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FONDO EUROPEO AGRICOLA PER LO SVILUPPO RURALE: L'EUROPA INVESTE NELLE ZONE RURALI

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A "Boat trip" around Piceno



**Museums
and Collections**

**The natural environment
and environmental centres**

**Villages
and typical products**

Artisan workshops





YouPiceno è un progetto curato da

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PICENO THEMED GUIDEBOOKS

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INTRODUCTION

A 'BOAT TRIP' AROUND PICENO

This guide is part of a set of 22 volumes which will lead the reader on an exciting journey of discovery of Piceno territory. Of these 22 guides, 18 are dedicated to the collections of the four museums that make up the Musei Piceni network (Palazzo de Castellotti museum complex, Offida; Palazzo Bonomi Gera municipal museum, Ripatransone; San Francesco museum complex, Montefiore dell'Aso; San Francesco cultural complex, Monterubbiano). The other four volumes are written as itineraries that focus on the specific history, art and environment traits that forge the Piceno identity (Piceno Museums and Collections; Natural Environment and Environmental Education Centres; Typical Towns and Products in Piceno; Artisan Studios of Piceno). Inspired by the complexity of the museum system and the lavish territory where it is located, these guides offer important proof of the fact that every element of material cultural heritage (whether housed in a museum or otherwise) and of Piceno's traditional and typical way of life is the product of what happened and was generated in history and by the territory's social development.

Piceno guards a heritage made up of numerous treasures, priceless not so much because of the richness of the objects that comprise it, but because of how they are scattered throughout the area. When travelling around Piceno, it seems almost impossible to go more than ten kilometres without encountering evidence of the Picene, Roman or Medieval period, a museum, or an artisan workshop that handcrafts typical local products, all of which are an important part of local history.

So the discerning visitor should simply get aboard and be captivated by this 'archipelago' of little islands of life past and present, going with the flow of this *boat trip*. There are many different routes and itineraries available, depending on the *port-of-call* chosen as the starting point for the trip, the amount of time available and the visitor's particular desires and interests.

This original voyage of discovery can also follow four separate courses around Piceno: **museums and collections; the natural environment and environmental education centres; historic villages and typical products; artisan workshops.**

MUSEUMS AND COLLECTIONS

ITINERARY 1 - THE PICENE HILLS

Monterubbiano - Montefiore dell'Aso - Ripatransone - Offida

ITINERARY 2 - THE LANDS OF SIXTUS V

Ripatransone - Montalto delle Marche - Castignano - Rotella - Force - Comunanza - Montemonaco

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THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTRES

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VILLAGES AND TYPICAL PRODUCTS

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ITINERARIES

GUIDE 1

PICENO MUSEUMS AND COLLECTIONS

ITINERARY 1

THE PICENO HILLS

This tour crosses the Piceno hill ridges in its exploration of the four museums that make up the Musei Piceni network. It takes in the towns of Monterubbiano, Montefiore dell’Aso, Ripatransone and Offida, focusing both on the diversity and the richness of the collections, and on the beauty and history of the buildings that house the museums, namely two historic palaces and two Franciscan convents.

The journey begins in **Monterubbiano**, at the San Francesco cultural centre, and continues to **Montefiore dell’Aso**, one of the “borghi più belli d’Italia” – winner of the “most beautiful towns of Italy” award –, where we find the San Francesco museum complex, whose narrative and collection layout are conceived as a seamless relationship with the surrounding landscape. Next stop is **Ripatransone** and its Museo Civico Palazzo Bonomi Gera, one of the oldest museums in the Marche (founded in 1877), found on Via Vittorio Emanuele, in a beautiful building built in the late seventeenth century. The museum comprises five exhibition sections. The tour dedicated to the discovery of the museums in the Musei Piceni network ends in **Offida**, in the municipal museum complex of Palazzo de Castellotti, with its rich and varied exhibits.

