



# Alta Tuscia

## ■ An ancient land

Tuscia (pronounced 'too-sha') was the name used by the ancient Romans for what is now the Italian province of Viterbo, and once part of the ancient region of Etruria, home of the Etruscans. This guide focuses on northern ('higher') Tuscia, an area of great cultural, natural and gastronomic interest in northernmost Lazio, bounded to the north and east by Tuscany and Umbria. Mostly overlooked by the tourists who flock to Florence and Rome, the area has undoubtedly retained much of its ancient charm, and has indeed changed little since medieval times when pilgrims – and in later centuries travellers on the 'Grand Tour' – headed down the Via Cassia (the ancient Roman road through Tuscia) towards the Eternal City. Montaigne writes of his stay in these parts in 1580, Cervantes' diaries tell of a visit to the area, and John Ruskin, who would have gazed out onto the beautiful countryside from the windows of his horse-drawn coach, was here in the November of 1840.

Visitors coming from Rome today can take the motorway to Florence and exit at Orvieto. The SS 71 leads through beautiful unspoilt countryside to **Bolsena**, a lovely old lakeside town offering superb views onto the volcanic lake and its two islands. Near the border with Tuscany to the north are the attractive towns of **San Lorenzo Nuovo**, **Acquapendente**, **Proceno**, and the **Monte Rufeno Nature Reserve**.

Continuing anti-clockwise round the lake we come to **Onano**, a little town perched on a crag, Grotte di Castro, with its caves and Etruscan tombs, and the charming, panoramic town of Gradoli. This is the territory over which the Farnese family held sway during the Renaissance.

Further south we come to ancient **Latera**, to **Valentano** (another town

overlooking the lake) and on through fertile volcanic land to **Piansano**, **Ischia di Castro**, (with the remains of the ancient capital of the Farnese Duchy), and **Farnese** itself, near the **Selva del Lamone** forest. The road to the coast takes in **Cellere**, romantic **Pianiano**, **Canino** (near the ancient ruins of **Vulci**) and to Montalto di Castro almost on the Tyrrhenian Sea.

## ■ Itineraries through Tuscia

The following suggested itineraries focus on various aspects of the area's historical past, its natural beauty, and on local food and drink.

Further information on itineraries through Tuscia can be found at [www.tuscia.org](http://www.tuscia.org). For a complete list of museums in the area and for the itinerary maps, see pp. 16-21.

### Prehistoric Tuscia

This itinerary, which traces the earliest human settlements in the area, takes in several interesting museums: at

### ★ ON THE PILGRIM TRAIL: THE VIA FRANCIGENA

One of the main routes taken by medieval pilgrims was the **Via Francigena from Canterbury to Rome** (so called because much of the journey was through France). The final stages of this pilgrimage passed through Italy, along the old Longobard route linking the Po Valley with the Tuscia region, taking in Proceno, Acquapendente, San Lorenzo Nuovo and Bolsena. Red, brown and orange information panels give today's visitors something of a feel for the countryside through which the pilgrims would have walked (local information centres also provide maps and illustrative material).

## ITINERARIES

**Valentano** (with finds from Lake Mezzano), **Ischia di Castro** (documenting the Aeneolithic necropolis over which a Roman villa was built) and **Bolsena** (presenting lake-dwellings dating back to the 9th cent. BC and Villanovan finds from the Turona Park).

### The Etruscans

Legend has it that the Etruscan site of **Vulci** was discovered in 1828 when an ox pulling a plough fell into a tomb filled with burial gifts. But pilaging of the tombs was already taking place in the previous century forcing the pontifical government to intervene in 1802 to put a stop to the thefts. Vulci, with its majestic Abbazia bridge, is surely the most atmospheric of the area's many Etruscan sites (revealed to 19th-century Europe by the Romantic traveller George Dennis), and finds from the

necropolises are well documented in the Vulci museum. Beautiful Etruscan tombs can also be seen at **Grotte di Castro** (Necropoli di Pianezze) and at the Etrusco-Roman excavations of **Poggio Moscini**; other Etruscan finds are displayed in the museum at **Bolsena**.

### The Farnese

The main towns tracing the history of the illustrious family that ruled over the area in Renaissance times are **Capodimonte** (Rocca Farnese), **Valentano** (Museo della Rocca Farnese), **Farnese** (Museo Rittatore Vonwiller, church of Sant'Anna), **Latera** (Palazzo Ducale), **Gradoli** (Museo del Costume Farnesiano), **Grotte di Castro** (Palazzo Comunale), and the archaeological site of **Castro**, the centre of the Farnese duchy that was razed to the ground by its arch-rival Pope Innocent X in 1649.

## FOOD AND WINE IN ALTA TUSCIA

### ETRUSCAN EATING

Restaurants and *trattorie* throughout Alta Tuscia serve delicious, wholesome local cuisine, and many special food festivals are held in celebration of the area's uniquely-flavoured produce, from Valentano chick peas, Onano lentils and Gradoli's famous beans of purgatory, to Proceno garlic, Canino asparagus, Acquapendente special cereal called "farro del Pungolo" and Bolsena tomatoes. Many of the local specialities – some of them dating back to Etruscan times – are unique to the area. Honey (for which Mt. Rufeno is famed) features in many sweet and even savoury dishes.

Wine is produced here to Italy's usual high standards. The best-known local quality wines are **Aleatico** (Gradoli) and **Est!Est!Est!** (Montefiascone). The **Alta Tuscia Wine Route** linking Acquapendente, Proceno, Onano, Bolsena, San Lorenzo Nuovo, Gradoli, Grotte di Castro, Latera and Valentano, was set up to promote 'gastronomic tourism', and connects up the most traditional *trattorie*, farm holiday establishments, fish farms and other

craft-based concerns, all marked for tourists by special road signs. The area is no less famous for its olive oil, especially the oil made around Lake Bolsena and in Canino.

