

EXCURSIONS

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It's easy to be blinded by Rome. Its legends, history and narcotic beauty make for a heady cocktail that can leave you breathless and hungover. The cure, if you have the time, is to give yourself a break, to get out for a day or two. The surrounding region of Lazio is well worth exploring, while further north the delights of Umbria are well chronicled. To the east, the brooding mountains of Abruzzo are a world apart.

Overshadowed by its capital, Lazio is a region that's not only beautiful – green and hilly in the north, parched and rugged in the south – but also rich in history and culture. In ancient times the wealthy built villas in the countryside and towns developed as fiefdoms of noble Roman families. Today Lazio's landscape is pockmarked with reminders of its ancient past. The most obvious place to start is Ostia Antica, imperial Rome's port. On the other side of Rome, to the east, the ruins of Emperor Hadrian's Villa Adriana complex in Tivoli are quite amazing.

To see something *really* old, however, head northwest to Etruria, the ancient land of the Etruscans. Cerveteri and Tarquinia were important centres between the 8th and 4th centuries BC and are today famous for their Etruscan treasures. Nearby, Viterbo retains enough of its medieval core to show what it must have been like in its 13th-century golden age.

In summer overheated Romans cool down by heading to the Castelli Romani, the green hills south of Rome, or by driving north to Bolsena, a charming medieval lake town. For the sea, the beaches at Sabaudia and Sperlonga are among the region's best.

Further afield, Umbria's hill-top towns are famously picturesque. The beautifully preserved Orvieto and Perugia are well connected with Rome and make for a great weekend break. In Abruzzo, L'Aquila sits in the shade of the Gran Sasso d'Italia, a massif of stark peaks capped by the Apennine's highest mountain, the Corno Grande (2914m).

All the places mentioned in this chapter are accessible by public transport, although to get to some of the smaller towns you'll need plenty of patience. Your own wheels will make life a lot easier (see p285 for details on car hire in Rome).

HILLS, MOUNTAINS, LAKES & THE SEA

When Rome's urban attractions begin to fade and you feel the call of nature, you're ideally placed to enjoy a breather in the countryside. Just 20km south of the city, the **Castelli Romani** (p278) is a picturesque area of lush vine-covered hills and pretty towns. The best-known are Frascati, a smart wine town with a lively *centro storico* (historic centre), and Castel Gandolfo, perched on a hill overlooking Lago di Albano, one of the area's two volcanic lakes (the other being Lago di Nemi).

For Lazio's largest lake, however, you'll have to travel to the very north of the region, to **Lago di Bolsena** (p270). It's too far for a day trip from Rome, but the lakeside town of Bolsena has a pretty medieval centre and plenty of accommodation.

If the idea of splashing around in fresh water doesn't appeal, head for the beach. The best of Lazio's beaches are about two hours south of Rome, near the border with Campania. Here whitewashed **Sperlonga** (p279) is ideal for an evening stroll after a soothing

day on the sand. Nearby, the Parco Nazionale del Circeo at **Sabaudia** (p279) is perfect for those who prefer watching birds to people.

For an absolute change of scene you can't beat the dark mountains and vast, silent valleys of Abruzzo. If you're up for it you can climb the Corno Grande, the rocky mountain that looms over Abruzzo's regional capital **L'Aquila** (p276), just over an hour away from Rome.

ANCIENT WONDERS

Given the wealth of Rome's ancient wonders, you might be surprised at just how many classical monuments lay strewn around the Lazio countryside. Chief among these are the ruins of Ancient Rome's port **Ostia Antica** (p266) and Villa Adriana in **Tivoli** (p277). The ruins at Ostia have been remarkably well preserved and are among the most impressive in the country. They are easily explored in a day and, unlike many of Rome's more famous ruins, are easy to interpret – as you walk down the skeletal streets you really can imagine how the town must once have looked. Villa Adriana, on the other hand, is not actually a town, although



its scale gives the impression of one. Emperor Hadrian's enormous palace complex provides a staggering example of the scale on which the Roman emperors operated.

Preceding the Romans, the Etruscans were a highly civilised people who provided many of the artistic and architectural techniques that the Romans subsequently adopted as their own. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, they originated in Asia Minor, moving to Italy in about 1000 BC. They were at their strongest between the 8th and 4th centuries BC, before being incorporated into the expanding Roman Republic in the 3rd century BC. Two of Etruria's major centres were **Cerveteri** (opposite) and **Tarquiniā** (p268). Both towns boast fascinating Unesco-listed tomb complexes that count among Lazio's most haunting sights.

MEDIEVAL MARVELS

The Middle Ages was an ugly period for Rome. Fighting among the city's aristocrats reduced much of the city to rubble, while Church feuding culminated in Pope Clement V transferring to Avignon in 1309. However, while Rome flourished, many of the hill-top towns in the surrounding areas flourished. In the north of Lazio, **Viterbo** (p269) became an important medieval centre and in the 13th century the popes established a residence there. Before that, though, it had already established a reputation as a thermal town and today its therapeutic hot springs still have an invigorating effect.

Over the regional border, in neighbouring Umbria, **Orvieto** (p271) owes its stunning Gothic cathedral, one of Italy's finest, to the munificence of a 13th-century pope who wanted to celebrate a miracle in Bolsena. At the same time, artists and architects in **Perugia** (p273) were taking inspiration from the violent atmosphere that surrounded them to create the beautiful hill-top centre that remains to this day.

OSTIA ANTICA

Founded by the Romans in the 4th century BC, Ostia (referring to the mouth or *ostium* of the River Tiber) became a great port town and later a strategic centre for defence and trade. Decline arrived in the 5th century AD when barbarian invasions and the outbreak of malaria led to the abandonment of the city and its slow burial – up to 2nd-floor level – in river silt, thanks to which it's survived so well. Pope Gregory IV re-established the town in the 9th century AD.

TRANSPORT

Distance from Rome 25km

Direction Southwest

Travel time 30 minutes (by train) to two hours (by boat)

Boat Batelli di Roma (p294) offers a return cruise from Rome to Ostia on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. It costs €13 and leaves Ponte Marconi in Rome at 10am, returning from Ostia at 2pm. Cruising time is just over two hours each way.

Car Take Via del Mare, parallel to Via Ostiense, and follow the signs for the *scavi* (ruins).

Train Take metro line B to Piramide, then the Ostia Lido train from Stazione Porta San Paolo (next to the metro station). Trains leave half-hourly and the 30-minute journey is covered by Rome's standard BIT tickets (see p284).

The beautifully preserved ruins (Scavi Archeologici di Ostia Antica; ☎ 06 563 52 830; www.ostiantica.info in Italian; Viale dei Romagnoli 717; adult/child €4/free, parking €2.50; 𠂆 8.30am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 8.30am-5pm Tue-Sun Mar, 8.30am-4pm Tue-Sun Nov-Feb) are quite spread out and you'll need a few hours to do them justice. You can buy a handy map of the site from the ticket office for €2 or take on one of the multilingual guides who roam the site; they usually charge €5 per person for a one-hour tour.

Ostia was a busy working port until AD 42, and the clearly discernible ruins of restaurants, laundries, shops, houses and public meeting places give a good impression of what life must have been like. The main thoroughfare, the Decumanus Maximus, runs over 1km from the city's entrance (the Porta Romana) to the Porta Marina, which originally led to the sea.

At one stage, Ostia had 20 baths complexes, including the **Terme di Foro**, which were equipped with a roomful of stone toilets (the *forica*) that still remain pretty much intact. The most-impressive mosaics on site are at the huge **Terme di Nettuno**, which occupied a whole block and dates to Hadrian's renovation of the port. Make sure you climb the elevated platform and look at the three enormous mosaics, including the stunning one of Neptune driving his sea-horse chariot and surrounded by sea monsters, mermaids and mermen. In the centre of the baths complex you'll find the remains of a large arcaded

courtyard called the Palaestra, in which athletes used to train. Here there's an impressive mosaic of four athletes engaged in boxing and wrestling.

Next to the Nettuno baths is a good-sized **amphitheatre**, built by Agrippa and later enlarged to hold 3000 people. By climbing to its top and looking over the site, you'll get a good idea of the original layout of the port.

