



Finding Valentino in Abruzzo Tour with ANGELA DI SCIASCIO

**and escorted by Specialist Abruzzo Guide,
Luciana Masci of Absolutely Abruzzo Tours**

**Welcome to ABSOLUTELY ABRUZZO Tours
... the undiscovered gem of central Italy...**

Exclusive Small Group travel for Angela Di Sciascio (max 15 guests only)

Thank you for choosing to join us on this unique and unforgettable journey into central Italy... Sit back and bathe in the warmth of the Mediterranean sunshine as we take time to explore the glorious Italian countryside in beautiful autumn with its endless vineyards and ancient olive groves.

Over 11 days, experience the 'art of living' in Abruzzo and immerse yourself in the traditional Italian village life and embrace the warmth of its people. Exquisite regional food and wines, wonderful music as well as timeless treasures preserved in the architecture and medieval art all await you... in Abruzzo.



PROPOSED PROGRAMME

2014 DEPARTURE: OCTOBER 5 -15 (11 days/ 10 nights)

COST: AUD \$6050 per person, twin share (and Single Supplement AUD \$1200)

Meal Codes: Breakfast (B), Lunch (L) and Dinner (D)

DAY 1: Sunday, October 5: Rome to Fossacesia, Abruzzo

(L, Welcome Drinks/Dinner)

You will be met at Rome Termini station or Rome Fiumicino airport hotels with an airconditioned private minibus, driver and English speaking and Abruzzo specialist guide, to transfer you across the Apennines into the beautiful region of Abruzzo. On the way we will stop for morning coffee at the tiny hilltop village of **Cocullo**, where you experience a typical Sunday morning in Abruzzo. Continuing our way across into the Chieti province we drive through stunning scenery of fertile vineyards and olive groves to **Fossacesia** on the Adriatic coastline, where you will be based for the next 4 nights.

After settling in, the warm Abruzzese hospitality continues at your accommodation with a splendid Abruzzese lunch. There will be time to unwind and soak up the village Italy atmosphere. This afternoon, marvel at the '*trabocchi*'- unique, ancient fishing structures only found in Abruzzo which have been in existence since medieval times. Then admire the majestic 11th century church of S. Giovanni in Venere overlooking the ancient olive groves and the **Gulf of Venus**, the ancient trading port on the Adriatic coast. Here in the grounds of the abbey, the monks are custodians of the oldest olive tree in the region.

Dinner is on the Adriatic coastline at **Rocca San Giovanni** on an ancient *trabocco*, with an exquisite seafood degustation menu with wines. Our hosts are absolutely passionate about their regional food and culture and serve their own seafood hauled in from their nets.

Day 2: Monday, October 6: Casoli – ‘Confetti’ sugared almonds tradition – Roccascalegna Medieval Castle – San Vito Passeggiata

(B,L)

Enjoy time to unwind and soak up the village Italy atmosphere this morning over your morning *cappuccino* in **Casoli**. You will visit Angela Di Sciascio's district villagen of Casoli where we have arranged a special meeting with the mayor and Angela's cousin Maria Chiara. Sergio De Luca will wish Angela and her guests a warm welcome with a special ceremony in the official chambers. Taste a delicious array of *confetti* in a delightful *confetti* shop – these sugared almonds have been made in Abruzzo since medieval times and are still a traditional part of any celebrations today. Stunning views of the Apennines are a perfect backdrop while we explore the medieval castle of **Roccascalegna** perched on a rocky outcrop above the Rio Secco. Hear bloody tales of barons and peasants locked in medieval struggle. A leisurely lunch awaits at a nearby country restaurant

where our hosts Amalia and Antonio serve us an amazing array of traditional Abruzzese dishes. Antonio is an olive producer and his award-winning extra virgin olive oil is a must to taste!

After an afternoon rest, we are refreshed and ready to visit the Adriatic coastal port town of **San Vito**. Once fought over by rival towns Ortona and Lanciano as their access to the Adriatic it is now a quiet seaside resort with charming cafes, restaurants and arguably the best gelato in Italy! You must try their pistachio and tiramisu! Stroll along the jetty to the trabocchi and enjoy the warm autumn evening *passeggiata*, Abruzzo style.

