



culture, knowledge and flavours

Calabria Gal Valle Del Crati

includes illustrated map



Medeat



A TRIP BETWEEN THE VALLEYS OF CRATI AND ESARO

PLACES WHERE HISTORY, CULTURE, CRAFTS AND FOOD AND
DRINK BLEND IN MILLENNARY CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

The valleys of Crati and of Esaro, which make up the territory where the Crati Valley LAG operates, lies in Calabria, the most southerly region of peninsular Italy.

The route begins in the north with the village of Altomonte and heads south near to the town of Cosenza, the provincial capital, running through the villages of the coastal mountain chain and those nestling on the hills of the Crati and the Esaro valleys, many of them Arbëreshe, since they were inhabited or founded about five centuries ago by communities coming from Albania.

The trip we present here is characterised by three itineraries, which will lead us to the discovery of typical local villages, together with glimpses of fascinating beauty characterised by architectonic and naturalistic heritage and by traditional crafts, the product of a long history, which after the Bruzi civilization saw the alternation of foreign dominations and immigration: Greek, Roman, Visigoth, Byzantine, Langobardic, Arab, Norman and Albanian. The visitor cannot fail to discover the local farming that produces high quality food making this land unique: the wine and olive oil, which have received many important awards, and the dotato fig, which enjoys DOP recognition together with the Bruzio olive oil. The offer of typical local products of this area is enriched by excellent cheeses and pressed pork meats, as well as by exquisite bakery and aromatic honey.

Have a good trip then, one that features history, culture, traditions and food and drink, in places where every angle can offer surprising opportunities.

• Among the peppers and the chestnuts of Esaro valley

The first itinerary winds through the Esaro valley and begins in **Altomonte**, an ancient village situated on a hill in a fortunate position from where a panorama of rare beauty can be admired ranging from the Ionian Sea to the Sibari Plain, from the peaks of the Pollino massif as far as the Sila mountains. Altomonte is a small town with a wealth of works of art and of historic-architectonic treasures, including the most important: the church of Santa Maria della Consolazione, dating from the fourteenth century.

The religious building, one of the most interesting examples of Angevin Gothic in Calabria, was built on the orders of Filippo Sangineto upon the walls of the small Norman church of Santa Maria de Franchis and preserves, in its interior, stone and wooden statuary of exquisite workmanship, for the most part the work of southern craftsmen between the fourteenth and eighteenth century.

Beneath the high three-light window of the apse, stands the imposing sepulchre of Filippo Sangineto, attributed to the workshop of Tino da Camaino.

The marble monument is made up of a sarcophagus supported by three statues portraying the three virtues – faith, hope and charity – in their turn supported by three lions. In 1444 the church and the monastery passed to the Dominicans who founded a monastery there, currently a convent, which houses the civic museum with its wealth of important works of art, including: the Saint Ladislav king of Hungary, by the Sienna master Simone Martini; the Madonna delle Pere, attributed to Paolo Di Ciaccio da Mileto, pupil of Antonello da Messina; two tablets by Bernardo Daddi, depicting St Augustine and St James, the other St Mary Magdalene and St John the Baptist; two alabaster tablets from a French workshop with the histories of the Virgin and of the Passion; an altarpiece with scenes of the Passion of Christ by the Master Maestro di Antonio and Onofrio Penna; paintings of the Neapolitan school; sacred vestments; wooden sculptures.





01.



02.

01.
**Church of Santa Maria
della Consolazione -
Altomonte**

02.
**Polychrome Mosaic Floor
of the Roman villa dating
from the first to second
century a.C. - Roggiano
Gravina**

In the monastery complex there is also the interesting historical library, with a rich collection of texts, above all from the Counterreformation period, including theological, canon law, history of the Church and codes of Gregorian chants. In the lower part of the village there are: the monastery of St Francis of Paola of 1635, which currently houses the Town Hall, and the adjacent monastic church dedicated to the Calabrian saint.

The territory of Altomonte is, moreover, teeming with farms, food processing plants and crafts that can be visited by following the itineraries promoted by the Council, denominated "Contrade Ospitali", which propose visits to ancient buildings, isolated country residences, archaeological sites, farm holiday centres, olive oil mills, olive oil producers, wine cellars and bakers dotted around the rural areas of Altomonte.

About 10 km away lies **Roggiano Gravina**, erroneously identified as the ancient Bergae referred to by the Latin poet Tito Livio. The old walls with tower and gateway can still be found in the most ancient part of the village. The village, which only as late as 1864 assumed its present name of Roggiano Gravina, stands in an area inhabited since the Bronze Age. Instead, the remains of a Roman villa dating from the first to second century a.C., was brought to light a few decades ago in the country district of Lardereria, where the polychrome mosaic floors are clearly visible, as well as an apse covered by a small temple

and a heating plant. Among the most important churches is that dedicated to St Anthony and the sanctuary of Santa Maria della Strada, set in the Roggiano countryside on the road leading to Fagnano Castello.