In an area of woods and rivers game and fish are of course in plentiful supply (mushrooms also feature prominently in many dishes). And in the centuries since the marshes were drained, Alta Tuscia has also had grazing land for its livestock farms, providing beef and lamb. *Porchetta*, or roast sucking-pig, is one of the most popular kinds of pork, and a wide range of charcuterie products is available. Good local cheeses are also to be found, for example *pecorino*, one by-product of local sheep-farming activities. Adding further to the variety of foods are the vegetables and pulses that grow in abundance in these parts. As for desserts, many of the local biscuits, cakes and pastries, made using local ricotta cheese, nuts and so on, are associated with the yearly festivals (Carnival and Easter in particular).

For a full list of local dishes see pp. 12-15.



## ACQUAPENDENTE

**The Monaldeschi castles**

The Monaldeschi were another powerful family in medieval and Renaissance times, whose castles can be seen at **Bolsena**, **Torre Alfina**, **Trevignano** and **Onano**.

**Brigandry**

Tuscia borders on the Lazio section of the Maremma coastal area, known for its horse-riding holidays. One popular equestrian excursion explores some of the beautiful out-of-the-way places where brigands once sought refuge.

**Religion**

Crossed by one of Europe's main pilgrimage trails (see box p. 113), Tuscia is filled with chapels, shrines and monasteries that tell of the area's devotional past and the miraculous events traditionally believed to have taken place here.

**Nature**

Alta Tuscia is an area of exceptional and generally unspoiled natural beauty. As well as **Lake Bolsena** (and the tiny Lake Mezzano), the main areas of environmental interest are the **Monte Rufeno Reserve** and the **Lamone Forest**.

**Food and drink**

The area's gastronomic delights (see box p. 114) will not disappoint. Locally-grown produce is transformed into mouth-watering dishes everywhere, and most towns celebrate their food in a whole range of local festivals during the year.

**■ Acquapendente**

Acquapendente (elev. 420 m) is a lively little town that also provides a useful base for excursions into the Monte Rufeno Park (see box) and the Alta Tuscia area as a whole (information on a whole range of local events and excursions in the area can be obtained from the **Centro Visite Riserva Nazionale Monte Rufeno**, in the tower opposite the cathedral, tel. 0763 733642; Acquapendente's

**★ THE MONTE RUFENO NATURE RESERVE**

This 2,890-hectare park on the border between Umbria and Tuscany north-east of Acquapendente is an unspoiled area of woods, waterfalls and wildlife. Visitors on foot can follow the well-marked nature trails or hire horses and bikes (details at the **Visitors' Centre**, tel. 0763 733642). There are also picnic areas, a campsite, and a flower museum. Various educational tours are organised. Five of its 32 ancient farmhouses offer accommodation, and those who have booked a stay in the reserve may enter by car. The Monte Rufeno park area is open from one hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset. For accommodation, see pp. 32-33.

own tourist information office is in Via Rugarella 10, tel. 0763 711228). Of uncertain origin – though probably an Etruscan and later Roman town before its destruction – it achieved a certain importance in medieval times as a waystage for pilgrims heading for Rome (see box p. 113). Much fought over by the Church and the imperial powers, it eventually became a free town in 1443 and grew in the centuries that followed. One of the best points of entry into the town from the Via Cassia is near the **Cathedral (Basilica di San Sepolcro)**, which has an impressive façade flanked by two bell-towers and an ancient stone portal. Beneath the raised transept and apse inside is the superb Romanesque **crypt**, with richly-decorated capitals. In the main church above note also two 15th-century bas-reliefs from the Agostino di Duccio school, a glazed terracotta altarpiece by Jacopo Beneventano (1522) and an elaborate 17th-century wooden choir in the apse. The history of the basilica is told on six panels on the piers to the left of the nave. Nearby stands the



## ACQUAPENDENTE

 **Accommodation and restaurants:** see p.27

 **Things to buy:** see p. 28

 **Feasts and fairs:** see p. 30

medieval **Julia de Jacopo Tower** (the visitors' centre). The **Barbarossa Clocktower** in the pinewood above the town is all that remains of the 12th-century castle.

**Via Roma** leads from the Cathedral to the **Bishop's Palace**, and after the entrance to the late 19th-century **church of Sant'Antonio Abate e Santa Caterina**, the late 13th-century (but now Baroque) **church of Sant'Agostino**, with 16th-century cloister and portal.

Continuing along **Via C. Battisti**, we come to the Renaissance **Palazzo Viscontini** at no. 39, and in the small square beyond, the **church of San Francesco**, with an interesting façade (17th-century frescoes, 14 fine wood sculptures and a 13th-century crucifix inside). To the south of the elegant **Piazza Comunale** down in the centre of town stands the much smaller **Piazza del Rigombo**, one side of which is lined with fountains (note the coloured ceramic panels behind illustrating the town's trees and plants; other glazed panels are to be found near interesting plant specimens around the town). The **church of Santa Vittoria** further on houses the **Madonna del Fiore**, the centrepiece of a solemn mid-May parade of panels ('pignaloni') decorated with flower petals and leaves. Finally, we come the leafy **Piazza della Costituente** with the **Palazzo del Teatro**.

Several interesting monasteries lie to the north and south of the town.