Behind the amphitheatre is the **Piazza delle Corporazioni** (Forum of the Corporations), the offices of Ostia's merchants guilds, which sport well-preserved mosaics depicting the different interests of each business.

Further towards Porta Marina is the **thermopile**, a shop that sold hot food and drink and which bears a striking resemblance to a modern bar. Check out the central bar counter, the kitchen to the right and the small courtyard at the rear. Here customers would have sat next to the fountain and relaxed over a drink. Inside, it's still possible to discern remnants of a fresco advertising the bill of fare.

To the north, there's a complex comprising a cafeteria/bar, toilets, a gift shop and a **museum** (𠂆 9am-1.30pm & 2.15-6.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sun Mar, 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sun Nov-Feb), which houses statues and sarcophagi excavated on site.

Near the entrance to the excavations is the **Castello di Giulio II** (☎ 06 563 58 024; Piazza della Rocca; 𠂆 free guided tours at 10am & noon Tue-Sun), an impressive example of 15th-century military architecture.

INFORMATION

Ostia Antica (www.ostiantica.net)

EATING

Ristorante Monumento (☎ 06 565 00 21; Piazza Umberto I 8; meals €26) A historic restaurant near the ruins, this place specialises in homemade pasta and fish.

CERVETERI

Within easy day-trip distance of Rome, Cerveteri's Unesco-listed Etruscan tombs make for one of the strangest and most memorable sights in Lazio. Cerveteri, or Kysry to the Etruscans and Caere to Latin-speakers, was one of the most important commercial centres in the Mediterranean from the 7th to the 5th centuries BC. However, as Roman power

grew, so Cerveteri's fortunes faded, and in 358 BC the Etruscan city was annexed by Rome.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, the spread of malaria and repeated Saracen invasions caused further decline. In the 13th century there was a mass exodus from the city to the nearby town of Ceri, and Caere became Caere Vetus (Old Caere), from which its current name derives. The first half of the 19th century saw the first tentative archaeological explorations in the area, and in 1911 systematic excavations began in earnest.

The tomb complex, the **Necropoli di Banditaccia** (☎ 06 994 00 01; Via del Necropoli; admission €4, incl museum €6.50; 𠂆 8.30am-6.30pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 8.30am-3.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-Apr) is 2km out of town. To get there take the hourly shuttle bus (€0.80) from the tourist information point in the town centre. Alternatively, you can follow the well-signposted road – it's a pleasant 20-minute walk.

The tombs are built into *tumoli* (mounds of grass-covered earth with carved stone bases), laid out in the form of a town, with streets, squares and terraces of 'houses'. The result is a strange and haunting landscape. Signs indicate the path to follow and some of the major tombs, including the 4th-century-BC **Tomba dei Rilievi**, are decorated with painted reliefs of figures from the underworld, cooking implements and other household items.

If you can't make the tombs the next best thing is a visit to the **Museo Nazionale di Cerveteri** (☎ 06 994 13 54; Piazza Santa Maria; admission €4, incl necropolis €6.50; 𠂆 8.30am-6.30pm Tue-Sun) in the medieval town centre.

INFORMATION

Tourist information point (☎ 06 995 52 637; Piazza Aldo Moro; 𠂆 10am-12.30pm & 4.30-6.30pm May-Sep, 10am-12.30pm Oct-Apr)

TRANSPORT

Distance from Rome 35km

Direction Northwest

Travel time 40 to 90 minutes

Bus Catch a Cotral bus (€2.50, 65 to 90 minutes, half-hourly from 7.30am to 9pm) from outside the Cornelia metro stop on metro line A.

Car Take either Via Aurelia (SS1) or the Civitavecchia autostrada (A12) and exit at Cerveteri-Ladispoli.

EATING

Antica Locanda le Ginestre (% 06 994 06 72; Piazza Santa Maria 5; meals €45; 1 Tue-Sun) Considered one of the best restaurants in Lazio, this family-run eatery attracts diners from all over the region. The delicious food is prepared with organically grown local produce and is served in the elegant dining room or flower-filled courtyard garden. Book if you want a table on a weekend or holiday.

TARQUINIA

It's a long day trip from Rome to Tarquinia, the most famous of Lazio's Etruscan centres, but your efforts are amply rewarded. The town is home to a beautiful tomb complex, the best Etruscan museum outside of Rome and an atmospheric medieval quarter. According to legend Tarquinia was founded towards the end of the Bronze Age in the 12th century BC. It later became the seat of the Tarquin kings of Rome before the creation of the Roman Republic, reaching its prime in the 4th century BC. After a century of struggle the town surrendered to Rome in 204 BC.

On the edge of the *centro storico*, the 15th-century Palazzo Vitelleschi houses the impressive **Museo Nazionale Tarquiniese** (% 0766 85 60 36; Piazza Cavour; adult/child €4/2, incl necropolis €6.50/3.25; 1 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun). Here you'll find frescoes removed from nearby excavations, including a beautiful terracotta frieze of winged horses (the *Cavalli Alati*), sarcophagi, jewellery and, in Sala VI, a collection of erotic tableware. Also on the ground floor, in Sala IX, the *Sarcofago con Cerbiatto* is a model of 4th-century-BC workmanship, showing a half-naked reclining woman holding a plate from which a long-necked dog (the *cerbiatto*) is drinking.

TRANSPORT

Distance from Rome 90km

Direction Northwest

Travel time 1½ hours

Bus Cotral buses (€3.80) leave approximately every hour from the Saxa Rubra station on the Ferrovía Roma-Nord train line, arriving at the Barriera San Giusto (medieval gate). The last bus leaves Tarquinia for Rome at 8.35pm.

Car Take the Civitavecchia autostrada (A12) then Via Aurelia (SS1).

Train Departures daily from Stazione Termini (€5.60, 1¼ hours, every one to two hours from 10.08am). Buy a return ticket as the ticket office in Tarquinia opens only in the morning. At Tarquinia station, you'll need to catch the Line BC shuttle bus to the centre of town. The last train leaves Tarquinia for Rome at 8.28pm.

To see Tarquinia's famous painted tombs *in situ*, head for the **necropolis** (% 0766 85 63 08; adult/child €4/2, incl Museo Nazionale Tarquiniese €6.50; 1 8.30am-7.30pm May-Sep, 8.30am-2pm Oct-Apr), 2km out of town. Almost 6000 tombs, of which 60 are painted, have been excavated since the first digs in 1489. Now protected by Unesco, the tombs have suffered centuries of exposure and are consequently visible only through glass partitions. On any given day only a selection are open to the public. There are some beautiful hunting and fishing scenes in the Tomba della Caccia e della Pesca; scenes featuring dancers, lionesses and dolphins in the Tomba delle Leonesse; and a smutty Dionysian-influenced scene of a man whipping a woman in the Tomba della Fustigazione.

To get to the necropolis from Piazza Cavour, walk up Corso Vittorio Emanuele and turn right at Piazza Nazionale into Via di Porta Tarquinia. Continue past the Chiesa di San Francesco and then down Via Ripagretta until you see the necropolis on your left. Alternatively, a shuttle bus leaves from outside the tourist office every 30 to 45 minutes from 9am to 10.50am and from 2pm to 4.40pm, returning to town five minutes after it arrives at the necropolis.

INFORMATION

Tourist office (% 0766 85 63 84; Piazza Cavour 1;

1 8am-2pm Mon-Sat) On your left as you walk through the town's medieval gate (Barriera San Giusto).

EATING & SLEEPING

Il Cavatappi (% 0766 84 23 03; Via dei Granari 2; meals €25; 1 Thu-Tue) One of a number of decent lunch spots in the *centro storico*, this family-run trattoria specialises in dishes made with local products.

Hotel San Marco (% 0766 84 22 34; www.san-marco.com; Piazza Cavour 18; d €65-75) If you need to stay over, this friendly little hotel has bright, unfussy rooms opposite the Museo Nazionale Tarquiniese. Noise from the downstairs American-style bar can be a nuisance, though.

VITERBO

Despite sustaining heavy bomb damage in WWII, Viterbo is Lazio's best-preserved medieval town. Founded by the Etruscans and eventually taken over by Rome, it developed into an important medieval centre, and in the 13th century became the residence of the popes.