Day 3: Tuesday, October 7: Autumn Grape Harvest - Private Cellar Visit with Wine Tasting – Guardiagrele

(B, L)

Be part of the traditional autumn grape harvest in Abruzzo (weather permitting) and join Amerigo and Roberto who will be picking *montepulciano* (red wine) or *trebbiano* (white wine) grapes. We follow the harvest to the local village winery and follow the whole process of winemaking. Learn about winemaking in Abruzzo using traditional methods and modern innovative techniques to produce their award winning wines. Indulge in delicious tastings of *montepulciano*, *cerasuolo rose'* and *trebbiano* wines. A leisurely country lunch set amongst ancient olive trees and vineyards awaits - prepared by Amerigo's wife, Lucia, serving homemade specialities including homemade potato *gnocchi* and fresh ingredients from her estate. All ingredients are sourced within 2 kms and feature seasonal home grown produce. Slow Food at its best!

Later this afternoon, we explore the lively town of **Guardiagrele**, once a walled town and a haven for the brigands from the local mountains. Meet local craftsmen in wrought iron and copper work, goldsmiths still making exquisite traditional Abruzzese filigree gold jewellery, as well as a chance to admire colourful ceramics and traditional linens.

There is time to unwind as we take a leisurely *passeggiata* along the *corso* – shopping for those favourite Italian shoes or leather handbag, enjoying a sumptuous *aperitivo*, *gelato*, *caffè macchiato* or just simply sit and take it all in...

Day 4: Wednesday, October 8: Casoli – Santa Reparata Feast Day – Capoposta - Lanciano

(B, L)

Take part in a village festival in medieval **Casoli** which has its yearly festival in honour of their patron saint, Santa Reparata. Be part of village life as the locals celebrate with music, dance, food and processions. Casoli comes alive with colourful market stalls where traditionally sweets and pastries as well as wood fried loaves of bread are sold off to the local villagers.

Afterwards we visit Angela's ancestral village of **Capoposta** which is in the district of Casoli. Meet her family and discover the real essence of Abruzzo hospitality in Valentino's native village.

It was from here that young Valentino set out for a new life in Australia. Enjoy Angela's reminiscences and thoughts which lead her to write her best selling book, "Finding Valentino".

Early this evening, we head on to the lively town of **Lanciano** which has been inhabited since pre Roman and Roman times. The Dioclesian bridge and its magnificent central piazza and churches are absolutely beautiful. There is time to stroll, enjoy the *dolce vita* and watch the world go by ... or shop Italian style. Unwind as we take a leisurely *Passeggiata* along the *corso* enjoying another famous Italian *aperitivo* such as an Aperol Spritz, *gelato* or just simply sit and take it all in.

Day 5: Thursday, October 9: Loreto Aprutino, Market Day- Walking tour of village - Olive Oil Museum – Ceramic Museum -Pianella

(B, L, Welcome Drinks)

Today we leave the Chieti province and make our way over to the hills to the Pescara province. Thursday is market day in **Loreto Aprutino** - relax with a morning coffee before browsing the colourful local stalls selling everyday wares - a great opportunity to practise your Italian with the locals!

Explore the medieval hilltop town of **Loreto Aprutino** with our local guide Sandra, who will take us through a private visit to a unique 19th olive oil museum - one of Italy's few olive oil museums as well as a private ceramic museum featuring three centuries of exquisite local ceramics/ maiolica ware from the village of Castelli in northern Abruzzo.

Onto lunch where our host Adriano has prepared an exquisite authentic degustation lunch set in a delightful restored stone cellar in the heart of the village of Loreto Aprutino.

You will be transferred to your delightful accommodation in **Loreto Aprutino**, set amongst 4200 olive trees and stay in a exquisitely restored 17th century farmhouse which will be home for the next 3 nights. Soak up the village Italy atmosphere with walks down tranquil country lanes, laze by the pool or sit and enjoy the spectacular scenery with views to the Maiella National Park and the Gran Sasso National Park.

Early this evening relax with *aperitivo* welcome drinks on the estate prepared by our hosts Gabriella and Mario, before one of our many *Passeggiatas* with the locals in a nearby village of **Pianella**. Here we can take you to a wonderful hidden osteria specialising in the most tender *arrostiticini* – traditional Abruzzese lamb skewers.

DAY 6: Friday, October 10: Pescara Museum of the Abruzzo People – Local Covered Markets – Adriatic coastline - 15th Century Medieval Frescoes in Loreto Aprutino - Private Cooking Class & Dinner

(B, Cooking Class/D)

We head onto the bustling port city of **Pescara** this morning– the largest commercial centre of Abruzzo. A visit to the fascinating Museum of the Abruzzo people follows, housed in an 18th Century Bourbon Jail - beautifully displaying the traditions of the Abruzzo people: sheep rearing and cheese making, grape harvesting, olive growing, exquisite filagree jewellery, traditional costumes, ceramics and maiolica ware. Stroll through the lively covered farmers market where you can practise your Italian while marvelling at the wonderful produce. Not to be missed is the wonderful local specialty *porchetta* - roast pork with rosemary and garlic.