ITINERARY 2

THE LANDS OF SIXTUS V

We recommend dedicating two full days to this tour, because of the size of the area and the time required for the visits, which take in small and medium-size towns that were the stage of historic events of great importance. In particular, the tour covers some of the places linked to Pope Sixtus V, born in Grottammare in 1521, later moving to Montalto delle Marche. Sixtus V showed great attachment to this area, which he called his “dear homeland”, ensuring gifts and privileges that forged the historical and cultural face of this lovely stretch of the Marche. Thanks to the generosity of this pontiff, the area vaunts priceless art treasures, found the ten Musei Sistini, the museums of Castignano, Comunanza, Force, Grottammare, Montalto delle Marche, Montemonaco, Monteprandone, Ripatransone, Rotella, and San Benedetto del Tronto. The tour starts on mid-altitude hills but reaches as far as the Sibillini Mountains and is thus interesting both for its landscape and urban features, winding through small towns that have lost none of their medieval traits, immersed in the quiet greenery of the Piceno hills.

The tour begins in Ripatransone, where we find a museum of sacred art, an outright “church–museum”, and continues in the Museo Sistino Vescovile episcopal museum of **Montalto delle Marche**. From Montalto delle Marche the trip continues to **Castignano** and then on to the mountain area, with the municipalities of **Rotella**, **Force**, **Comunanza** and **Montemonaco** all home to a museum of sacred art.

ITINERARY 3

CONTEMPORARY PICENO

The tour crosses the most characteristic places of contemporary artistic production, linked in a fascinating, indissoluble way to the villages which proudly protect the material traces.

The itinerary starts from the mountains, in the unique Museo di Arte Immanente, in **Arquata del Tronto**, known for its monumental fortress, a striking material testimony of the Middle Ages. The next stop is **Offida** in the “Aldo Sergiacomi” museum, then moving on to **Ripatransone** where Palazzo Bonomi Gera is home to a contemporary art gallery. The tour ends in the **Montefiore dell’Aso** museum complex, which is home to three collections of contemporary art, all dedicated to the figure and work of three artists who were born or lived in the Montefiore dell’Aso area: the “Domenico Cantatore” collection; the “Adolfo De Carolis” museum, and the “Giancarlo Basili” Centro di Documentazione Scenografica.

GUIDE 2

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTRES

ITINERARY 4

TOWNS WITH A SEA VIEW

This tour, halfway between the sea and the hills, and straddling the Aso and Tesino river valleys, is well-suited to those staying along the coast, especially in the summer, and deciding to dedicate one or more days to exploring the nearby hills. It is a charming excursion, around Piceno's most beautiful small towns, which retain clear evidence of a medieval past, of towers and fortified walls, and a pristine natural environment, protected and promoted by two environmental education centres.

The tour must surely start from the **Monterubbiano** San Francesco cultural centre, with its freestanding floor model reproducing the Aso River, marking the most significant archaeological sites, distinguishing between Roman, Picene and Medieval settlements. The Centro di Educazione Ambientale "Giano", or environmental education centre for the mid and lower Aso Valley, is inside the complex.

From Monterubbiano, we cross the River Aso to reach **Carassai**, an ancient town of feudal origin whose archaeological museum and Rocca Montevermine fortress have been open to the public since 2008. Leaving Carassai, we take the ridge route towards the coast and **Montefiore dell'Aso**, elected "uno dei borghi più belli d'Italia", one of the most beautiful towns in Italy. Immersed in an agricultural landscape that is famous for its fruit crops and viticulture, medieval Montefiore still has fragments of walls with gates and towers dating from the fifteenth–sixteenth centuries. The route takes in **Cupra Marittima** then continues up the Tesino Valley to reach **Offida**, since 2008 also a member of the "Borghi più belli d'Italia". Offida is predominantly a hill territory and characterized by its agricultural production, dedicated above all to the cultivation of vines and olive trees. This rich eco-economic system is of focus of the work of the "Giano" environmental education centre, housed in Palazzo De Castellotti museum complex.