Viterbo's main sights are squeezed into the walled *centro storico*, a small area easily covered on foot.

The focal square, the Renaissance **Piazza del Plebiscito**, is flanked by elegant *palazzi* (mansions), of which the most impressive is the 15th-century **Palazzo dei Priori** (admission free; 1 10am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm). Now home to the town council, the *palazzo* is worth a quick look for the 16th-century frescoes that colourfully depict Viterbo's ancient origins. You'll find the best in the Sala Regia on the 1st floor. Outside, the elegant courtyard and fountain were added two centuries after the *palazzo* was built in 1460.

To the southwest, **Piazza San Lorenzo** is the religious heart of the medieval city. It was here that the cardinals came to vote for their popes and pray in the 12th-century **cathedral** (Cattedrale di San Lorenzo; % 0761 32 54 62). Next door, the **Museo del Colle del Duomo** (admission incl Sala del Conclave in Palazzo dei Papi €3; 1 9.30am-1pm & 3-8pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-6pm Sun Oct-Mar) displays a small collection of religious artefacts.

On the northern side of the square, the 13th-century **Palazzo dei Papi** (% 0761 34 17 16; 1 visits by appointment only) was built to entice the papacy away from Rome. Go up the stairs to the graceful Gothic loggia to peer into the **Sala del Conclave**, the hall where five popes were elected. In 1271 the entire college of cardinals was briefly imprisoned here. The story goes that after three years of deliberation the cardinals still hadn't elected a new pope. Mad with frustration, the townspeople locked the dithering priests in a turreted hall and starved them into electing Pope Gregory X.

Nearby, the Romanesque **Chiesa di Santa Maria Nuova** (Piazza Santa Maria Nuova; 1 10am-1pm & 3-5pm)

TRANSPORT

Distance from Rome 105km

Direction Northwest

Travel time 1½ to two hours

Bus Cotral buses (€3.30, 1½ to two hours, half-hourly) depart from the Saxa Rubra station on the Ferrovía Roma-Nord train line. In Viterbo, get off at Porta Romana.

Car Take Via Cassia (SS2). Once in Viterbo, the best bet for parking is either Piazza Martiri d'Ungheria or Piazza della Rocca.

Train Direct trains depart hourly (€4.10, 1¼ hours) from Rome's Ostiense station for Stazione Porta Romana. There are also trains from Valle Aurelia station (next to the metro station on Line A), often changing at Cesano (€3.70, 1½ hours).

is the oldest church in Viterbo. It boasts some lovely cloisters, believed to date from an earlier period, and was restored after bomb damage in WWII.

To the south of the church lies the remarkably well-preserved medieval quarter. Wander down Via San Pellegrino with its low-slung arches and claustrophobic grey houses to pint-sized **Piazza San Pellegrino**. While in the area, pop into the **Museo del Sodalizio dei Facchini di Santa Rosa** (% 0761 34 51 57; Via San Pellegrino 60; admission free; 1 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Wed-Sun Apr-Sep, 3-5.30pm Fri, 10am-1pm & 3-5.30pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar) to learn the history of the Machine of St Rose, the 30m-high construction that is carted around town during Viterbo's annual 3 September festival.

For a shot of Etruscan culture, head to the **Museo Archeologico Nazionale** (% 0761 32 59 29; Piazza della Rocca; admission €4; 1 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun), housed in an attractive *palazzo* by the northern entrance to the town. Not a big place, it has an interesting collection of Etruscan artefacts taken from local digs and, on the 1st floor, an impressive series of statues dedicated to the Muses.

A short walk away is the **Chiesa di San Francesco** (% 0761 34 16 96; Piazza San Francesco; 1 8am-noon & 3.30-7pm), a Gothic church containing the tombs of two popes: Clement IV (died 1268) and Adrian V (died 1276). Both are attractively decorated, notably that of Adrian, which features Cosmati work (see p33).

On the other side of town, the **Museo Civico** (% 0761 34 82 75; Piazza Crispi; admission €3.10) features

DETOUR: THERMAL SPRINGS

Originally used by both the Etruscans and the Romans, Viterbo's famous thermal springs are concentrated in an area 3km west of town.

The easiest to get to are the **Terme dei Papi** (‰ 0761 35 01; Strata Bagno 12;   pool 9am-7pm Wed-Sun), where you can take a dip in the sulphurous pool (€12 Wednesday to Saturday, €15 Sunday), have an invigorating massage (€25 to €100) or treat yourself to a goopy mud bath (about €60). Take city bus 2 (2F on Sundays) from Piazza Martiri d'Ungheria in Viterbo. Specialist and therapeutic mud and water treatments cost much more and need to be booked in advance.

yet more Etruscan goodies and a small art gallery, the highlight of which is Sebastiano del Piombo's *Pietà*. At the time of research the museum was closed for restoration.

INFORMATION

Tourist office (‰ 0761 32 59 92; www.provincia.vt.it in Italian; Via F. Ascenzi;   10am-1pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Sat) Ask for the useful (and free) booklet *Ospitalità Toscana*.

EATING & SLEEPING

Ristorante Tre Re (‰ 0761 30 46 19; Via Macel Gattesco 3; meals €22;   Fri-Wed) A great bet for steaming plates of tasty local food. House specialities include *acquapazza Viterbese*, a scalding soup of chicory, potatoes and tomatoes, and *pollo alla Viterbese*, roast chicken stuffed with spiced potato and green olives.

Tuscia Hotel (‰ 0761 34 44 00; www.tusciahotel.com; Via Cairoli 41; s €49-56, d €74-82; a) A serviceable town-centre three-star with large, light rooms. Parking is available on request and costs an extra €7.

LAGO DI BOLSENA

Set in lush rolling countryside a few kilometres short of the regional border with Umbria, Lago di Bolsena is the largest and northernmost of Lazio's lakes. The lake's main town is Bolsena, a charming, low-key place that, despite a heavy hotel presence, retains its medieval character.

Like many Italian towns, Bolsena has its own miracle story. In 1263 a priest saying mass noticed blood dripping from the bread he was

blessing. Science was unable to prove that it wasn't a miracle and Pope Urban IV promptly founded the festival of Corpus Domini to celebrate – each June the townspeople hold a 3km procession and decorate the town with flowers. The miracle is famously depicted in Raphael's *Messa di Bolsena* (Mass of Bolsena) in the Vatican Museums' Stanze di Raffaello (p136).

There's not a huge amount to see in Bolsena but what there is in the medieval centre. To find evidence of the town's miracle head to the 11th-century **Basilica di Santa Cristina** (‰ 0761 79 90 67; Piazza Santa Cristina;   7.15am-12.45pm & 3.30-7.45pm Easter-Sep, 7.15am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Oct-Easter), where you'll find four stones stained with the miraculous blood. Beneath the basilica are a series of **catacombs** (admission €4;   9.30am-noon & 3.30-6.30pm Easter-Sep, 9.30-11.30am & 3-4.30pm Oct-Easter), noteworthy for a number of tombs that are still sealed.

For superb views over the lake climb up to the **Castello Monaldeschi** (‰ 0761 79 86 30; admission castle €3.50, panoramic walkway €2;   10am-1pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Sat & Sun) at the top of the hill. Originally built between the 13th and 16th centuries, the castle was pulled down by locals in 1815 to prevent it from being taken by the French invader Luciano Bonaparte. It now houses the Museo Territoriale del Lago di Bolsena, covering the area's volcanic geology.

INFORMATION

Tourist office (‰ 0761 79 99 23; Piazza Matteotti;   9.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm daily May-Sep, 9.30am-12.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr)

EATING & SLEEPING

Trattoria Pizzeria del Moro (‰ 0761 79 88 10; Piazza Dante Alighieri 5; meals €25) On a pier jutting into the lake, this trattoria specialises in fresh fish and local eel.

TRANSPORT

Distance from Rome 150km

Direction Northwest

Travel time 1½ to 2½ hours

Bus From Viterbo (see p269) take one of the infrequent Cotral buses (€2.50, 50 minutes).

Car Take Via Cassia (SS2) to Viterbo and follow the signs to Bolsena.