Admire the Adriatic coastline as you enjoy a coffee or gelato in one of Pescara's lovely cafes followed by time to browse the shops and stay on for lunch.

After a well earned rest, you will experience one of Abruzzo's hidden gems of the art world - inside the quiet church of Santa Maria in Piano outside the town walls of **Loreto Aprutino**.

Magical medieval art comes to life in the form of a unique 15th century fresco cycle created by an artist from the school of the master Giotto.

One of the tour's highlights is a hands-on private cooking class later this afternoon, with wonderful local Abruzzese women. Meet Olga and Milva as you prepare a fabulous 4 course dinner together the slow food way. Create amazing antipasti, spaghetti alla chitarra, meat dish and pastries such as pizzelle. Slow food at its best!

DAY 7: Saturday, October 11: Sulmona – Weekly Markets – Abruzzese Costume Museum – Raiano – 18th Century Olive Oil Press – Private Olive Oil Tasting – Medieval Abbey of San Clemente

(B, D)

Take a trip through time with us as we explore Sulmona's past, home to monks, poets and Romans through the centuries. **Sulmona** is the birthplace of the great poet Ovid and was once the headquarters of the Celestine monks from medieval times. Admire the remains of a wealthy Roman villa and traditional peasants' costumes from more recent times. We wander the backstreets of the town discovering quiet courtyards, and the medieval Aquaduct still carrying water to this day. Then there's time to sample the specialties of Sulmona as we visit *Confetti* producers where sugared almonds have been made according to ancient recipes for centuries.

Farewelling Sulmona, we continue our scenic drive and wind our way up to the enchanting village of **Raiano**. Guido welcomes us to his village and proudly shows us his gems, including an ancient 18th century olive press still in the hands of a local family producing exquisite extravirgin olive oil. Visit the local village bar who have created a magnificent local specialty - olive oil gelato!

Later this afternoon, we visit the ancient 9th century medieval abbey of **San Clemente** – an architectural marvel with exquisitely carved limestone altar, pulpit and columns.

Returning to your accommodation, learn all about extra virgin olive oil in a private tasting with Gabriella, an international expert on olive growing and tasting – the amazing differences between extra virgin, virgin and olive oil followed by a walk through their olive grove where their centuries old magnolia trees bloom. Dinner this evening is at the farmhouse where Olga will prepare some traditional dishes of our region with seasonal ingredients from the estate, such as hand made ricotta ravioli with a saffron and zucchini sauce, cheese and egg balls, rolled involtini of meat and a delicious ricotta, chocolate and almond cake.

DAY 8: Sunday, October 12: Farindola – Santo Stefano di Sessanio – Campo Imperatore – S.Omero - Teramo Province

(B, L, D)

This full day scenic touring takes us into the majestic Gran Sasso National Park where we climb to 2000m above sea level.

We start with a morning *cappuccino* in the alpine village of Farindola, the stepping off point into the national park and famous for *pecorino* sheep's milk cheese. Heading off, we explore one of the highest alpine pastures of Europe- the majestic **Campo Imperatore**, a plain 20 km long and 12 km wide bounded by rugged mountains in the shadow of the highest peak in the Apennines, the Gran Sasso. Climbing to 1800m we will have the chance to glimpse an alpine shepherd tending his flock with the maremme sheep dogs, see wild horses and circling hawks high above. See an amazing array of colour with wildflowers over the fields and visit the Hotel Campo Imperatore where Benito Mussolini was once held prisoner. Hear all about his famous and historical rescue from this remote outpost.

Our alfresco picnic lunch on this high alpine plain is beautifully prepared by Luciana and you will have fun sampling local produce and *arrostiticini*, lamb skewers barbequed in the local style with a delightful spread of regional Abruzzese produce. All surrounded by stunning mountain scenery of the Apennines... *Squisito!*

After lunch, we visit the magical village of **Santo Stefano di Sessanio**. This hamlet at 1250m above sea level and is truly one of the jewels of Abruzzo, a place where time has stood still over the centuries. Ruled for over 200 yrs by the mighty Medici family, we will explore the village on foot from where once the drawbridge stood, squeezing through narrow gates and corners where lovers once met, to the ancient gaming house and courthouse. Wander through its ancient alleyways and lanes; enjoy the tiny shops with local artisans selling their fine lacework, ceramics, woodwork and local crafts.