**Trevinano** (15 km to the north of Acquapendente) and **Torre Alfina** (to the east) are interesting medieval villages with ancient castles and churches, each conveniently situated near an entrance to the Monte Rufeno Park (see box p. 115). 4 km north of Acquapendente stands the charming six-span **Gregorian**

 **Restaurant and Hotel:** "La Monaldesca", in the Rufeno reserve, entrance no. 1; tel./fax 0763 717078; e-mail: lamonaldesca@tin.it

**Bridge** built by Pope Gregory XIII in 1578 over the Paglia river.

### ■ Bolsena

Bolsena (elev. 350 m) is an attractive summer vacation resort, on the north-east shores of the lake of the same name, set against the backdrop of the Volsini mountain range. Its origins can be traced back to the important Etruscan city of *Velsna* to the north, from where the populace fled down to the lake to escape Roman oppression in what was then known as *Volsinii*. It was variously controlled by the Longobards, by Orvieto and – up to Italian unity – by the Church. Numerous Etruscan, Roman and medieval remains can be seen in and around Bolsena, most impressively at the **Poggio Moscini** archaeological site just outside the town on the road to Orvieto (Roman baths, the forum, temples, a basilica later used as a Christian church, and private villas). Other remains include the imposing walls near the castle, and many Longobard tombs.

Etruscan and even Iron Age remains can be seen in the beautiful **Turona Archaeology and Nature Park** in the hills north of the lake (reached from a turn-off at km 108 of the Via Cassia). The hub of the town is **Piazza Matteotti**, in which stand **Palazzo Comunale** (containing the **tourist information office**; tel. 0761

#### Food specialities

Bolsena is a good place to buy charcuterie, fish, olive oil and wine. For a full list of shops see p. 49

 **Accommodation and restaurants:** see p. 52

(For younger travellers: a Youth Hostel is to be found in the Madonna del Giglio sanctuary)



## BOLSENA

## Lake Bolsena

**L**ago di Bolsena is the largest lake of volcanic origin in Italy. The remains of the Bronze Age settlement of Gran Carro, now submerged, are in the Lake Museum at Bolsena.

Visits to the privately-owned **Bisentina Island**, once the Pope's summer residence with interesting Renaissance church buildings, leave from Capodimonte and Bolsena (tel. 0761 799820) The island is a haven for wildlife. The now uninhabited **Martana Island** is famous for the story of Ostrogoth queen Amalaswintha, who was killed here in 584 by her cousin Theodahad. Her treasure was long believed to be buried here.

**Capodimonte**, is a charming town of Etruscan origin on the southern shore of the lake. The *borgo*, with castle, town hall and collegiate church, occupies the peninsula; the hotels are located in the modern part. The tree-lined lakeside promenade is a popular walk. Nearby **Marta** is picturesquely situated high up over the lake, with charming old streets and splendid views.

### THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The crystal-clear waters have an abundance of whitefish, perch, pike and eels (mentioned by Dante in his *Purgatory*). Teal, heron, mallards, moorhens and kingfishers all inhabit the reedy shores. The lake is also interesting for the unusually geometric 'pietre lanciate' rock formations near Bolsena. Nature trails leave from Grotte di Castro and Gradoli.

### ACTIVITIES

For boat trips round the lake contact **Navigazione Alto Lazio** (Corso della Repubblica 60, Bolsena, tel. 0761 798033, 0360 664684); or **Navigazione La Bussola** at Capodimonte (tel. 0761 870760, 0338 7672849). Water sports enthusiasts will find most amenities at Bolsena. Many traditional popular and religious festivals are held in the surrounding towns, including celebrations of the local produce grown on the lake's fertile slopes (see p. 57)

**Lakeside Campsites** (see p. 54).

### DAY TRIPS FROM THE LAKE

The famous Gothic cathedral of **Orvieto** is just 28 km from Bolsena. Medieval **Viterbo** lies to the south. Between the two, to the east of the lake, are **Bagnoregio** (with the picturesque old **Civita di Bagnoregio**) and **Montefiascone**, famous for its wine.

799923, fax 0761 796056, e-mail: ascotur@tin.it) and the Gothic church of **San Francesco**. The gateway by the church leads into the charming medieval town, with the splendid **Castello Monaldeschi**, built in the 13th-14th centuries but damaged by earthquake in 1695 and by the people of Bolsena themselves in 1815, who feared that Luciano Bonaparte might take control of their fortress. The castle, which was restored in the 20th century and affords excellent views of the town and the lake, now houses the **Lake Bol-**

**senza Museum**, documenting the area's volcanic origins, the history of human settlement of the area (particularly the now submerged 'Gran Carro', a Villanovan village to the south of Bolsena), local Etruscan and medieval history and popular traditions (opening times: see p. 48). At the foot of the castle stands the mid 16th-century **Palazzo Del Drago**, with rooms beautifully decorated in the Roman mannerist style. On the other side of the main square, the main shopping street of **Corso della Repubblica** leads to **Piazza di**



## BOLSENA

## ★ THE MIRACLE OF THE EUCHARIST

In 1263 a Bohemian priest officiating in the church of Santa Cristina became convinced of the truth of transubstantiation after drops of blood were seen to fall on the altar linen, and onto the marble now kept in the 'Chapel of the Miracle'. Solemn celebrations with a grand flower display are held each year at Corpus Christi, the feast day (known in Italian as Corpus Domini) instituted by Urban IV to commemorate the miracle. Other festivals in Bolsena include the 'Mysteries of St. Christine' with live tableaux in the main squares on 23-24 July, the fish, fruit and vegetable fairs in July, the handicrafts show (second weekend in August) and the Feast of San Rocco (16 August). For a full list of feasts and fairs: see p. 51.