DETOUR: MONTEFIASCONE

If you have your own wheels, Montefiascone is a good place to stock up on wine. Near the southern shores of Lago di Bolsena, the town is home to the famous white wine Est! Est!! Est!!! According to local lore a travelling monk wrote *est!* (Latin for 'it is') on cellar doors to indicate the places where the wine was good. On arriving at Montefiascone he was so overcome by the quality of the local tipple that he exclaimed '*Est! Est! Est!*'. Modern critics have been less kind, deriding it as little more than trattoria plonk. However, in recent years it has improved considerably and it's now being taken seriously by buffs. Load up at the **Cantina di Montefiascone** (‰ 0761 25 11 30; Via Grilli 2;   8am-1pm & 3-7pm), just off Via Cassia (SS2) south of town.

Hotel Columbus (‰ 0761 79 90 09; www.atihotels.it; Viale Colesanti 27; s €45-79, d €60-96) Value for money and a central lakeside location are what you get at this modern three-star. Rooms are comfortable if bland.

ORVIETO

Home to one of Italy's most magnificent Gothic cathedrals, medieval Orvieto is a favourite of tour operators and gets very crowded, particularly in summer when busloads of tourists pour in for the day. But try not to let that put you off, as it really is a striking town, well worth a visit. Perched precariously on a cliff made of the area's tufa stone, it counts among its many attractions an important collection of Etruscan artefacts and a series of ancient underground caves.

To get to the main sights catch bus 1 from the train station or take the funicular up to Piazza Cahen at the eastern end of the old town. For those with cars, there's plenty of parking space in Piazza Cahen and in several designated areas outside the old city walls.

A good investment is the **Carta Unica** (adult/concession €18/15), which includes five hours' free parking, a return trip on the cable car as well as free bus transport, and admission (only once) to the Cappella di San Brizio in the cathedral, Museo Claudio Faina e Civico, Orvieto Underground, Torre del Moro, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo and the Crocifisso del Tufo necropolis (the last is just outside of town, at the foot of the rock massif on which Orvieto stands). It's available at participating sites, the Campo della Fiera car park, the tourist office and the funicular car park.

Little can prepare you for the visual feast that is the **cathedral** (‰ 0763 34 11 67; Piazza Duomo;   7.30am-12.45pm & 2.30-7.15pm Apr-Sep, 7.30am-12.45pm & 2.30-6.15pm Mar & Oct, 7.30am-12.45pm & 2.30-5.15pm Nov-Feb). Started in 1290, it was originally planned in the Romanesque style but, as work proceeded and architects changed, Gothic

features were incorporated. The black-and-white marble banding of the main body of the church is overshadowed by the rich rainbow colours of the façade.

Pope Urban IV commissioned the cathedral to celebrate the Miracle of Bolsena (see opposite) in 1263, but it took 30 years to plan and three centuries to complete. It was probably started by Fra Bevignate and later additions were made by Lorenzo Maitani, Andrea Pisano and his son Nino Pisano, Andrea Orcagna and Michele Saniceli. The great bronze doors, the work of Emilio Greco, were added in the 1960s.

Inside, Luca Signorelli's fresco cycle, *Il Giudizio Universale* (The Last Judgment), shimmers with life in the **Cappella di San Brizio** (admission €5;   closed during Mass), to the right of the altar. Signorelli began work on the series in 1499, and Michelangelo is said to have taken inspiration from it for his Sistine Chapel masterpiece. Indeed, to some, Michelangelo's version runs a close second to Signorelli's work. The **Cappella del Corporale** (admission free;   7.30am-12.45pm & 2.30-7.15pm May-Sep, varies Oct-Apr, closed during Mass) houses the blood-stained altar linen of the Bolsena miracle and features frescoes by Ugolino di Prete Ilario that depict the miracle.

Next to the cathedral is the **Museo dell'Opera del Duomo** (‰ 0763 34 24 77; Palazzo Soliano, Piazza Duomo; adult/concession €5/4;   10am-1pm & 3-7pm daily Jul & Aug, 10am-6pm daily Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct, 10am-5pm Wed-Mon Nov-Mar), which houses a clutter of religious relics from the cathedral, as well as Etruscan antiquities and works by artists such as Simone Martini and the three Pisanos: Andrea, Nino and Giovanni.

Around the corner in the **Palazzo Papale**, you can see Etruscan antiquities in the **Museo Archeologico Nazionale** (‰ /fax 0763 34 10 39; Piazza Duomo; adult/concession €3/1.50;   8.30am-7.30pm) and the much more interesting **Museo Claudio Faina e Civico** (‰ 0763 34 15 11; www.museofaina.it; Piazza Duomo 29; adult/concession €4.50/3;   9.30am-6pm daily Apr-Sep,

TRANSPORT

Distance from Rome 120km

Direction Northwest

Travel time 1¼ to 1½ hours

Bus Bargagli (☎ 057 778 62 23) runs a daily bus service to Rome (€8, one hour 20 minutes, 8.10am and 7.10pm). From Rome, buses depart from Stazi-one Tiburtina twice daily, at 3.15pm and 9pm.

Car The city is on the A1 north-south autostrada.

Train Hourly trains depart from Rome's Stazione Termini (€7.10, 1¼ hours).

10am-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar). Here you'll find one of Italy's most important collections of Etruscan archaeological artefacts, as well as some significant Greek ceramic works, mostly found near Piazza Cahen in tombs dating back to the 6th century BC.

Head northwest along Via del Duomo to Corso Cavour and the **Torre del Moro** (Moor's Tower; ☎ 0763 34 45 67; Corso Cavour 87; adult/concession €2.80/2; 10am-8pm May-Aug, 10am-7pm Mar, Apr, Sep & Oct, 10.30am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Nov-Feb). Climb all 250 steps and you're rewarded with sweeping views of the city. Nearby, in Piazza della Repubblica, stands the 12th-century **Chiesa di Sant'Andrea** (11 8.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-7.30pm) with its curious decagonal bell tower. Continue west and you come to the 11th-century **Chiesa di San Giovenale** (Piazza Giovenale; 11 8am-12.30pm & 3.30-6pm), its interior brightened by 13th- and 14th-century frescoes.

Standing watch at the town's easternmost tip is the 14th-century rock fortress, **La Rocca**, part of which is now a public garden. To the north of the fortress, the **Pozzo di San Patrizio** (St Patrick's Well; ☎ 0763 34 37 68; Viale Sangallo; adult/concession €4.50/3.50; 11 9am-8pm May-Aug, 9am-7pm Mar, Apr, Sep & Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb) is a 60m-deep well, lined by two spiral staircases for water-bearing mules.

The coolest place in Orvieto – literally – is **Orvieto Underground** (☎ 0763 34 06 88; Parco delle Grotte; adult/concession €5.50/3.30; 11 tours 11am, 12.15pm, 4pm & 5.15pm daily Mar-Jan, Sat & Sun only Feb), a series of 440 caves that have been used for millennia for various purposes. Tours (with English-speaking guides) take you through several that were used as WWII bomb shelters, refrigerators, wells and, during many a siege, dovecotes to trap pigeons for dinner (still seen on local restaurant menus as *palombo*).

INFORMATION

Information office (☎ 0763 30 23 78; Piazza della Pace; 11 9am-4pm) At the bottom of the funicular.

Tourist office (☎ 0763 34 17 72; info@iat.orvieto.tr.it; Piazza Duomo 24; 11 8.15am-1.50pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Sat, Sun & holidays)

EATING

Ristorante Zeppelin (☎ 0763 34 14 47; Via Garibaldi 28; meals €32; 11 Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) **Jazz-cool** restaurant serving creative Umbrian food; enjoy menus for vegetarians (€25), children (€20), truffle lovers (€40) and traditionalists (€25).

L'Asino d'Oro (☎ 0763 34 44 06; Vicolo del Popolo 9; meals €28; 11 Tue-Sun) Innovative food at affordable trattoria prices is the speciality of the house. Dishes such as a smoked streaky bacon with radicchio appetiser and *cinghiale in agri-dolce* (sweet-and-sour boar) are typical.

Ristorante La Pergola (☎ 0763 34 30 65; Via dei Magoni 9b; meals €26; 11 Thu-Tue) Sit down to hearty Umbrian fare served in a delightful, flower-filled garden.