We make our way to the Teramo province in northern Abruzzo where you can unwind over the next 3 nights in this beautifully restored country farmhouse set in tranquil gardens. Welcome drinks await in the lounge before dinner at the accommodation.

DAY 9: Monday, October 13: Private Truffle Hunting excursion – Truffle degustation – Campovalano – Private Cellar Visit and tastings – Controguerra – Ascoli Piceno

(B, L)

We head to the nearby village of **Campovalano** and learn all about Abruzzo's secret - prized truffles. This village celebrates its yearly truffle festival in July with markets and fresh truffles everywhere! Surprisingly, over 80% of Italy's truffles come from our region of Abruzzo. Understand how truffle dogs are used to find these precious gourmet delights and enjoy delicious tastings of truffle pastes and cheeses infused with truffle ... *squisito!* Meet local truffle hunter Ginesio who will share his passion for truffle hunting and truffle dog training with us and experience a rare treat – a truffle hunt! Taste some delicious samples of seasonal truffle products... *squisito!*

Then we head to a local winery in **Controguerra** and meet a charming winemaking family and learn all about winemaking in Abruzzo. Meet Lidia and Amato who use traditional and modern techniques combined to produce great award winning wines. We will visit their extensive vineyards and indulge in tastings of heritage grape varieties such as *pecorino* and *cococciola* as well as traditional and award winning *montepulciano*, *cerasuolo* (rose') and *trebbiano* wines. The wines will be perfectly matched with our tasting platters of delicious local *pecorino* cheeses, estate produced *prosciuttos*, good bread with lashings of their extravirgin olive oil and more! Ah... Slow Food at its best.

After a well earned rest back at the accommodation, we take a short trip to the Le Marche region and explore the delightful town of **Ascoli Piceno** which lies just over the Tronto River. Here we can enjoy a *passeggiata* along the *corso* - stroll to take in the local atmosphere and watch the world go by Italian style. We will see some of the many medieval towers still in evidence today, the important Duomo cathedral and the vibrant Piazza del Popolo with its central Renaissance square - a perfect place for that *aperitivo!*

DAY 10: Tuesday, October 14: Aritsan Cheesemaker and Tastings - S.Omero – Civitella del Tronto - Spanish Fortress

(B, D)

This morning we visit a local **cheesemaker** who produces traditional Abruzzese cheeses and has been making cow's milk cheese for generations using time honoured methods. You will be delighted with tastings of fresh *ricotta*, *giuncata* and *pecorino* cheeses.

This morning we will explore the nearby charming village of **Sant'Omero** with only a population of just over 5000 people. We will be welcomed by the village mayor as one of the first non Italians to visit their village. Sant'Omero is a delight with its hidden gems including Roman settlements, Romanesque churches and Spanish influences on the village.

Heading onto the nearby fortified hilltop village of **Civitella del Tronto**, we visit its extensive fortress perched high above on the plateau above the village. With a private tour and local guide we can survey its commanding views over what was once the border of the kingdom of the Two Sicilies and

the Papal States to its north. After Salzburg it is the second largest and important fortress in Europe. Learn all about its turbulent history from the French and Spanish invasions to the Unification of Italy.

Stroll through the village exploring the romantic narrow alleys and enjoy an *aperitivo* or welcome drinks on the terrace before a sumptuous dinner at the accommodation.

The fine dining experience here is one of Italy's best kept secrets with an amazing selection of Abruzzo's finest ingredients including local pecorino cheeses, air dried salumi and precious local truffles.

Day 11: Wednesday, October 15: Ovindoli – Rocca di Cambio – Celano – Piccolomini Medieval Castle – Departure for Rome Fiumicino Airport, Rome Termini Station – End of Tour

(B)

Before we leave Abruzzo we drive through stunning alpine scenery where the locals ski on these slopes over 1000m above sea level – passing through the charming villages of Ovindoli and Rocca di Cambio to arrive at the hilltop village of **Celano**, perched high in the Apennines.

It was from here where much of Abruzzo was ruled in Medieval time from its mighty 13th century castle held by the noble Piccolomini family. The castle houses an exciting collection of pre Roman artefacts from the Italic tribes who settled in the now drained but immense lake near Celano; a perfect setting to enjoy your last coffee in Abruzzo, relaxing and strolling in the warm autumn sunshine.

Transfer to Rome's Leonardo da Vinci airport at Fiumicino, Rome Termini Station by the afternoon.

Arrivederci e Buon Viaggio!

Join us in Abruzzo and be inspired for a lifetime....

To secure a place on the tour, email Angela Di Sciascio at info@angeladisciascio.com.au and provide your name, address and telephone. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.