Roggiano Gravina is well known for its production of a pepper of the highest quality indeed called "rog-gianese" pepper.

To the south-east is **Malvito**, identified as the ancient town of Temesa in the Magna Grecia, a town whose most splendid period was in the Middle Ages, when the massive Langobardic-Norman castle was erected, which was the centre of coordination of the fortification that still preserves intact its central tower, two lateral guard towers and the remains of the outer walls. The lovely, little church of Schiavonea should be mentioned whose interior preserves holy furnishings and wooden sculptures from the eighteenth century, and the archaeological area of the late-Roman era, situated in the Pauciuri district.

A few kilometres further on, the small Arbëreshe community of **Santa Caterina Albanese** is reached, also known by the name of Pizzoleo in olden times. Walking through its characteristic alleyways, often spanned by arches, located in the highest part of the village, the parish church is reached dedicated to St Nicholas the Great, built in baroque style and where some processional

03.

**Basket of Chestnuts
- Fagnano Castello**



03.

04.

**Typical Cheese LAG
Valle del Crati Area**



04.

05.

**Hot Pepper LAG Valle
del Crati Area**



05.

statues are preserved.

In the outlying ward of Joggi stands the church of St Nicholas of Bari where there is a fine silver processional cross.

About 6 km away is **Fagnano Castello**, from whose centre interesting excursions into the surrounding mountain area can be arranged. Here, a visit to the lakes should be mentioned, reachable on the main trunk road Superstrada delle Terme, exiting at the Fagnano Castello junction and turning left to take the mountain road leading to the small natural basins of Trifoglietti and Due Uomini, recognised as a whole as "Wet Zone of International Importance".

Chestnut farming is of special importance; it is an important resource of the area, both from a naturalistic and a production point of view.

The Tyrrhenian Sea can be easily reached a few kilometres from Fagnano on an excellent road and the very important Terme Luigiane spa of Guardia Piemontese.

This itinerary ends with a visit to the small historic town of **San Marco Argentano**, situated on a hill in a strategic position about 426 metres above sea level. Below, a few kilometres from the town stand the ruins of the medieval abbey of Santa Maria della Matina, Norman in origin, built by Robert Guiscard and consecrated in 1065.

The ancient religious building still preserves fine architectonic elements, especially in the remains of the chapter house and the cloister.

The monument, today private property, is hard to visit. Robert Guiscard, who made it the military base for the conquest of Calabria, occupied San Marco Argentano in 1048. The Cathedral dedicated to a St Nicholas of Myra stands in the historic centre, it preserves a beautiful Norman crypt, a residual element of the original church with four naves. The building period of the so-called Norman or Drogone Tower is unknown; it stands 22 metres high, with a diameter of 13.50 metres and is made up of 5 floors. Its huge rooms and thick walls would make it a defence tower while the high location of its entrance would seem to date it among Norman works of military importance.





06.



07.

06.
**View of the Vil-
lage of Malvito**

07.
**Norman or Dro-
gone Tower - San
Marco Argentano**



08. The Dottato Cosenza Fig

One of the most special Crati Valley products is the Cosenza fig, that belongs to the "dottato" variety, which is particularly fine and has been grown since ancient times. The Romans knew it under the name of *Ficus Carica* and Plinius praised it as very suitable for the drying process.

The Crati Valley's hilly and airy climate is particularly convenient for the growth of this plant which is typical for the richness and beauty of its leaves and the sweetness of its fruit. This fig is in fact very suitable for drying and for the following manufacturing processes, by which many products with unique organoleptic qualities are obtained. Figs may be eaten either fresh or dried and there are many traditional manufacturing processes: a *crocetta* (pierced in order to form little crosses), *steccati* (pierced one by one on a stick), in a small crown, in a plait, in a ball (blended with fig honey in order to form a ball which is then rolled up in fig leaves) or stuffed with almonds and walnuts and then covered with chocolate.

Nowadays, the Cosenza *dottato* fig enjoys the DOP certification, this confers a well-deserved recognition to such a high quality product.

• Among the mostaccioli, the Italo-Arbëreshe culture and the coastal mountain chain

The second itinerary starts at **Cervicati**, a small place located in a lovely position on a hill about 450 metres above sea level. In the village, inhabited by a population of Albanian origins, stands the Barone building and the parish church dedicated to St Nicholas of Bari, from the seventeenth century.

Free-range rearing of the black pig of Calabria, an autochthonous breed from which tasty pressed pork meats are obtained, has become an important productive activity for the small village, which organises a food festival dedicated mainly to traditional pressed pork meats in the winter.

Following the scenic inland road to the south, running through chestnut woods, many small villages are found clinging to their hilltops, almost all of them of Albanian origin or colonisation.