Cantina Foresi (☎ 0763 34 16 11; Piazza del Duomo 2; snacks from €4.50) A family-run *enoteca* (wine bar) serving *panini* (bread rolls) and sausages, washed down with local wine from the ancient cellar.

SLEEPING

Hotel Maitani (☎ 0763 34 20 11; www.hotelmaitani.com; Via Lorenzo Maitani 5; s/d/ste €71/126/170; P) Pillow chocolates and cathedral views (in some rooms) are a winning combination at this thoughtful hotel.

Hotel Corso (☎ 0763 34 20 20; www.hotelcorso.net; Corso Cavour 343; s €50-64, d €80-87; a i) **For snug**

DETOUR: CIVITA DI BAGNOREGIO

An abandoned village perched atop a huge crumbling rock in the middle of a barren ravine, Civita di Bagnoregio is a unique sight. There's not much to do other than enjoy the views, but if you're in the area it's definitely worth a look.

Just 25km south of Orvieto, the village is accessible by a footbridge from Bagnoregio. There's a car park at the base of the walkway or you can get a shuttle bus from Piazza Battaglini in Bagnoregio to the bridge. To reach Bagnoregio from Orvieto take the SS71 south and turn off left onto the SP130.

rooms with wooden-beamed ceilings, terracotta bricks and antique cherry furniture.

B&B Valentina (☎ 393 970 58 68; valentina.z@tiscalinet.it; Via Vivaria 7; s/d/tr €50/70/90) A homely B&B offering casually elegant, spacious rooms. Valentina lives downstairs with two friendly dogs.

PERUGIA

Too far from Rome to cover in a day, Perugia merits a night's stopover. One of Italy's best-preserved medieval hill towns, it's a lively student centre famous for its chocolate and annual jazz festival (Umbria Jazz, p275).

The city has a lively and bloody past. Founded by the Etruscans, it reached its zenith in the 6th century BC and fell to the Romans in 310 BC. During the Middle Ages it was racked by bloody internal feuding and violent wars against its neighbours, wars that continued long after the city was incorporated into the Papal States by Pope Paul III in 1538. For three centuries Perugia remained under papal control.

The city also has a strong artistic and cultural tradition. In the 15th century it was home to fresco painters Bernardino Pinturicchio and his master Pietro Vannucci (known as Perugino), who would later teach Raphael. The city also attracted the great Tuscan masters Fra Angelico and Piero della Francesca.

Perugia's most noteworthy sights are crammed into the hill-top *centro storico*, 1.5km above the train station.

The city's focal point is **Piazza IV Novembre**, a popular hang-out for guitar-strumming students and gelato-eating tourists. Looming over the square is Perugia's austere **Duomo** (Cathedral of San Lorenzo; ☎ 075 572 38 32; Piazza IV Novembre; 11 10am-1pm & 2.30-5.30pm Tue-Sun). Built between 1345 and 1587, it's home to the city's most prized relic – the Virgin Mary's wedding ring. On 30 July you can witness the annual unveiling of the ring, usually locked inside 15 boxes.

In the centre of the square stands the **Fontana Maggiore** (Great Fountain), designed by Fra Bevignate but sculpted by father-and-son duo Nicola and Giovanni Pisano between 1275 and 1278. Along the edge are bas-relief statues representing scenes from the Old Testament, the founding of Rome, and a griffin and lion. Look for the griffin all over Perugia – it's the city's symbol.

On the southern side of the piazza, the block-long **Palazzo dei Priori** houses Perugia's

TRANSPORT

Distance from Rome 170km

Direction North

Travel time 2½ to three hours

Bus Sulga (☎ 800 09 96 61; www.sulga.it) buses depart from Piazza dei Partigiani to Rome (€15, three hours, five daily). From Rome, there are six departures daily from Stazione Tiburtina.

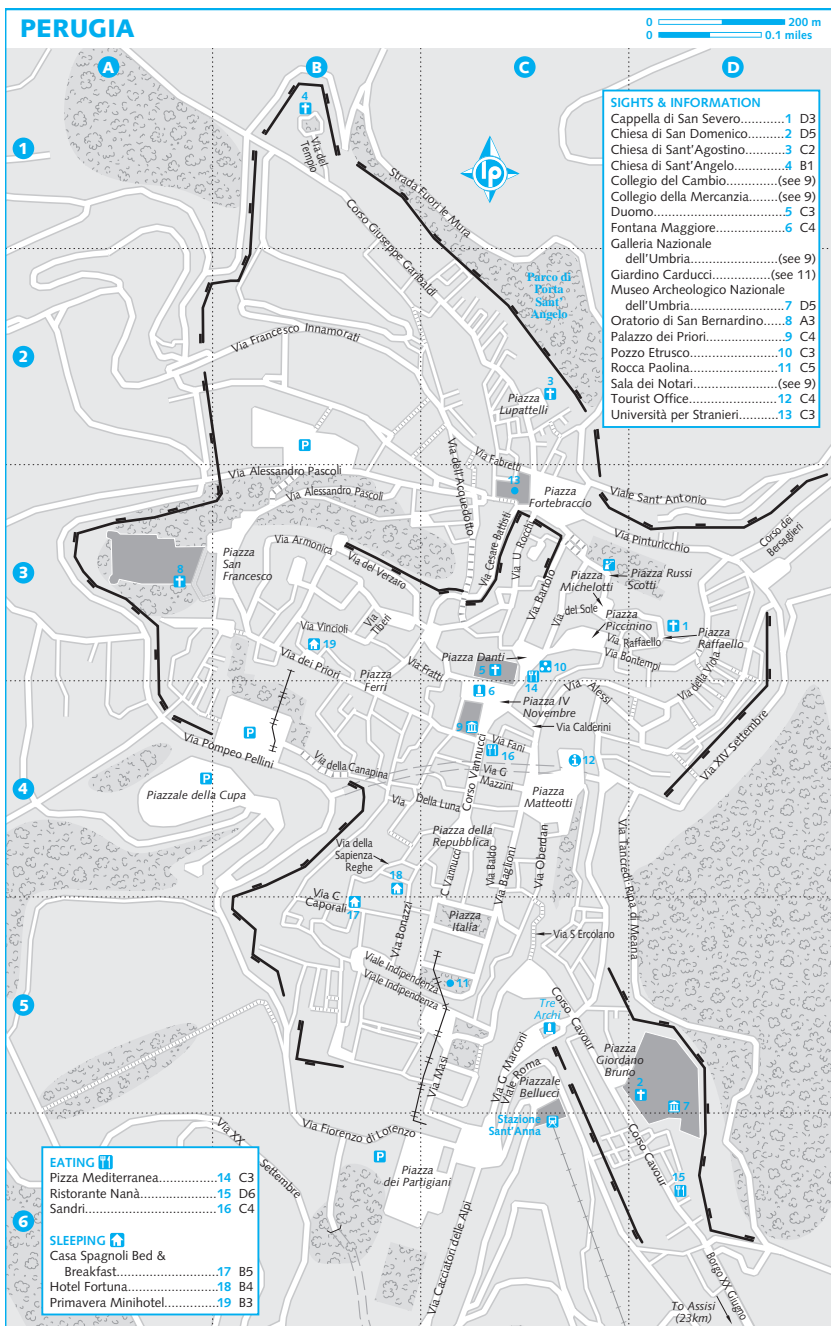
Car Take the A1 autostrada north from Rome, exit at Orte and follow the signs for Perugia.

Train Regular trains connect Perugia with Rome (€10 to €18.45, 2½ hours). Perugia's train station, Stazione Fontivegge, is 1.5km west of the city centre but regular buses (6, 7, 9, 11 and 15) run to Piazza Italia.

municipal offices as well as four of Umbria's best-known museums. Start in the stunning **Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria** (National Gallery of Umbria; ☎ 800 69 76 16; Corso Vannucci 19; adult/concession €6.50/3.25; 11 8.30am-7.30pm), whose comprehensive collection features numerous Byzantine-inspired paintings from the 13th century, as well as works by local heroes Pinturicchio and Perugino.

