

Central Apennines

HIGHLIGHTS

- Crossing a long, airy ridge and several panoramic peaks on the **Sibillini Traverse** (p227)
- Taking a step back to marvel at the monolithic beauty of the Gran Sasso and Corno Grande range from the expansive **Campo Imperatore plateau** (p233)
- Walking in the footsteps of escaped POWs in the **Parco Nazionale della Majella** (p235)
- Keeping an eye out for one of a handful of bears in **Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo** (p238)

Signature food: *Maccheroni alla chitarra*

Celebrated native: Ovid
(Roman poet)

Famous for... Earthquakes

How's this for an oversight. Italy's symbolic spinal mountains, the Apennines, are also its least crowded. Indeed, at times, a visit here feels like a trip back to the 1950s; a world of wheezing trains and buzzing Vespas (motor scooters); a landscape of ruined farmhouses and fields splashed with blood-red poppies. All this is good news for prospective hikers who share the region's ample trails with sheep dogs, mountain goats, abundant birdlife and the odd – rarely sighted – human being.

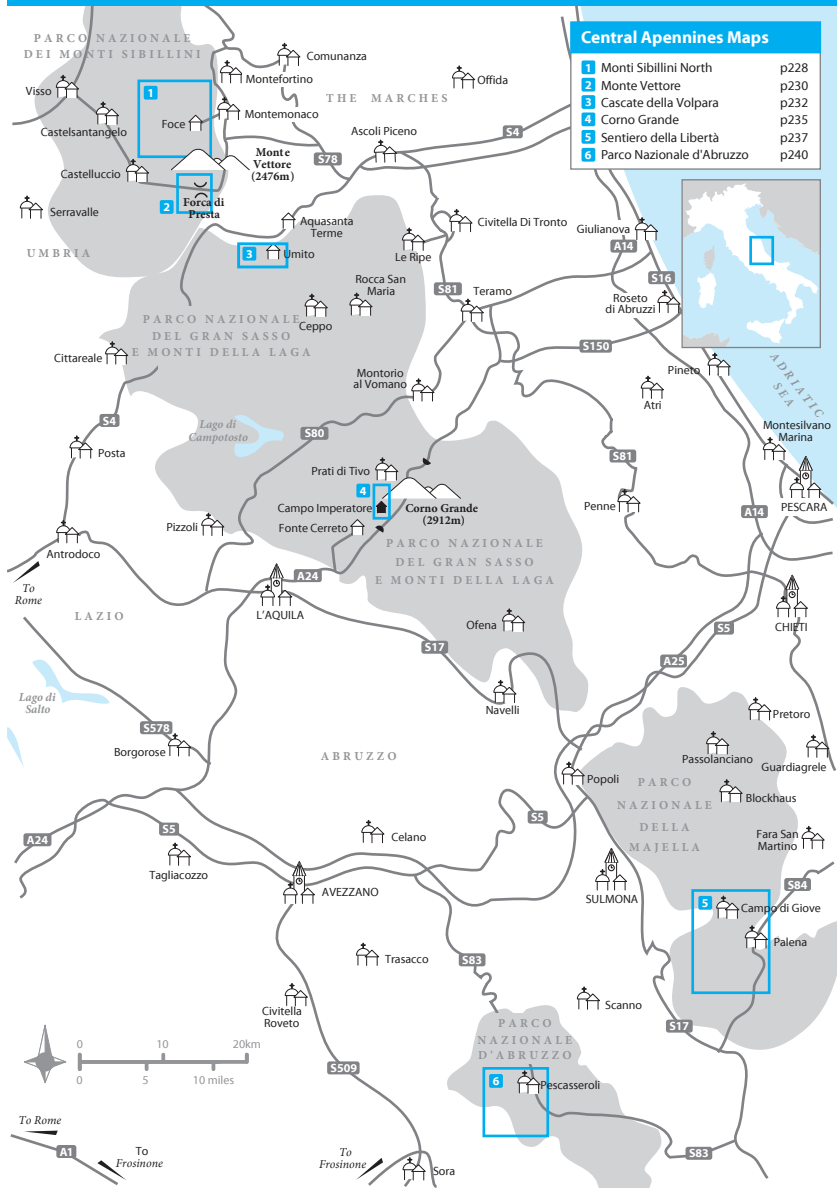
While the Apennines proper stretch from the Maritimes on the French border down to the plain of Sibari in Italy's metaphoric toe, the highest and most imposing part of the range is crowded into a compact central stretch that straddles the borders of Umbria, Le Marche and Abruzzo.

These loftier peaks are characterised by their abundant beech woods, lonely plateaus and quiescent lightly populated valleys, all of which have resisted the modern interferences of tourism. While smaller than the Alps, the range's crowning pinnacle, Corno Grande, just northeast of L'Aquila, is no dwarf; it is a hulking limestone peak whose slopes protect the expansive Campo Imperatore plateau and the southernmost glacier in Europe.

A major national park building effort in the 1990s has created an almost unbroken swathe of protected land across the Apennines that runs from Monti Sibillini in the north to Abruzzo in the south.



CENTRAL APENNINES



CLIMATE

The Apennines offer an interesting mix of alpine and Mediterranean climate. Summers

are warm and dry, with daytime temperatures in the valleys and slopes normally in the mid-20s°C. Temperatures are lower on