitor Centres and town Information Points. It is really quite difficult to get lost in the mountains of Abruzzo.

Only the sheer rock faces soaring vertically up to the blue are the privilege of mountaineering enthusiasts and expert freeclimbers; the rest of us, on the contrary, can attempt everything else, even the high peaks stretching up to 3,000 metres. Corno Grande, the highest mountain in Gran Sasso, with its four summits varying between 2,800 and 2,900 metres in altitude, may be reached with climbs that are accessible to many, even those who are not really expert mountaineers.

LOTS OF WAYS to discover

Fans of active tourism, combining sport, nature, discovery and fun, will realize that there are few limits to exploring and getting to know Abruzzo: cycling, mountain biking, rambling with a backpack, on horseback, with skis, hang gliding, paragliding, by ultralight aircraft, gliding, on a motorbike, off-road, by kayak, by canoe, on skates…

Cycling

The varied territory and lovely landscape, the huge number of old and local roads with little vehicle traffic (concentrated on the modern network of highways and motorways, which Abruzzo has too, of course), make cycling tourism probably the most complete and penetrating way to explore and understand this region, which is ancient and modern at one and the same time, jealously guarding its environment and its traditions, whilst being completely open to the world of today.

Abruzzo

The large number of secondary and alternative routes, the systematic and close presence along all roads of a village, a fountain, a coffee bar, a trattoria, a refuge, a hotel, make pedalling around the beaches, hills and highlands of Abruzzo a real pleasure: if your calves are strong and fit, you will thoroughly enjoy the challenges posed by these splendid roads that can reach over 2,000 metres in altitude!

Mountain biking

Of all the sports practiced in this setting and on this territory, mountain biking is the most popular and widespread in Abruzzo. A success story achieved by the often wild loveliness of the surroundings; the remote and ancient villages; the timeless landscapes; the great variety of nature, so irregular and often tormented by the orography; and lastly the infinity of old tracks, mountain and country roads, dirt roads, mule tracks, farm and forestry paths, lanes and all types of secondary connections that cover Abruzzo's limitless hills and mountains like the finest spider's web.

The mountain bike then becomes the most direct way for discovering – or rediscovering – this legacy, without disturbing its silence and its dignity.

Pedalling along the many itineraries offered by the coast, the rugged mountains, rolling hills and edges of the stunning badlands, around the lakes or along the flourishing torrent banks, through solemn beech woods or the heaths of infinite highlands, emotions will run strong and memorable, not only for the neophyte but also for the more skilled and "tough" cyclist.

On horseback

Alongside the widespread popularity of the mountain bike in Abruzzo, over at least a decade the region has become established at national level as one of the best scenarios (sharing the mountain bike's territories and tracks) for equestrian tourism, attracting riders and aficionados from all over Italy. Certainly this can be defined a niche sport, whose success is yet again a confirmation of the valid environmental choice made by Abruzzo, whose Parks now classify it as the greenest region in Europe. A

"Ippovia del Gran Sasso" - Equestrian Circuit
At 300 kilometres this is the longest in Italy: a circuit that allows the exploration and appreciation of an extraordinary environmental and cultural heritage along old dirt roads, mule tracks and paths, through some landscapes, towns and villages, pastures, and beech and durmast oak woods of unspoiled beauty. The itineraries covered mainly existed already, and for centuries connected the towns and villages separated by the Gran Sasso massif, or have always been used by farmers to reach their high-altitude fields. The Park has thus realized a huge circuit that encircles the Gran Sasso massif, and enhanced it with a network of shorter offshoots and circuits, for a total of about 300 km of appropriately restored tracks. The entire circuit has been installed with stopover and rest stations with stable facilities for the horse: one is, for instance, the Paladini complex in the municipality of Crognaleto, which has guest quarters with 50 beds, a restaurant, an information point and a stable for up to ten horses. A great many shepherd refuges have also been recovered and restored, using traditional materials for rebuilding dry stone supporting walls or for erecting fascines and stockades. Drinking points and troughs, as well as fountains, all along the circuit have also been restored, so as to offer refreshments and also to support livestock farmers here. There are also stopover areas installed with hearths and huts; innovative signs point out beauty spots or historical and architectural features found along the tracks, and there are also shelters, hostels and the gastronomic delights of the territories crossed. The long itinerary networks all the agritourism and equestrian centre facilities, thus encouraging the development of private services for better hospitality for horse and rider.
Naturally these refurbished, well-equipped routes are suitable not only for horseriding, but also for covering on foot or by mountain bike.
On the Teramo slope the most significant section directs the route on the northern slopes of Gran Sasso d'Italia, in the Rigopiano direction, eastwards, and towards Nerito and Cortino, up into the Laga Mountains, from the opposite side, reconnecting at the end with the route on the Aquilan side, which crosses the valleys and plains at middle altitude,