Santa Cristina, with the 11th-century Collegiate Church of Santa Cristina (the façade is late-15th cent). A Romanesque portal in the left-hand aisle inside leads to the *Cappella del Miracolo*, built to commemorate the miracle of the Eucharist (see box above). To the left of this chapel is the door to the *Grotta di Santa Cristina*. Here is the tomb of Saint Christine, the daughter of a Roman prefect in the early years of Christianity who miraculously survived her father's attempts to drown her for refusing to renounce her devotion to Christ. Above the arch leading to the tomb are traces of a fresco with the oldest known depiction of the later miracle of the Eucharist. The furnishings around the tomb of the saint are 19th century. The *Catacombs* of St. Christine to the right of the tomb date back to the period of Christian persecution. Also in the medieval town, note the church of San Salvatore with its coloured roof tiles.

## ■ Canino

The name of Canino (elev. 229 m) derives from the pre-Roman gens *Canina* people of nearby Vulci (see box). The town grew in importance under the Farnese, who rebuilt the old medieval town, but when Castro fell in 1649, Canino was sold to Napoleon Bonaparte's brother Luciano. He made improvements to the town and restored the thermal baths at Musignano, where he had his summer residence; when he died in 1853, the area was bought by the Torlonia family, owners of the territory up to the middle of the last century.

The maze-like medieval quarter ('Le Buche'), which retains its original paving, has an interesting large public wash-house built by the Farnese. In the main Piazza De Andreis stands the late 18th-century church of Santi Andrea e Giovanni Battista, in which Luciano Bonaparte is buried; many other works of 14th/16th-century art also grace the interior. Note the square's fine 12-sided fountain, and the nearby theatre. The main Via Cavour, lined with fine palaces bearing the Farnese crest, leads to Piazza Mazzini (the castle square). Another good, porticoed palace (Palazzo Miccinelli) stands in Piazza

📍 Tourist Information: Via Roma 1, tel. 0761 437001.

🏠 🍽️ Accommodation and restaurants: see p. 111

📅 Feasts and fairs: see p. 112

## ★ GASTRONOMIC SPECIALITIES

Canino is famous for its early-ripening asparagus, and for its quality olive oil, celebrated with a local festival in the first week of December. Gastronomic specialties also include saffron pizza, made at Easter. For a list of where to buy foodstuffs in Canino see p. 109



## CANINO

**THE VULCI EXCAVATIONS**

The remains of one of Etruria's largest city states are made all the more atmospheric by the Etrusco-Roman **Abbadia Bridge** over the Fiora river, and the medieval castle, which now houses the **Museo Nazionale Vulcente** (Neolithic finds and burial gifts from local necropolises, see p. 110). The walls and streets of the ancient town have been unearthed and remains of a temple and *domus*. Numerous necropolises can also be visited, most notably the François tomb (mid 4th-cent. BC). The **Ponte Rotto**, an 85-metre Roman bridge, stands nearby.

**Vittorio Emanuele**. At the end of the street is the **church of Santa Croce**, with a fine Romanesque portal; it contains a 16th-century Descent from the Cross and wooden crucifix. The **Farnese castle** at the entrance to the old town is noted for the **Paul III Tower** (after the Farnese pope believed to have been born here). Nearby stands **Palazzo Bonaparte**. The late 15th-century **monastery of San Francesco** (incorporating Romanesque elements) lies at the northern end of the town.

The WWF runs a **Nature Reserve** on the Fiora river, with good lookout points; the picturesque ruins of ancient **Castellardo** lie 2 km out of Canino along the road to Ischia. Another interesting excursion can be made along the road from Canino to the coast, via Musignano. The first 14 km bring us to Luciano Bonaparte's villa and scattered remains of the Roman baths. Just before the beach, we come to the interesting old town of **Montalto di Castro**. The famous Etruscan towns of **Tarquini** and **Tuscania**, and the spectacular rock tombs of **Norchia**, are also within relatively easy reach to the south.

**■ Cellere**

The history of this typical medieval town, which sits on a rocky spur (elev. 344 m.), can be traced back to

1180. It remained under Castro rule until 1649.

The main street between the two gateways leads from the entrance square (note the attractive fountain) through the old town and its arched medieval streets that offer fine views of the surroundings. Little is left of the **Farnese Castle**, which was transformed into the Farnese family residence between the 15th and 17th centuries. Though of ancient origin, the **parish church of Santa Maria Assunta** in Piazza Castel Fidardo has been much changed over the centuries. Interesting frescoes can be seen in the mid 14th-century **church of the Madonna delle Grazie** in the locality of the same name outside Cellere.

A pleasant walk (signposted at the entrance to the town) leads to the **Timone Park**, among whose oakwoods lies the source of the Timone river. The walk continues to **Piania-**

 **Tourist Information:** Via Cavour, tel. 0761 344787.

  **Restaurants and things to buy:** see p. 106

 **Feasts and fairs:** see p. 106

★ **THE CHURCH OF ST. GILES: A RENAISSANCE GEM**

Just before the gateway to the old town, a road to the right leads down to the beautifully-situated **church of Sant'Egidio**, probably designed between 1500 and 1503 by Antonio da Sangallo the Younger for Alessandro Farnese (later Pope Paul III). The Greek-cross interior is richly frescoed with – among other scenes – the figures of St. John the Evangelist (depicted with eagle and gospel), and of local patron saint Giles (with deer and arrow), whose feast is celebrated on the first Sunday in September.



## CELLERE

## THE LAMONE NATURE RESERVE

This 1,800-hectare reserve between the Olpeta and Arsa rivers to the north of Farnese is a dense, mostly untamed area of woodland rich in wildlife, and noted for its characteristic lavic rock formations ('murce'). Other natural phenomena include enormous inverted cone-shaped hollows filled with mosses and ferns, and the small rainwater tarns that provide watering holes for the wildlife and grazing animals and turn into grassy clearings in summer. Traces of man's presence here dates back to the Paleolithic; in the 19th

century the woods were a hiding-place for brigands. The main (unsurfaced) roads across the reserve are open to motor traffic, while the well-maintained and well-marked pathways attract horse riders, mountain bike enthusiasts and hikers. Before heading off into the woods, however, newcomers are advised to call in at the **Reserve's Head Office in Farnese** (Palazzo Comunale, Piazza Umberto I, tel. 0761 458741-458381), which organises walking tours and supplies illustrative material.

no, a well-preserved medieval farming village.