The three other museums are the gilded **Collegio del Cambio** (Exchange Hall; ☎ 075 572 85 99; Corso Vannucci 25; admission incl Collegio della Mercanzia €3.10; 11 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm daily Mar-Oct, 9am-2pm Tue-Sun Nov-Feb), which has some superb frescoes by Perugino; the **Collegio della Mercanzia** (Merchant's Hall; ☎ 075 573 03 66; admission incl Collegio del Cambio €3.10; 11 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm daily Mar-Oct, 9am-2pm Tue-Sun Nov-Feb), the former seat of the city's powerful Renaissance-era merchants; and the 13th-century **Sala dei Notari** (Notaries' Hall; ☎ 075 574 12 74; Piazza IV Novembre 3; admission free; 11 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun), where the nobility used to meet. Here, the arches supporting the vaults are Romanesque, covered with frescoes depicting biblical scenes and Aesop's fables. To reach the hall, walk up the steps from Piazza IV Novembre.

Just off the southern end of Corso Vannucci is the tiny **Giardini Carducci**, which has lovely views of the countryside. The gardens stand atop a 16th-century fortress, known as the **Rocca Paolina** (main entrance Piazza Italia, entrances on Via Marzia, Via Masi & Viale Indipendenza; admission free; 11 8am-7pm), which was built by Pope Paul III in the 1540s over a medieval quarter formerly inhabited



by some of the city's most powerful families. Destroyed by the townspeople after Italian unification, it is now used as the thoroughway for Perugia's *scale mobili* (public escalators) and to host temporary art exhibitions.

Continuing further south, along Corso Cavour, the early-14th-century **Chiesa di San Domenico** (☎ 075 573 15 68; Piazza Giordano Bruno; ☎ 8am-noon & 4pm-sunset) is the city's largest church. Its Romanesque interior was replaced by austere Gothic fittings in the 16th century. Pope Benedict XI, who died after eating poisoned figs in 1325, lies buried here. The adjoining convent is home to the **Museo Archeologico Nazionale dell'Umbria** (☎ 075 572 71 41; Piazza Giordano Bruno 10; adult/concession €4/2; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun, 10am-7.30pm Mon), which has a choice collection of Etruscan and prehistoric artefacts dating back to the 16th century BC.

A short walk away, the **Medieval Gardens** (☎ 075 585 64 32; Borgo XX Giugno 74; admission free; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri) are a great place to picnic.

At the other end of town, northeast of Piazza IV Novembre, you can venture down the 3rd-century-BC **Pozzo Etrusco** (Etruscan Well; ☎ 075 573 36 69; Piazza Danti 18; adult/child €2.50/1; ☎ 10.30am-1.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Wed-Mon Apr-Oct, 10.30am-1.30pm & 2.30-4.30pm Wed-Mon Nov-Mar). The 36m-deep well was the main water reservoir of the Etruscan town, and, more recently, the source of water during WWII bombing raids. Nearby, the **Cappella di San Severo** (☎ 075 573 38 64; Piazza Raffaello; adult/child €2.50/1; ☎ 10.30am-1.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mar-Oct, 10.30am-1.30pm & 2.30-4.30pm Nov-Feb) is decorated with Raphael's *Trinity with Saints* (thought by many to be his first fresco) and frescoes by Perugino.

Heading north from the **Università per Stranieri** (University for Foreigners; ☎ 075 5 74 61; www.unistrapg.it; Piazza Fortebraccio 4), Italy's foremost academic institution for foreigners, Corso Giuseppe Garibaldi

leads to the **Chiesa di Sant'Agostino** (Piazza Lupatelli; ☎ 8am-noon & 4pm-sunset), noteworthy for a beautiful 16th-century choir by Baccio d'Agnolo. Further north, Via del Tempio branches off to the 5th-century **Chiesa di Sant'Angelo** (☎ 075 57 22 64; Via Sant'Angelo; ☎ 10am-noon & 4-6pm), one of Italy's oldest churches, which is said to stand on the site of a pagan temple.

Near the city's western walls, Piazza San Francesco is home to the 15th-century **Oratorio di San Bernardino** (☎ 075 573 39 57; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 3-6pm), the impressive façade of which is decorated with bas-reliefs by the early Renaissance sculptor Agostino di Duccio.

INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 075 573 64 58; info@iat.perugia.it; Piazza Matteotti 18; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Umbria Jazz (☎ 800 46 23 11, 075 500 11 07; www.umbriajazz.com in Italian) attracts top-notch international performers for 10 days each July, usually around the middle of the month. Single tickets cost €10 to €100, and week-long or weekend passes are also available.

EATING

Ristorante Nana (☎ 075 573 35 71; Corso Cavour 206; meals €25; ☎ Mon-Sat) A family-run trattoria with a small creative menu – think pâté with Sardinian flatbread or *gnocchetti* in pepper and radicchio cream sauce.

Pizzeria Mediterranea (☎ 075 572 13 22; Piazza Piccinino 11/12; meals €11; ☎ Wed-Mon) Too-cool-to-smile

waitresses dish out Perugia's best pizza to appreciative locals.

Sandri (☎ 075 572 41 12; Corso Vannucci 32) Tasty café for delectable chocolate cakes, candied fruit, espresso and pastries.

SLEEPING

Hotel Fortuna (☎ 075 572 28 45; www.umbriahotels.com; Via Bonazzi 9; s €69-98, d €99-128; a i) Ancient stone, frescoes and Venetian plaster walls sit alongside new furnishings and modern bathrooms at this spotless hotel.

Primavera Minihotel (☎ 075 572 1657; www.primavera.minihotel.it; Via Vincioili 8; s €42-48, d €60-70; a i) Central yet quiet, this place has magnificent views and bright, airy rooms. Great value for money.

Casa Spagnoli Bed & Breakfast (☎ 075 573 51 27; www.perugiaonline.com/bbspagnoli; Via C Caporali 17; with shared bathroom s €30-38, d €50-58) A homely B&B perfectly located near Piazza Italia.

L'AQUILA

Although there's not a whole lot to see in L'Aquila (Abruzzo's regional capital), its proximity to the magnificent Parco Nazionale del Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga makes it an attractive escape from Rome. Overshadowed by the Gran Sasso d'Italia, it's not entirely bereft of charm, with a foreboding fort, a stunning 13th-century basilica and a fountain with 93 spewing gargoyles.

Known locally as the **Forte Spagnolo** (Spanish Fort), L'Aquila's austere 16th-century castle was built after an unsuccessful rebellion against the city's Spanish rulers in 1528. At the northeastern corner of the *centro storico*, it houses the **Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo** (☎ 0862 63 34 00; Castello Cinquecentesco; admission €4; 11 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun) and its collection of local archaeological finds and religious art. The surprise highlight is the skeleton of a million-year-old mammoth, unearthed near the city in 1954.

At the other end of the walled centre, the strikingly geometric **Basilica di Santa Maria di Collemaggio** (☎ 0862 2 63 92; Piazzale di Collemaggio; 11 8.30am-1pm & 3-8pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-8pm Sat & Sun) is Abruzzo's most famous church. Its square pink-and-white quilt-pattern façade is a beautiful marriage of architectural styles: the intricate rose windows are typically Gothic while the imposing central portal is pure Romanesque.

TRANSPORT

Distance from Rome 110km

Direction Northeast

Travel time About two hours

Bus ARPA (☎ 0862 41 28 08; www.arpaonline.it) runs buses to and from Stazione Tiburtina (€9.10, 1½ hours, 19 daily).

Car Take the A24 autostrada east from Rome.

Consecrated in 1288, the basilica became an important religious centre in 1294 when Pietro del Morrone was crowned Pope Celestine V here. As founder of the Celestine order, he was canonised in 1303, seven years after his death, and his tomb lies inside the basilica.

A monument to L'Aquila's magic number, the 13th-century **Fontana delle 99 Cannelle** (Fountain of the 99 Spouts) is misnamed – there are, in fact, only 93 spewing gargoyles. Surrounded by a wall of pink-and-white stone, the 13th-century fountain is one of the few supplies of fresh water that has proved reliable throughout the city's earthquake-prone past.