around lake Campotosto, the Voltigno plain and Capestrano.
The Aquilan side route, unlike the Teramo side, which tends to valorize the environmental and landscape qualities more, focuses in a totally unique way on the great historical and artistic heritage of villages, castles, abbeys and fortified towns. For instance, the ancient Barony of Carapelle, with the famous villages of Santo Stefano di Sessanio, Castelvecchio Calvisio, Castel del Monte, Calascio, Barisciano, as well as mighty locations like Capestrano, famous for its Italic warrior. Nonetheless, this slope does not lack for exceptional natural beauty spots, like lake Campotosto or the Vasto valley, near the wonderful Chiarino valley, straddling the provinces of L'Aquila and Teramo.
The route that connects to the Pescara area, crossing the lovely Rigopiano valley, under Mount Camicia's impressive north face, and marvellous backdrop to historical Castelli, reconnects with L'Aquila along locations of incomparable beauty, like Val d'Angri, famous for its chamois, the Park's wildlife area, and Farindola, even more famous for its legendary *pecorino* cheese.

success sustained and made possible not only by the increasing number of local regional fans, but also by exercise and stopover facilities scattered throughout the territory. This has been a spontaneous process of "equestrian infrastructuring", which evolved quickly over the years and which now has its moment of glory in the wonderful Gran Sasso "Ippovia" (a circuit of over 300 kilometres, with a lavish arrangement of minor routes that it intercepts and connects), essential for enjoying and practising in safety this noble discipline that brings us into close and complete contact with nature and the territory. The fact that each site and each itinerary is within a reasonable distance of a stable, a blacksmith, a vet, has been crucial for Abruzzo: a positive competitive factor for realization of its equestrian tourism organization.

Flying high

Free flight fans will find Abruzzo to be a perfect scenario with settings known at national level: the countless natural terraces are excellent launch pads, the swift upsweep of the mountains from sea level (the tallest peaks in the Apennines are less than 45km from the coast!), with the excellent "currents" this kind of orography produces, all making the region ideal for hang gliding and paragliding.

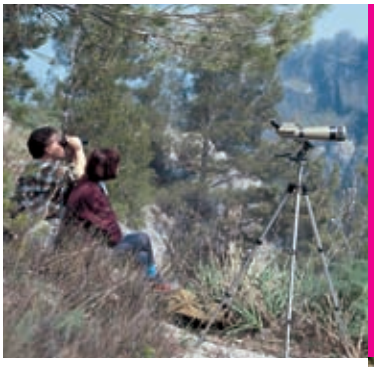
Those who prefer motors on their aircraft can depend on two airports: Pescara and L'Aquila, as well as countless landing strips throughout the region for ultralight aircraft: Colonnella, in Val Pescara, near Vasto, Raiano, Castel di Sangro.