### ■ Farnese

The very name of this town (elev. 341 m.) reveals its clear links with the powerful family that held sway in the area in Renaissance times, and who saved this town from the fate of Castro, the ruins of which are just 8 km away (see p. 123). But although the remains of a Bronze Age settlement have been found at nearby Sorgenti della Nova, little is known of the early history of this charming town by the Olpeta river near the Lamone woods (see box).

**Piazza Umberto I**, the main square dominated by the viaduct over the town, has two large fountains. The town hall in the late 18th-century **Palazzo Ceccarini-Chigi** houses the **Civic Museum** (ancient archaeological finds; medieval and Renaissance ceramics, see pag. 98). Amid the narrow winding streets of the medieval town stands **Palazzo Farnese**, residence of the Farnese family for some eight centuries (and still privately in-

habited). Originally an 11th-century fortress, it was transformed into a noble residence in the early 17th century. Many Farnese family members are buried in the **Convent of the Cappuccini**, in Via San Francesco. The Romanesque **church of San Salvatore** in Piazza Regina Margherita has a 1711 belltower; inside are interesting bas reliefs, early 17th-century paintings and a remarkable monumental wooden tabernacle. Various other monasteries and convents are to be found just outside the town, most notably the **church of Sant'Anna** (see below) and the **sanctuary of the Madonna delle Grazie** on the road to Manciano, whose history of miracles is celebrated on the last Sunday in May.

The small **church of Sant'Anna** at Le Piagge on the old road to Castro is remarkable for the bizarre decorations woven into its traditional religious frescoes: a collection of weird and wonderful grotesque figures (note for example the hooded devil-priest) charged with arcane allegorical significance.

📄 **Tourist Information:** Piazza Umberto I, tel. 0761 458381.

🏠 **Accommodation and restaurants:** see p. 100

🍷 **Feasts and fairs:** see p. 99

### ★ TYPICAL FOODSTUFFS

Quality oil, cheeses and meats, including mouth-watering porchetta (roast sucking-pig) are all sold in Farnese (addresses on p. 101)



## PALAZZO FARNESE

Alessandro Farnese (who became Pope Paul III) commissioned Antonio da Sangallo to design this grand palace as a wedding gift for his son Pier Luigi, the later Duke of Castro. It was hastily built between 1515 and 1526 over the remains of the medieval castle, and much consolidation work was later required. After the family's defeat in the War of Castro it was abandoned for half a century before being restored by Pope Clement IX around 1716, but was stripped of all decoration by the Napoleonic army and subsequent owners. It was returned to the peo-

ple of Gradoli in the 19th century and now houses the municipal offices and an important **Costume Museum**.

The rooms have fireplaces and wooden coffered ceilings that still bear traces of the Farnese lily intertwined with the Orsini rose, the family symbol of Pier Luigi's bride. The two *piani nobili* have interesting frescoes and grotesques. The servants' quarters, kitchens and work-rooms are in the basement. Note also the monumental staircase to the stables, which is broad enough to be ridden down on horseback.

### ■ Gradoli

The medieval village of Gradoli (elev. 470 m.) lies in an enviable position inside the crater of Lake Bolsena, with a beautifully mild climate and over eight kilometres of beach that can be reached via signposted nature trails. Gradoli was long ruled by the Farnese, founders of the Duchy of Castro, and enjoyed a period of splendour of which the grand family

palace here is a living reminder.

A gateway leads into the central Piazza Vittorio Emanuele and the old town; steps lead up to **Palazzo Farnese** (see box). To the left of the palace stands the Baroque church of **Santa Maria Maddalena**. Inside, note the hexagonal Renaissance baptismal font, the pulpit and the wooden confessionals. Renaissance frescoes and sacred furnishings can be seen in the adjoining **Museo di Arte Sacra**. The church of **San Michele Arcangelo**, in Via Cavour (probably of ancient origin) has some interesting 15th-century Sienese school frescoes. The church of **San Pietro in Vinculis** in Via della Madonna was much altered over the centuries.

The church of **San Vittore** on a hill outside the town was built on the site where invading Saracens trapped by fog were unable to take the town, an event re-evoked each year on 14 May.

About 7 km from Gradoli on the shores of the lake stands the late 15th-century church of **San Magno**, where, every 19 August, the so-called Papal Pardon of San Magno (granted to those who attended matins and vespers here on this day) is celebrated with a *fête champêtre*.

📄 **Tourist Information:** Piazza Vittorio Emanuele 30 (tel./fax 0761 456810).

🏠 **Accommodation and restaurants:** see p. 62

### ★ FOOD AND WINE

Gradoli is famous for its quality wines (Grechetto, Aleatico), its olive oil, and a special kind of bean ('Fagiolo del Purgatorio'), which is served along with fish dishes at the town banquet held during the *Festa degli Incappucciati*, a peculiar ancient festival, when sweet fritters are also served. Other special biscuits and savoury cakes can be tasted at the Feast of Santa Maria Maddalena on 22 July. For a full list of feasts and fairs and of where to buy Gradoli foodstuffs see pp. 62-63.

