



# Abruzzo & Molise

## Includes »

Parco Nazionale del Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga.....	603
Sulmona.....	603
Parco Nazionale della Majella.....	608
Scanno.....	609
Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise.....	610
Pescara.....	611
Chieti.....	613
Vasto.....	614
Campobasso.....	615
Isernia.....	615
Termoli.....	616
Albanian Towns.....	617

## Why Go?

A stunning mountain region little known to foreign visitors, Abruzzo is an area of unspoiled natural beauty and rural, back-country charm. Only an hour from Rome, it feels like a world apart with its great Apennines peaks, still, silent valleys and pretty hilltop towns. To the south, Molise offers more of the same, albeit on a smaller, less dramatic scale.

The landscape is extraordinary. In the region's three national parks, thick forests and flowering meadows give way to high barren plains and snowcapped granite peaks, and wolves and bears roam free in the vast beech woods. A mecca for outdoor enthusiasts, it offers wonderful hiking, skiing and mountain biking, while the coast boasts some beautiful sandy beaches.

Nestled in this verdant land, cultural gems await discovery. Pescocostanzo's baroque centre and Sulmona's historic *palazzi* (mansions) testify to past glories, while isolation has ensured the survival of age-old customs such as Cocullo's bizarre snake charmers' procession.

## Best Places to Eat

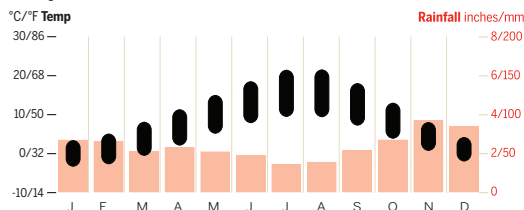
- » Locanda Sotto gli Archi (p607)
- » Hosteria dell'Arco (p607)
- » Il Panzotto (p614)
- » Ristorante Clemente (p607)

## Best Places to Stay

- » Sextantio (p607)
- » Locanda Alfieri (p616)
- » Le Torri Hotel (p608)
- » B&B Villa del Pavone (p613)
- » Residenza Sveva (p616)

## When to Go

### L'Aquila



**May** Cocullo's bizarre snake festival involves a statue, procession and writhing nest of snakes.

**Jul** Sulmona's square fills with prancing horses and jousting during this medieval tournament.

**Jun-Sep** Spring wildflowers, summer sun and autumn leaves – perfect conditions for hiking.

## ABRUZZO

Best known for its dramatic mountain scenery, Abruzzo's landscape is surprisingly diverse. A vast plain extends east of Avezzano, the coastline is flat and sandy, and there are ancient forests in the Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise.

Many towns retain a medieval look, while the numerous hilltop castles and isolated, sometimes abandoned, *borghi* (medieval towns) exude a sinister charm, lending credence to Abruzzo's fame as an ancient centre of magic, and the land of a thousand castles.

### Parco Nazionale del Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga

About 20km northeast of L'Aquila, the Gran Sasso massif is the centrepiece of the Parco Nazionale del Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga, one of Italy's largest national parks. The park's predominant feature is its jagged rocky landscape through which Europe's southernmost glacier, the Calderone, cuts its course. It's also a haven for wildlife, home to an estimated 40 wolves, 350 chamois and six pairs of royal eagles. Hiking trails criss-cross the park and atmospheric castles and medieval hill towns crown the foot hills.



**Rocca Calascio**, six kilometres west of Santo Stefano di Sessanio, is one such imposing castle dominating the skyline above the Navelli Plain. There's not much to see inside, but the views are stupendous, and from a distance the castle makes an impressive photograph.

**Fonte Cerreto** is the main gateway to the Gran Sasso and **Campo Imperatore** (2117m), a high windswept plateau 27km long and known as 'Italy's Little Tibet'. A **funivia** (cable car; ☎0862 60 61 43; €14 Mon-Fri, €16 Sat & Sun; ☀8am-5pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun, closed May) runs up to the Campo from Fonte Cerreto. Up top, there's hiking in summer and skiing in winter (see the boxed text, p609).

For more information contact the **park office** (☎0862 6 05 21; www.gransassolagapark.it, in Italian; Via del Convento 1; ☀10.30am-1pm Mon-Fri & 4-6pm Tue & Thu) in **Assergi**.

One of the most popular trekking routes is the surprisingly straightforward climb up **Corno Grande** (at 2912m, it's the Apennines' highest peak). The 9km *via normale* (normal route) starts in the main parking area

### L'AQUILA: AFTER THE SHOCK WAVE

Destruction from the devastating earthquake that struck northern Abruzzo in 2009 – 10km from the regional capital **L'Aquila** – is still very much in evidence. After three years, much of L'Aquila's *centro storico* (historic center) is still off limits to visitors: rubble surrounds buildings damaged beyond repair, scaffolding fronts those slowly undergoing restoration, and the military patrols cordoned-off streets. Many of the 65,000 made homeless by the earthquake remain in housing estates built to accommodate them on the edge of the city.

Abruzzo and neighbouring Molise are particularly vulnerable to earthquakes as they sit on a major fault line that follows the Apennines from Sicily up to Genoa.

At the time of research there was no indication as to when restorations to L'Aquila's historic centre would be complete.

at Campo Imperatore and heads to the summit. The trail should be clear of snow from early June to late September/early October. If attempting the ascent, or any other serious route, be sure to arm yourself with the CAI 1:25,000 map *Gran Sasso d'Italia* (€10).

The park has a network of *rifugi* (mountain huts) for walkers. Otherwise, you can bed down at **Camping Funivia del Gran Sasso** (☎0862 60 61 63; Fonte Cerreto; camping per person/tent/car €7/8/150; ☀mid-May-mid-Sep), a modest camp ground in Fonte Cerreto. At the top of the cable-car lift, the **Hotel Campo Imperatore** (☎0862 40 00 00; Campo Imperatore; half-board from €70), where Mussolini was briefly imprisoned in 1943, also has a **hostel** (dm per person €30, incl dinner €45) that offers basic year-round digs.

Fonte Cerreto is just off the A24 motorway (clearly signposted). It's best to have your own transport to navigate the park.

### Sulmona

POP 25,220

Sulmona lies in a picturesque location, nestled in a valley with the Morrone massif as a backdrop. A lively and prosperous provincial