Kayaks, canoes, windsurfing

Sport and adventure can be combined, of course, descending many of the rivers here in a canoe or a kayak. One of the most interesting makes its way along the upper branch of the Vomano, in the province of Teramo. This certainly is not the Colorado river, but it is definitely very popular with Italian canoeists; the upper branch, in particular common is a real "black run", and should only be attempted by someone who has plenty of experience. Canoeing can also be enjoyed along the Sangro, Aventino, Orta, Alento and Tirino rivers, in the lovely Celano gorge and on the river Aterno, across the wild San Venanzio ravine. Obviously kayaks and canoes can be used for exploring the coastline, especially in the higher, craggier cliff sections, and also on Abruzzo's many lakes, where windsurfers are welcome more often than not.

Off-road on two and four wheels

Anyone who likes off-roading that respects the environment, will discover that Abruzzo has interesting opportunities, although the



Coming to Abruzzo in all four seasons also means being able to practice and cultivate a series of very unique and satisfying hobbies: watching animals in their natural habitat, birdwatching, photo safaris, gathering wild fruit, mushrooms, truffles, investigating the places and periods when the region's most unusual typical products are to be discovered.

vast mountain territories embraced by the Parks will not, of course, allow off-road travel with jeeps, SUVs and motorbikes (Enduro, cross, trial). Bikers, for instance, discovered Abruzzo a few years ago, and now organize rallies as well as mapping out special itineraries for exploring the local beauty spots, often assisted by the Parks themselves. Similarly, over recent years the region has become the destination for important national and international rallies and events for off-road vehicles, promoted by local associations and supported by the national federation, in close collaboration with the Parks and appropriate local authorities, so that nothing slips through the net of what is possible, what is allowed and what is safely entertaining! Off-roaders do have kilometres of dirt roads to explore, as do Enduro and trial bike lovers, who are now being joined by growing numbers of quads, the unique four-wheel cross bikes.

Whatever your favourite sport may be for enjoying nature, Abruzzo has the place for you. And if you feel like just parking the car, spreading out a blanket and relaxing under the sun, with nothing but the murmur of the wind and chirping crickets for company, then any nook of mountain Abruzzo will do the trick. Close your eyes, point to any place on the map and book there!

ABRUZZO

Nature in Abruzzo takes the stage every day of the year: and every day the show is new, different, thrilling. Each season shows its colours, expresses its perfumes, its gifts, and can be the right moment to lose yourself so you can… find yourself.

The best seasons for discovering Abruzzo and its nature are spring, summer, autumn and winter; we think visiting during other seasons is a waste of time!
Yes, in Abruzzo nature is a major player all year round: always itself and always different. Light and colours and scents interweave to the point that the more distracted will fail to recognize in autumn the meadows and beech groves encountered in summer. The appearance of the beech trees will change completely, bathed in reds, yellows and golds.

Winter transforms much of the region, often for many months of the year, into a valid subsidiary of the Great North. In the harsh light of winter dawns the highlands seem to stretch into infinity, in panoramas worthy of Tibet, whilst joyful noisy waterfalls of other seasons transform themselves into massive pillars of ice that challenge climbers with their difficult scaling. Down valley, in the Sorgenti del Pescara Reserve or in the other protected wetlands, morning mists tinge with mystery the dense cane beds where ducks, coots and herons can be spotted.
In spring, when the feel of new grass on the skin is soft and reassuring, colours, scents and sounds explode. Regal bears lumber slowly through the yellow laburnum, offset by the brilliant green of tender beech shoots in Val Fondillo or the monumental

for all seasons

Sant'Antonio woods, while the Pescara slope of Gran Sasso offers the greenest of amphitheatres, with Voltigno's slopes once again the scenario of lavish blossom with outstanding red lilies.
In summer the luxuriant flourish of nature paints the entire region with ripe splendour: green mountain woods and meadows, boundless highlands dotted with pasturing cattle and sheep, hillsides ripe with corn and overflowing fruit groves, the coast's sunny beaches, against the backdrop of Gran Sasso and Majella at a stone's throw, singing the notes of the unique pleasure to be found in Abruzzo: that of discovery.