### ■ Grotte di Castro

This picturesque town, set amid olive groves and vineyards high up over



## GROTTE DI CASTRO

Lake Bolsena (elev. 467 m.), owes its name to the caves dug out of the tufa rock by the local population to escape the invading Longobards, and now used as warehouses. The town was destroyed by the Saracens in the 9th century but rose again, and many of the fine palaces in Grotte di Castro date back to a happier period in its history as the centre of the Duchy of Castro in the 16th century. However, the tombs in the surrounding area suggest that these hills were originally inhabited by the Etruscans (see box). The locality of **Civita** to the south-east of Castro has other remains from pre-Roman times: an aqueduct and other water channels, walls and roads as well as necropolises from the mid 7th century BC and earlier.

The town is famous for its potatoes, which are celebrated in a local festival in mid-August.

Grotte di Castro can be visited on three levels: the **panoramic** itinerary is the lowest of the three, above which lies the **medieval town** whose old workshops retain their ancient doorways and signs (note the 1563 **Palazzo Innocenzo Iuzzi** in this section of the town). Here, too, is the **Basilica of Maria SS. del Suffragio e San Giovanni Battista**, a 17th-century church (with Baroque interior and an interesting antiquarium) built on the site of a much older place of worship. The third and highest tour takes us into the **Renaissance town**, where we can admire Castro's fine 16th-century palaces and the **church of San**

 **Tourist Information:** Via Roma, tel. 0763 796966. The Romanesque church of Santa Maria delle Colonne is 2.5 km outside Grotte di Castro.

  **Accommodation and restaurants:** see p. 68

 **Things to buy:** see p. 69

 **Feasts and fairs:** see p. 70

### ★ ETRUSCAN TOMBS

2 km outside Grotte di Castro, on the road to Bolsena is the lake area's first Archaeology Park, with the Etruscan necropolis of **Pianeze**, a series of 6th-century BC chamber-type tombs on a terraced tufa ridge. One of the best preserved is the so-called **Red Tomb**, containing sculptures and paintings. The **Cento Camere** and **Vigna della Piazza necropolises**, with their chest-type tombs (some can be visited) are located in a particularly atmospheric leafy setting. Many have the pitched roofs typical of Etruscan houses.

**Pietro Apostolo**, whose original Romanesque belltower survives. **Palazzo Comunale**, by Vignola, in **Piazza del Municipio**, has a superb spiral staircase. The road leading to the columbaria (ancient burial niches) begins in **Piazza della Rocca**, higher up. Also worth seeing in the town are the **Museum of Archaeology and Popular Traditions**, and the monumental fountain of 1886.

### ■ Ischia di Castro

The area around Ischia di Castro (elev. 384 m.), located at the confluence of two rivers and inhabited since Palaeolithic times, was chosen by early farming settlers for the good protection it gave. Important Etruscan necropolises here include the so-called 'Tomb of the Chariot', named after the rare, two-wheeled vehicle found inside, and now in the Museo della Rocca Albornozi in Viterbo. However, local history hinges around the year 1649, when papal troops de-

 **Tourist Information:** Via San Rocco 2, tel. 0761 425455..

  **Accommodation and restaurants:** see p. 95

 **Feasts and fairs:** see p. 96



## ISCHIA DI CASTRO

stroyed ancient Castro (see box below) and deported its people to the nearby medieval town of Ischia. This event marked the end of the Farnese hold on the town, which subsequently passed into church hands until the creation of the Kingdom of Italy.

The medieval town, with its narrow winding streets, massive gateways and ruined walls, sits atop a tufa crag. Piazza Regina Margherita is dominated by one of the oldest Farnese residences, **Palazzo Ducale**, an unfinished 16th-century reconstruction attributed to Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, who gave the austere medieval castle a new Renaissance elegance. The Baroque **Cathedral** (dedicated to Sant'Ermete) in a smaller square nearby has an octagonal baptismal font of 1538, a Sienese-school fresco of the Madonna del Popolo, and two 9th-century marble pulpits from the destroyed cathedral of San Savino in ancient Castro. The small, recently-restored Romanesque **church of San Rocco** (good 16th-century frescoes) stands in Piazza Cavalieri di Vittorio Veneto, the town hall square that is also home to the **Museo**

### ★ THE 'CARTHAGE OF THE MAREMMA'

Ancient Castro, a town inextricably bound up with the history of the Farnese family, was made the capital of the duchy of the same name in 1547 by Pope Paul III Farnese, only to be wiped from the face of the earth in 1649 by the hatred of Pope Innocent X Pamphili. A few overgrown ruins are all that survives of a place once graced by Sangallo's beautiful churches and palaces, although some features – such as the impressive fortifications, the paving of the Renaissance square and the remains of the surrounding buildings – are still remarkably visible.

### RELIGIOUS EVENTS

June is the month of the traditional pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Castro. The festival of the patron saint Ermete is held in early September.

**Civico di Ischia di Castro**, a local history museum (closed Monday).

The **sanctuary of the Madonna del Giglio**, which dates back to the early 1400s, stands in the valley below the town.

**Poggio Conte** and **Chiusa del Vescovo** are two of several fascinating hermitages built into rock in the countryside around Ischia (visits by prior arrangement in spring and summer).

The remains of a grand Roman villa have been excavated at **Selvicciola**, near Vulci. Abandoned in around the 5th century, the villa has a necropolis and church suggesting later occupation by Longobards.