About 20km northeast of L'Aquila, Fonte Cerreto is the main access point for the Gran Sasso and **Campo Imperatore** (2117m), a desolate highland plain where Mussolini was briefly imprisoned in 1943. A **funivia** (cable car; ☎ 0862 40 00 07; return trip €9 Tue & Thu, €11 Mon, Wed & Fri, €13 Sat & Sun; 11 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat & Sun) runs up to the Campo every 30 minutes from Fonte Cerreto. Up top, there's hiking in summer and skiing in winter.

One of the most popular trekking routes is the surprisingly straightforward climb to the top of **Corno Grande** (the Apennines' highest peak). The 9km *via normale* (normal route) starts in the main parking area at Campo Imperatore and heads to the summit at 2914m. The trail should be clear of snow from early June to late September/early October.

To get to Fonte Cerreto by public transport take bus 76 (€0.80, 20 minutes, hourly) from L'Aquila to Paganica and then a Linea M bus to Assergi and Fonte Cerreto (€0.80, 20 minutes, 13 daily). By car follow the A24 east and exit at Assergi or Fonte Cerreto.

INFORMATION

Park office (☎ 0862 6 05 21; www.gransassolagapark.it in Italian; Via del Convento 1; 11 10.30am-1pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri) In Assergi, 16km northeast of L'Aquila.

Tourist office (☎ 0862 41 08 08; Piazza Santa Maria Paganica 5; 11 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun mid-May–mid-Sep, 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat mid-Sep–mid-May)

EATING & SLEEPING

La Matriciana (☎ 0862 2 60 65; Via Arcivescovado 5a; meals €20; 11 Mon-Sat) A bustling no-frills trattoria good for steaming bowls of pasta, filling meat dishes and robust red wine.

Trattoria da Rino (☎ 0862 2 52 80; Via San Marciano 2; meals €18; 11 Tue-Sun) Sit down to warming Abruzzo classics prepared by *nonna* in the kitchen.

Hotel Duomo (☎ 0862 41 08 93; www.hotel-duomo.it; Via Dragonetti 6; s €55-80, d €80-90; p) Rooms at this quietly elegant hotel sport a rustic-chic look with burnt-sienna floor tiles, wrought-iron bedsteads and dark-wood furniture.

TIVOLI

Pass through Rome's scruffy eastern suburbs and you soon come to the busy hill-top town of Tivoli. A Roman resort and summer playground for the Renaissance rich, it's best known for its two Unesco World Heritage Sites: the monumental Villa Adriana and the 16th-century Villa d'Este. The latter is prettier and easier to get to, but the former is what makes a day trip here really worthwhile.

Emperor Hadrian's summer residence **Villa Adriana** (☎ 06 399 67 900; adult/child €6.50/3.25, parking €2; 11 9am-1hr before sunset), 5km outside Tivoli, is more a small town than a big villa. It was built between 118 and 134 and even by Roman standards it stood out for its opulence. A model near the entrance gives you some idea of the scale of the original complex, and you'll need several hours to explore. Audioguides (€4) give a good overview.

A great traveller and enthusiastic architect, Hadrian personally designed much of the complex, taking inspiration from buildings he'd seen around the world. The **Pecile**, a large porticoed pool area where the emperor used to stroll after lunch, was a reproduction of a building in Athens. Similarly, the **Canopo** was a copy of the sanctuary of Serapis near Alexandria, with a long canal of water, originally surrounded by Egyptian statues, representing the Nile.

To the east, one of the highlights of the complex is Hadrian's private retreat, the Teatro Marittimo. Built on an island in an artificial pool, it was originally a minivilla

accessible only by swing bridges, which the emperor would have raised when he felt like a dip. Nearby, the fishpond is encircled by an underground gallery where Hadrian liked to wander. There are also *nymphphaeums* (shrines to the water nymphs), temples and barracks, and a museum displaying the latest discoveries from ongoing excavations.

Up in Tivoli's hill-top centre, **Villa d'Este** (☎ 199 76 61 66; www.villadestetivoli.info; Piazza Trento; adult/child €6.50/free; 11 from 8.30am Tue-Sun) is more impressive outside than inside. A former Benedictine convent, it was transformed into a sumptuous pleasure palace by Lucrezia Borgia's son, Ippolito d'Este, in 1550. From 1865 to 1886 it was home to Franz Liszt and inspired his composition *Fountains of the Villa d'Este*.

The mannerist frescoes in the villa are worth a look, but it's the elaborate garden you come for: terraces with water-spouting gargoyles, shady pathways and spectacular fountains powered solely by gravitational force. One fountain (designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini) once played the organ; another imitated the call of birds. Don't miss the Rometta fountain, which has reproductions of the landmarks of Rome.

The villa's closing hour varies according to the month; the earliest (November to January) is 4pm and the latest (May to August) is 6.45pm.

A short walk from Villa d'Este is **Villa Gregoriana** (☎ 06 399 67 701; Piazza Tempio di Vesta; adult/child €4/2.50; 11 10am-6.30pm Tue-Sun Apr–mid-Oct, 10am-2.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Mar & mid-Oct–Nov), a 19th-century park laid out by Pope Gregory XVI in 1834. The park descends down a steep gorge, over which water crashes to the

TRANSPORT

Distance from Rome 30km

Direction East

Travel time 30 minutes to one hour

Bus Cotral buses (€1.60, one hour) depart from Ponte Mammolo station on metro line B at least every 20 minutes. For Villa Adriana take the CAT shuttle bus 4 or 4X (€1, every 30 minutes Monday to Saturday, every 70 minutes Sunday) from Largo Garibaldi in Tivoli town centre.

Car Take either Via Tiburtina (SS5) or the Rome–L'Aquila autostrada (A24).

Train From Stazione Tiburtina (€2.50, 50 minutes, hourly).

bottom of the canyon more than 100m below. Of the various grottoes and waterfalls, the highlight is the 120m-high Cascata Grande (Great Waterfall).

INFORMATION

Tourist information point (% 0774 31 35 36; Piazza Garibaldi; h 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-3pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar)

EATING & SLEEPING

Villa d'Este (% 0774 31 17 65; Villa d'Este, Piazza Trento; set menus €14) In Villa d'Este, this is a stylish café-cum-restaurant for a drink or lunch.

Hotel Adriano (% 0774 38 22 35; www.hoteladriano.it; Largo Yourcenar; s €90-100, d €100-120) A smart three-star opposite the entrance to Villa Adriana. Its excellent restaurant (meals €45) has served Federico Fellini and Queen Elizabeth II.

CASTELLI ROMANI

About 20km south of Rome, the Colli Albani (Alban hills) and their 13 towns are collectively known as the Castelli Romani. Since early Roman days they've provided a green refuge from the city and today Romans still flock to the area on hot summer weekends. The most famous towns are Castel Gandolfo, where the pope has his summer residence, and Frascati, famous for its crisp white wine. The other towns are Monte Porzio Catone, Montecompatri, Rocca Priora, Colonna, Rocca di Papa, Grottaferrata, Marino, Albano Laziale, Ariccia, Genzano and Nemi.

Frascati is an easy bus or train ride from Rome and makes a rewarding day trip. From central Piazza Guglielmo Marconi, the large villa you

see rising above the square is the 16th-century **Villa Aldobrandini**, designed by Giacomo della Porta and built by Carlo Maderno. It's closed to the public but you can visit the landscaped **gardens** (h 9am-1pm Mon-Fri) once you've picked up a permit from the tourist office.

If you have a car head up to the ruins of ancient Tusculum. All that remains of this once-imposing 4th-century-BC town is a small amphitheatre, a crumbling villa and a small stretch of road leading up to the city. However, the grassy hill top is a popular spot for a walk and commands fine views.

But more than villas and views, Frascati is all about food and fine wine. To get into the swing of things, head for one of the authentic **cantine** (wine cellars) in the **centro storico**. Many don't sell food, but won't mind if you bring your own snack – pick up a delicious **porchetta** (roast hog) **panini** from one of the stands on Piazza del Mercato.

A short drive away at **Grottaferrata** there's a 15th-century **abbey** (abbazia; % 06 945 93 09; Viale San Nilo; admission free; h 8.30am-12.30pm & 4-7.30pm summer, 8.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-1hr before sunset winter), founded in the 11th century and now home to a congregation of Greek monks and a small museum.