ITINERARY 5

CHURCHES, LEGENDS AND MOUNTAIN TRAILS

This is entirely a mountain tour that takes in the Monti Sibillini and Monti della Laga national parks, discovering the natural beauty of Piceno's high-altitude area and the activities promoted by the environmental education centres, with particular attention to the rural churches often hidden in the woods and clearings, and the legends that cloak the history of many places in mystery. Given the area covered and the wide range of activities offered in this tour, we suggest taking two days for this tour.

The itinerary begins at the foot of Mount Ascensione, in **Rotella**, which allows visitors a choice of routes for the ascent of the slopes, guaranteeing not only all-embracing, magnificent views, but also taking in rural churches or places of worship along the way. We may then continue towards Force – a coppersmith town with a copper museum – between the Aso, Tesino and Tronto valleys. The tour continues to **Montemonaco**, a small fortified town and the highest in Piceno (988 metres above sea level), surrounded by the Monti Sibillini national park, and whose history is woven from legends and true events. The tour continues to **Montegallo**, 13 kilometres from Montemonaco, at the foot of Mount Vettore, whose natural features are promoted by the activities of "Montegallo" environmental education centre, based in Palazzo Branconi, in the Frazione Balzo district. The centre has been promoting stimulating and engaging environmental experiences for years through various activities (guided tours, hiking, Nordic walking and photography courses, etc). At Montegallo the tour pushes on towards the southwest boundary of Piceno territory and reaches **Arquata del Tronto**, on the border where the Marche region meets Abruzzo and Lazio. Arquata del Tronto is the only municipality in Europe whose territory falls within two nature parks – the Monti Sibillini and the Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga national parks.

The mountain tour ends at **Acquasanta Terme**, an old town that owes its name to the sulphur-iodine springs that flow from natural tunnels known since Roman times. In addition to its sulphurous waters, the wealth of Acquasanta comes from its quarries of travertine, a construction material widely used in Piceno.

GUIDE 3

TYPICAL TOWNS AND PRODUCTS IN PICENO

ITINERARY 6

HILL SECRETS AND FLAVOURS

The tour, lasting approximately a day and a half, proceeds along hilly ridges and includes some of Piceno's most characteristic small towns, real treasures of art, history and landscape, producing infinite wealth linked mainly to dedicated agriculture and deep-rooted fine food and wine traditions, passed down from one generation to the next to reach our times. The route offers a number of suggestions for exploring these villages, pursuing the flavours of a bygone era that made its country style and local farms, stores, agritourism facilities, restaurants, etc. its hallmark.

The tour starts from **Ripatransone**, one of the two Piceno towns vaunting the Orange Flag award, surrounded by walls that speak of its medieval and Renaissance past. The belvedere has it earned the name of the "Piceno balcony" and with its five museums and stunning buildings and monuments combined with a strong and very ancient culinary tradition, the town is a veritable treasure trove. From Ripatransone, the trail continues to **Offida** and its well-regarded ancient food and wine tradition, rich in unique products and recipes. In particular, Offida gastronomy is known for its baked goods, especially during Carnival period, and for its wine, which has vaunted its own DOC label since 2010. From Offida, the tour continues towards the Aso Valley and reaches **Montefiore dell'Aso**. This area is especially famous for its agriculture and is extremely active in viticulture and, above all, fruit-growing. Over the years, local farms have diversified their activities by developing an increasingly intensive fruit-processing industry, which has built up a strong offer of marmalades, jams, preserves, and fruit juices. From Montefiore, crossing the River Aso, the tour concludes in **Monterubbiano**, another Orange Flag winner. In addition to the wonderful art and history on offer, from the 1800s' belvedere in the San Rocco park, we can enjoy the amazing agricultural landscape that embraces Monterubbiano and is mainly dedicated to olive groves. Last but not least, Monterubbiano is a land of ancient culinary traditions, as well as home of the "tagliatella fritta" a fried noodle speciality eaten on Sundays, whose recipe has been handed down for generations.