### ■ Latera

Situated in a volcanic crater to the north-west of Lake Bolsena, the picturesque town of Latera (elev. 508 m.) lies amid splendid countryside cloaked in chestnut trees. Chestnuts are indeed the theme of a local autumn festival (on the last Sunday in October), just one of many traditional and cultural events held here. The annual **Feast of Sant'Angelo** (7-8-9 September), for example, features a market of livestock and other merchandise, entertainments and a firework display. Other colourful festivals are held at Carnival and Easter time. The town's farming traditions are documented in the fascinating **Museo della Terra** (see box on p. 124). This typically medieval town, with an

 **Tourist Information:** Via Pieve, tel. 0761 459342.

 **Restaurants:** see p. 78

 **Feasts and fairs:** see p. 79



## LATERA

## ★ THE 'MUSEUM OF THE LAND'

Housed in an ancient monastery grain store, Latera's museum of folk and farming culture displays an array of farming utensils and household items that illustrate life not only in the town (artisan workshops, the local market) but also in the environment (the surrounding woodland, geothermal energy sources etc.). Opening times: see p. 77

Etruscan and Roman past (Marcus Aurelius is believed to have been named Emperor here), has also yielded finds from Neolithic times (5000 BC). Like other towns in the region it was sacked by Barbarians and fought over by the Church, Orvieto and local feudal families. Its most stable period of rule was under the Farnese (until 1668), who built **Palazzo Ducale** in **Piazza della Rocca** and a town aqueduct (note also the two **fountains**). The historic center is a maze of streets, steps and archways, above which rises the elegant **Latera bell-tower**. Just before the main square stands the **church of San Clemente** (a Romanesque place of worship much altered over the centuries, and with a 1591 baptismal font). There are many other churches in and around the town. The **church of San Giuseppe** in Via San Giuseppe (of uncertain origin but known to have existed in 1295) is associated with the miracle of the Madonna who was seen to open her eyes to the faithful gathered here. The **church of the Madonna del Carmine** in Via Piave was built in 1800 over the remains of a tiny chapel too small to hold mass in, while the **church of Santa Maria delle Grazie** in Via Roma is probably late 16th century. Outside Latera is the charming chapel of the **Madonna della Cava** (probably pre-1400) in the like-named locality; the chapel at **San Sebastiano** is also of uncertain

origin, while the chapel at **San Rocco** was probably built around 1400 as a plea to St. Roche to spare the town of the plague.

## ■ Onano

The palindromically-named town of Onano (elev. 510 m.) lies 8 km from Acquapendente, Grotte di Castro and Latera on the north-western slopes of Monti Volsini near the border with Tuscany (the interesting towns of **Sorano**, **Sovana** and **Pitigliano** are within easy reach). Of Etruscan origin, the Onano area was overlooked by the Romans but eventually over-run by Barbarians. It was then variously controlled by the Monaldeschi and Sforza families before coming under Church rule up to the Unification of Italy. It is famed for its ancient lentil-growing tradition, celebrated during festivals held in late summer (see box). The patron saint of animals is celebrated with the roasting of meat on a big bonfire on January 17. The medieval town, with its delightful winding streets contained within the remains of the old walls, is dominated by the austere **Castle** (Palazzo Madama) in the main square, an imposing quadrangular edifice with arched corbelling supporting an upper crenellated parapet. The keep-style west wing was built in the mid-1500s; the eastern section was added later the same century. The interior is a sequence of majestic and solemn rooms and salons over a series of formidable underground passageways and storerooms. On the death of the last Sforza, the castle passed into the hands of the Denhams, an Irish shipbuilding family, and was retitled Palazzo Madama in honour of Carlotta Denham, a lady of great moral rectitude who was extremely popular in the town.

 **Tourist Information:** tel. 0763 78021, fax 0763 78391; (for church visits call 0763 78565).

 **Feasts and fairs:** see p. 74



## ONANO

## ★ LOCAL LENTILS

The highly-prized, flavoursome Onano lentil (the *lens culinaris medicus* that is an excellent source of protein, iron and vitamins) has been cultivated here since ancient times. It is served in a variety of dishes washed down with wine at the Lentil Festival in the week of 15 August, held in conjunction with the feast of the local patron saint, San Trifone.

 **Tourist Information:** Piazza Indipendenza 17, tel. 0761 450832.



## FEASTS AND FAIRS

The Piansano year is punctuated by the Feast of St. Bernard in late May (with a horse race and historic pageant), and the Feast of the Madonna del Rosario on the 1st Sunday in October when the famous 'tortello' (a ricotta-filled pastry) is served.

The church of **Santa Croce** in Piazza Pio XII was rebuilt in 1956; the church of **Santa Maria della Concezione** in Via Cavour dates back to 1784. The Romanesque church of **Santa Maria alle Grazie** (outside the town at Le Grazie) with Sienese school frescoes is Onano's oldest; the **Madonna del Soccorso** (at La Fontana) was built in 1454, the **Madonna del Piano** in 1493, and the **Madonna della SS. Trinità** with its supposedly miraculous waters (at Scardi) dates back to 1668.

## ■ Piansano

Piansano (elev. 409 m.) sits on a tufa spur amid rolling countryside in what was once a marshy area inside a small volcanic crater. Its ancient wine-growing traditions (recalled in the town's crest) have now all but given way to cereal crops and sheep-farming. The area was settled in Neolithic times, and the archaeological remains of an Etrusco-Roman town to the south-east of present-day Piansano are thought to be the *Maternum* described on the 'Peutingarian Tablet' as lying between Tuscania and Saturnia on the Via Clodia. The town disappeared for centuries: it was mentioned in the Middle Ages as a contested part of the church territories and seigniorial estates, but not until 1537 with the creation of the duchy of Castro did it once again begin to flourish. It was repopulated in 1560,

and its subsequent history followed the historical developments of other towns in the area.

**Palazzo Comunale**, which stands in the main street of the old town, has an interesting Baroque portico, with curious figured columns. Further on, in Piazza Marconi, is the church of **San Bernardino**.

Piansano has its own local arts magazine, town band, choir, and a group of flag-throwers which performs in Italy and abroad. Crafts include wood sculpture and painted glassware. In the 1960s the town was used as one of the locations for Mario Monicelli's 'Brancaleone', starring Vittorio Gassman. The nearby *fountain* is seen in an early scene of the film.