Continuing southwest brings you to **Castel Gandolfo**, a smart hill-top **borgo** (small village) overlooking Lago di Albano. Dominating the town is the pope's summer residence, which although closed to the public still attracts coachloads of tourists. The small **centro storico** is a lovely place for an evening stroll, and although it can get very busy it's still ideal for the romantically inclined.

The smaller of the two lakes in the Castelli, **Lago di Nemi**, has spawned numerous legends. In ancient times it was the centre of a cult to the

ST BENEDICT, THE CAVE MAN

Founder of the Benedictine order, St Benedict is generally regarded as the father of Western monasticism. He is also the patron saint of engineers and speleologists, an accolade that he owes to three years he spent holed up in a cave.

Born to a rich Roman noble in the Umbrian town of Nursia in 480, Benedict studied in Rome until, at the age of 20, he decided to flee the city's vice and seek somewhere quiet to pray. He ended up in a cave gouged into the side of a steep ravine just outside the small town of **Subiaco**, 63km east of Rome. Over the next three years he attracted a large local following that was eventually to provoke the ire of his fellow friars and force him to escape.

There are two monasteries that make the hike to Subiaco worthwhile. The first and most important is the spectacular **Monastero di San Benedetto** (Monastery of St Benedict; % 0774 8 50 39; h 9am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm), carved into the rock over the famous cave. As well as its stunning setting, described by Petrarch as 'the edge of Paradise', the monastery boasts some wonderfully vibrant 13th- to 15th-century frescoes.

Halfway down the hill from St Benedict's is the **Monastero di Santa Scolastica** (Monastery of St Scholastica; % 0774 8 55 25; h 9am-12.30pm & 3.30-7pm), where Italy's first book was printed in 1465. The monastery complex has a restaurant offering set menus at lunch (€15) and dinner (€21), and a **foresteria** (guest quarters; % 0774 8 55 69; foresteria@benedettini-subiaco.it; per person €35, half/full board €43/48) where you can spend a comfortable and contemplative night. It's best to book ahead, as Benedictine clergy from around the world often make the pilgrimage here to work in the monastery's famous **library and archive** (h Mon-Fri & Sat morning).

From Subiaco, Benedict headed south until, it's said, three ravens led him to the top of **Monte Cassino**. Here, in 529, he founded the abbey that was to be his home until he died in 547. One of the medieval world's most important Christian centres, the monumental **abbey** (% 0776 31 15 29; admission free, parking €2; h 9am-12.30pm & 3.30-5pm) has been destroyed and rebuilt several times throughout its history, most recently in 1953. During WWII the abbey was central to German efforts to stop the Allied push north. After almost six months of bitter fighting, the Allies finally bombed the abbey in May 1944 in a desperate attempt to break through.

Subiaco is easy to get to: by car simply take the A24 autostrada and follow the signs; by public transport take a Cotral bus (€3.10, 1½ hours, 29 daily) from Ponte Mammolo on metro line B. For Monte Cassino take the A1 autostrada south 135km or a train from Stazione Termini (€7.40, two hours, 23 daily).

goddess Diana and it was a favourite vacation spot of Emperor Caligula. On the shores of the lake, the **Museo delle Navi Romane** (% 06 939 80 40; Via Diana; admission €2; h 9am-6pm Tue-Sun) was built by Mussolini to house two ancient Roman boats (one 73m long, the other 71m), salvaged from the lake when it was partly drained between 1927 and 1932. These dated from Caligula's time but were tragically destroyed by fire in 1944 – what you see now are scale models of the originals.

Trattoria la Sirena del Lago (% 06 936 80 20; Via del Plebiscito 26, Nemi; meals €22; h closed Mon) Sit down to local game and trout at this bustling trattoria.

Pane e Tuttipani (% 06 941 66 37; Via Mentana 1, Frascati; meals €20; h Tue-Sun) A charming **enoteca** that serves excellent and well-priced food. After sampling the local tipples, buy a few bottles to take away with you.

Hotel Pagnanelli Lucia (% 06 936 14 22; Via A Gramsci 2, Castel Gandolfo; d €100) A modest two-star hotel with decent rooms at reasonable rates.

TRANSPORT

Distance from Rome 20km

Direction Southeast

Travel time 20 to 50 minutes

Bus From Rome's Anagnina station on metro line A, take the Cotral bus to Frascati (€1, 20 minutes, 35 per day on weekdays, fewer on weekends). From Frascati catch the Albano Laziale bus to get to Castel Gandolfo (€1.70, 40 minutes, hourly).

Car For Frascati and Grottaferrata take Via Tuscolana (SS215); for Castel Gandolfo and Albano Laziale follow Via Appia Nuova (SS7) south, following signs for Ciampino Airport.

Train Trains leave from Stazione Termini for Frascati (€1.90, 30 minutes, hourly), Castel Gandolfo (€1.90, 40 minutes, hourly) and Albano Laziale (€1.90, 50 minutes, hourly), from where you can catch a bus to Nemi.

INFORMATION

Tourist office (% 06 942 54 88; iatfrascati@libero.it; Piazza Guglielmo Marconi 1, Frascati; h 8.30am-1pm Mon & Tue, 9am-1pm Thu, 9am-1pm & 3.30-7pm Wed, Fri & Sat summer, 9am-1pm Mon, Wed, Thu & Sat, 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Tue & Fri winter)

EATING & SLEEPING

Antico Ristorante Pagnanelli (% 06 936 00 04; Via A Gramsci 4, Castel Gandolfo; meals €55; h Wed-Mon) With high-class cuisine, a 3000-label wine list and spectacular views over Lago di Albano, this restaurant is the business.

SPERLONGA & SABAUDIA

The best of Lazio's beaches are south of Rome, near the regional border with Campania.

The small coastal town of **Sperlonga** is one of the area's most fashionable beach resorts. It's almost entirely given over to tourism, but the whitewashed **centro storico** is a cool hang-out (in summer, at least) and there are two inviting sandy beaches either side of a rocky promontory. The town is divided into two parts: medieval Sperlonga Alta is on top of the promontory; modern Sperlonga Bassa is at sea level.

There's a small **tourist office** (☎ 0771 52 10 82; info@litoralepontino.it; Corso San Leone 22; ⌚ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri, 2.30-5.30pm Tue & Thu) **behind the church at the top of the hill.**

Other than the beach, the town's main attraction is the **Museo Archeologico di Sperlonga** (☎ 0771 54 80 28; Via Flacca, km1.6; admission €2; ⌚ 8.30am-7.30pm), home to sculptures dating from the 2nd century BC and a cave with a circular pool used by the emperor Tiberius. The remains of his villa are in front of the cave.

Back 43km towards Rome, **Sabaudia** is not a particularly attractive place, with its Fascist architecture and modern holiday homes, but it is the centre of the **Parco Nazionale del Circeo**, an 800-hectare area of sand dunes, rocky coastline, forest and wetlands. The **visitor centre** (☎ 0773 51 13 85; www.parcocirceo.it; Via Carlo Alberto 107; ⌚ 9.30am-1pm & 5-7pm) can provide details on activities in the area, including fishing, bird-watching, walking and cycling.

EATING & SLEEPING

Gli Archi (☎ 0771 5 43 00; Via Ottaviano 17, Sperlonga; meals €35) Signature dishes at this hill-top fish restaurant include *linguine agli scampi* (flat

TRANSPORT

Distance from Rome 120km

Direction Southeast

Travel time 1½ to two hours

Car Take Via Pontina (SS148) south to Terracina and then the SS213.

Bus Cotral buses for Sabaudia (€3.80, two hours) leave from outside the Laurentina station on metro line B.

Train Take a regional train (not the Intercity) from Stazione Termini to Fondi (€5.60, 1¼ hours, about 20 daily); from here get the connecting Piazzoli Giorgio bus to Sperlonga (€1, 15 minutes, six daily).

spaghetti with scampi) and *zuppe di cozze* (mussel soup).

Albergo Major (☎ 0771 54 92 44; Via Romita I 4, Sperlonga; s €60-170, d €70-180; Ⓟ a) Just off the main seafront road into town, the Major has decent rooms and excellent facilities for beach bunnies: tone up on your tan in the solarium before heading to the hotel's private beach area.

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