ITINERARY 7

MOUNTAIN FRAGRANCE AND FLAVOUR

We recommend spending at least two days on this tour, to explore the mountains and high hills of Piceno, including an almost full tour of the Monti Sibillini national park. This itinerary is in a natural setting that has few equals, following roads dedicated to the intense, precious aromas of mountain fruits like chestnuts, aniseed and truffles, or the sturdy flavours of simple, traditional dishes, the material witnesses of a rural civilization that has now almost completely disappeared, surviving mainly in the products and in the production processes, in the technical skills and wisdom passed from generation to generation.

The trail begins in **Acquaviva Picena**, a place rich in culture and tradition, where the memories of rural civilization are still vivid, whose life and nourishment were marked by the cycle of the seasons. The next stop is **Castignano**, an ancient village often associated with aniseed. From Castignano the tour continues towards the mountains, to the municipality of **Montedinove**, set on the area's tallest hill, between the Aso and Tesino river valleys, on the slopes of the Sibillini Mountains. The territory of Montedinove, like that of the neighbouring municipalities Comunanza, Montegalloy and Montemonaco, in addition to its natural beauty and the aura of mystery evoked by the Sybil legends, is known for an ancient fruit-growing vocation, linked to the native pink apple, one of Slow Food's three Piceno presidia. The path continues to **Rotella**, a territory at the foot of Mount Ascensione rich in chestnut groves. From Rotella, the journey goes on to **Force** – along with Roccafluvione, Montemonaco and Montegalloy – an ideal place to taste truffles, of which various species grow here throughout the year. The tour ends in **Montemonaco**, one of Piceno's leading producers of Sibillini pecorino, one of Slow Food's three presidia in Piceno.

GUIDE 4

THE ARTISAN STUDIOS OF PICENO

ITINERARY 8

STREETS OF GOLD AND COPPER: ARTISTS, ARTISANS AND WORKSHOPS

This tour is a focus on two quite different materials, both for how they are used and for how they are worked, but both unique to and typical of Piceno and the applied arts that characterized this area and still survive in some workshops. One is gold, the key component of precious reliquaries found mainly in museums of sacred art and the trait that identifies the work of Carlo Crivelli; the other is copper, a less noble metal but one which the creative skills of Force artisans craft into quality items that speak of history. The tour should start from the **Montefiore dell’Aso** San Francesco museum complex, which dedicates an entire room to the polyptych by Carlo Crivelli, characterized not only by the traditional gold background, but also by its combination of painting and goldsmithing. Moving on from Crivelli’s painted gold, the tour takes us to the sculpted gold of reliquaries and religious ornaments set with precious stones, particularly two items conserved in the **Castignano** and **Montalto delle Marche** museums of sacred art. The Montalto delle Marche reliquary is well known as a masterpiece of French goldsmithing made in the 1300s, highlighted with gold, silver gilt and enamel reliefs, and adorned with gems, pearls and a cameo. The tour ends in **Force**, where the priceless articles exhibited in the small Museo Sistino of sacred art is linked uniquely to copper, a less prized material than gold, but used in applied arts to achieve authentic masterpieces.

ITINERARY 9

LEARN TO DO: TOOLS OF THE TRADE

The tour is a journey to discover the Piceno area’s specific and distinctive production through exhibits in local museums, handed down thanks to a cultural legacy of traditional knowledge, techniques, tools and manufacturing processes that not only tell the story of the place but also promote today’s applied arts. Indeed, in most cases the crafts and manufacturing processes shown in museums are linked to busy workshops, artisans and agri-food companies still applying traditional production techniques and customs. The itinerary starts in Ripatransone, home to an interesting collection of pottery on the first floor of the Museo Civico di Palazzo Bonomi Gera, as well as an original and unusual museum – Museo del Fischietto e del Vasaio – devoted to terracotta and its production. From Ripatransone we move on to **Offida**, whose traditional manufacturing calling for bobbin lace has its own dedicated bronze monument at the entrance to the town, with the bobbin lace Museum at Palazzo De Castellotti. The tour comes to an end in **Acquasanta Terme**, a well-known spa town in the upper Tronto valley, often referred to as the “travertine valley” due to the presence of quarries of this stone, particularly in the area between Acquasanta and Ascoli Piceno.

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