## ■ Proceno

The picturesque village of Proceno (elev. 418 m.), thought to be of Etruscan origin, lies 7 km north-west of Acquapendente (note the churches of **Santa Maria del Giglio** and **San Martino** on the way up). In the main square stands the imposing **Palazzo degli Sforza** of 1535, with frescoes and coffered ceilings inside. Steps beside the Town Hall lead down to the small **Museo della Civiltà Contadina**. Further down is the medieval **Rocca**, or castle (now converted to provide holiday accommodation), the 16th-century church of **Santa Maria della Neve**, and the **Parish Church**, which has a fine



## PROCENO

 **Tourist Information:** Piazza della Libertà 1, tel. 0763 710003.

  **Accommodation and restaurants:** see p. 36

 **FEASTS**
**AND OTHER LOCAL EVENTS**

In early August a festival dedicated to the sale of the prized red garlic that grows in the vicinity. For a full list of feasts and fairs: see p. 36

Gothic portal and 14th-century frescoes inside. Further up note the round church of Sant'Agnese.

■ **San Lorenzo Nuovo**

San Lorenzo Nuovo, which sits right on the Via Cassia between Bolsena and Acquapendente on the northern slopes of the Lake Bolsena crater, is an interesting example of 18th-century town-planning. The design of the new town by architect Francesco Navone, who was commissioned by Pope Clement XIV to move the population out of the insalubrious old town down by the lake, is based on Copenhagen's Amalienborg Square. It centres around the octagonal **Piazza Europa**, in which stands the **cathedral of San Lorenzo Martire**, a harmoniously-designed church containing canvases by Florentine artist Jacopo Zucchi and a much venerated 13th-century wooden crucifix that is celebrated in a solemn ceremony every 14 September. The Danish capital also served as the model for the layout of the main streets leading off from the square, most notably **Corso Umberto I**, which ends at the **church of Santa Maria Assunta** (1784), originally part of a Capuchin monastery. The rest of the town displays a surprising-

 **Tourist Information:** Piazza Europa 30, tel. 0763 727003.

  **Accommodation and restaurants:** see p. 39

 **FEASTS**
**AND OTHER LOCAL EVENTS**

The famed local potatoes are the main ingredient of 'gnocchi', a festival of which is held around 15 August. For a full list of oils, pasta and cheese on sale in the town see p. 41

ly modern grid pattern of streets, in which noble palaces rub shoulders with more humble buildings, in accordance with the enlightened ideas of the day. In one interesting corner in a square off the main *Corso* there is a **fountain** dating back to 1778.

■ **Valentano**

The busy farming town of Valentano (elev. 538 m), superbly situated on the south-western slopes of Monti Volsini, was once an important centre for the quarrying of the special red clay used for tennis courts, while the surrounding scrubland used to be notorious as a hideout for local brigands. The town affords views across to Lake Bolsena and to the tiny circular Lake Mezzano (see box).

The main **Piazza Cavour** is entered through **Porta Magenta** (1779): the curious mascheron in the keystone is thought to have been included by the builders of the gateway to silence critics of the work. **Corso Plebiscito**, beginning to the right of the 16th-century **Municipio** in the main square, runs into **Via Cialdini**, which in turn leads up to **Piazza della Vittoria**. Here we encounter the 12th-century **collegiate church of San Giovanni Evangelista** (whose campanile houses bells from the ruined town of Castro) and the **Castle**, rebuilt by the Farnese from the 14th century onwards over an earlier fortress, hence the name 'Rocca Farnese'. It was recently renovated and now houses an impressive **Library** and the **Museo della Preistoria e della Rocca Farnese** (see p. 83), whose many treasures include a collection of finely-decorated medieval and Renaissance majolica ceramics discovered by chance in the 1980s.



## VALENTANO

 **Tourist Information:** Piazza della Vittoria 8, tel. 0761 422486.

 **Accommodation and restaurants:** see p. 86

 **Things to buy:** see p. 84

 **Feasts and fairs:** see p. 87

The elegant church of **Santa Maria** in **Corso Matteotti** (or Strada di Santa Maria), part of an institute occupied by a congregation of nuns, contains an interesting ancient fresco and a statue of the Madonna. This street ends at the medieval **Porta San Martino**, a gateway flanked by ruined towers, beyond which the leafy and panoramic **Piazzale San**

## ★ LAKE MEZZANO

Thought to be the *statiensis lacus* described by Pliny and Seneca, the beautiful blue-green **Lake Mezzano**, picturesquely situated 4 km north-west of Valentano, has yielded Bronze-Age finds from a now submerged pile-dwelling settlement that are now in the Prehistory Museum in Valentano. The surrounding area, which is ideal for walks and picnics, boasts an ancient oak more than 300 years old.

## ★ CAKES AND CHICKPEAS

Valentano is well known for one interesting ancient ceremony held among much feasting in Valentano on 15 August and called the 'straight chickpea furrow', in which a 5 km-long furrow is marked out across the plain. Tradition has it that the straighter the line traced, the greater the harvest will be.

**Martino** opens up.

The church of **Santa Croce** in Piazzale Diaz, which dates back to the early 15th century, boasts an excellent ancient fresco of the Madonna of the Flagellants (the church possibly stood on a Flagellant pilgrimage route). The image of the Virgin in the church of the **Madonna del Monte on Mt. Nero** (1852) was revered by a Zouave garrison, as graffiti scratched on the left-hand wall reveals. The church of **Santa Annunziata** at **Villa Fontane** was built to replace an older place of worship, whose medieval structure can still be seen on the eastern side of Villa Fontane, originally owned by the Knights Templar. The **sanctuary of the Madonna della Salute** is half a kilometre out of town.

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