Observing the seasonal presence and rhythms of the rich wildlife found in Abruzzo's Parks is just one way of spending a weekend in any of the fours seasons. It is not easy to do, as some expertise is required, alongside knowledge of the habitats and habits of the various species, but Abruzzo is the ideal place to learn how, maybe in a Reserve or along a nature trail, with the help and instruction of a nature guide.
Then there is birdwatching, a nature hobby imported from Britain, which is now becoming very popular and for which Abruzzo offers an excellent practical scenario, thanks to the extent of its protected nature, the enormous biodiversity that it safeguards, the wide range of habitats and ecosystems found here.

Photo safaris are an extended variation of the two previous activities, and a great many "watchers" are now converting to this hobby. It is a pastime that combines knowledge of nature and its environment, with the ability to use photographic equipment properly and "professionally": following an initial "warm up", there can be enormous satisfaction, both as "watchers" and as photographers.

Another way to spend fine days in the open air is to try picking mushrooms, a hobby that attracts thousands of skilled aficionados, who are happy to get up at the crack of dawn and travel long distances in order to carry home some of these precious fungi! Again, this is not a pastime to take lightly: first of all a knowledge of mushrooms is necessary, in other words you must be able to recognize the species, then you must be aware of ecology, to understand where the edible type of fungus grows and in what conditions. Never run risks by relying on improvised skills or superficial impressions: that is extremely hazardous! Before defining yourself knowledgeable, always ask an expert mycologist (every municipal council employs such experts) to check the mushrooms you pick.

During the four seasons, Abruzzo's boundless woods do not dispense just mushrooms and truffles (which require expertise to seek out and pick): it is much easier to pick berries, and here you can even involve children in the "safari", as they are usually very fond of these tasty crops. Strawberries, raspberries, redcurrants, bilberries, gooseberries, rosehip, hazelnuts, chestnuts, and lots more that may not be quite so well-known. This is another increasingly popular activity, linked to seasonal maturing of wild fruits. These appetizing occasions can be further enhanced with a typical mountain Abruzzo pastime of picking fruits from abandoned trees and fruit groves: the region's mountain territory was once farmed up to almost 2,000 metres, but it has now fallen almost totally into decline.

Nonetheless, many fruit trees survive to prove that until just a few decades ago, local communities were forced to farm up to the extreme altitude limits in order to survive. So we find the great almond groves of L'Aquila, ancient species of apples and pears, quince (whose knotty fruit makes wonderful jams) and, above all, cherries and sour cherries, whose tiny fruit has an unforgettable fragrance (sour cherries are actually an ingredient for a typical Abruzzese liqueur that is easy to prepare: sweet, aromatic *ratafià*).

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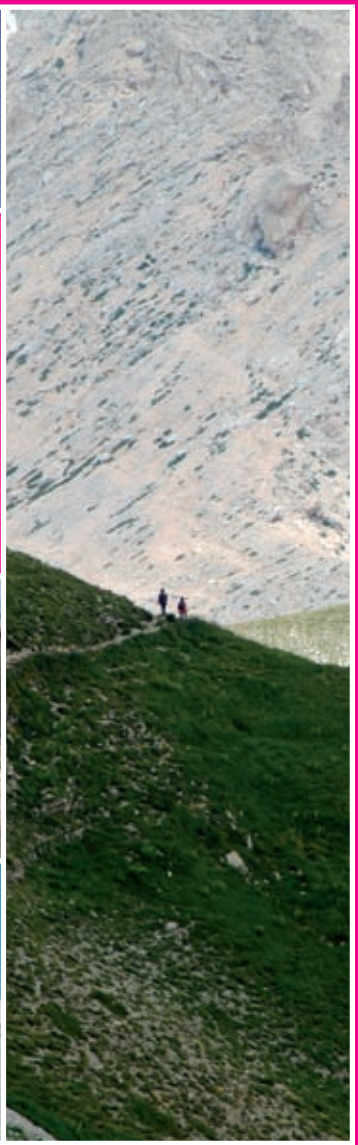

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