The first reached is **Mongrassano**, settled in the sixteenth century by Albanian refugees. The Church of the Carmelites stands in the centre of the village, built in the sixteenth century. Located inside the historic and huge Miceli building, once the property of the barons of Mongrassano, the museum Centro Iconografico Arbëreshe is a very active place for the documentation and research of Arbëreshe culture, Albanian music, history and traditions in Calabria. Inside the iconographic

centre there is a permanent exhibition, divided into two sections. The ground floor displays tools and equipment of the local countrymen whereas the floor above is dedicated to a rich photographic collection of clothes and objects regarding the traditional practices of the village.

Heading south, **Cerzeto**, founded by Albanian refugees in the second half of the fifteenth century, is reached. Many artefacts were found close to the village that indicate a settlement of the Magna Grecia and Roman era. The parish church of St Peter and St Paul should be mentioned, an eighteenth-century building in baroque style. The outlying ward of San Giacomo contains the sanctuary of the Madonna del Buon Consiglio, seventeenth-century in origin with its interior characterised by an eighteenth-century coffered ceiling. The gastronomic culture village vaunts the mostaccioli, a typical local dessert based on honey, every family here has its own “secret” recipe. The dessert is prepared above all for weddings.

About 6 km from Cerzeto is **Torano Castello**. Access to the historic centre of the village is through the monumental Vaglio Gate and nearby the monastery of St Anthony is found, erected by the Capuchins in the sixteenth century. The Parish church dedicated to San Biagio, built between the tenth and eleventh century. In the municipal archaeological museum, recently created thanks to the contribution of the Crati Valley LAG, are some artefacts from the archaeological site discovered in the Cozzo la Torre district, dating from the Bronze Age or the earliest Iron Age.





A little more than 5 km away is **San Martino di Finita**, a small village founded by Albanian refugees around 1470, famous in the past for its weaving on home looms. The village contains the church of Bishop St Martin built in baroque style, but restructured several times, its interior has a wooden crucifix, a reconstruction of the grotto at Lourdes. More recent is the church of the Borgo, built by masons from Fuscaldo.

At about 3.5 km is **Rota Greca**, another village of Arbëreshe origins, standing on a hill at 510 metres above sea level. Arising in the fifteenth and sixteenth century it has a parish church dedicated to the Assumption of St Mary and the church of St Francis of Paola, with its Renaissance origins, successively rebuilt in the Neoclassical era. One of the most important monuments is "The garden of the Just", situated in the Migliani-Magnocavallo quarter, a recent work dedicated to the ex-vice-commandant of the Rome police, Angelo De Fiore, born in Rota Greca, who in the Second World War saved many Jews from extermination.

The itinerary continues with a visit to **Lattarico**, a village situated 406 metres above sea level on an outcrop that dominates the Coscinello torrent. In the village stands the church of the Immaculate Conception. The interior contains statues of St Francis of Paola and St Joseph and Child, together with a fine canvas by an anonymous artist depicting the Immaculate Conception. The parish church, dedicated to St Nicholas of Bari, in Romanesque-Gothic style, built in 1547. In the outlying ward of Lattarico called Regina, the church of St John the Baptist can be admired, which has a lovely rose window and a sculpted stone portal figuring a lion.

About 5 km from Lattarico is **San Benedetto Uilano**, a village with medieval origins and repopulated by Albanian refugees in the sixteenth century. The parish church stands in the middle of the village and is dedicated to the abbot St Benedict. Its interior contains a Roman funerary urn from the imperial age decorated with a ram's head and festoons. The precious colourful female costumes embroidered with gold thread, typical of the Albanian communities, are still in use today, especially at traditional festivals and weddings.



09.
***The Garden of
the Just – Rota
Greca***

10.
***Porcini Mush-
rooms LAG Valle
del Crati Area***

09.



10.



11.
**Vaglio Gate-Torano Cas-
tello**



12.
**Interior of Church of St
Peter and St Paul - Cer-
zeto**

11.
**“Vallje” Folk Dance in
Traditional Arbëreshe
Costume - Mongrassano**



12.

13.



● Among the wonderful figs and the craftwork of the Crati valley

The third itinerary, crossing the heart of the mid-valley of the River Crati, begins at **Montalto Uffugo**, one of the largest villages of the area. The village has a wealth of historical and cultural tradition and most people remember it for having inspired Ruggero Leoncavallo in the drafting of his opera "I Pagliacci": in fact, the musician spent his childhood here.

A visit to the Duomo of Madonna della Serra is not to be missed, built in 1227, even though the building was subjected to different phases of restructuring in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century.

An imposing carved limestone façade distinguishes the building, while the interior, which was originally on a Greek cross plan, following post-earthquake restructuring at the end of the 1800s, nowadays has a neoclassical style. The church of the Annunciation, called St Francis, is interesting since it contains the only original portrait of the saint of Calabria. Moreover, look out for the church of St James, dating from the sixteenth century, containing the statues of the "Mysteries", carried in procession through the streets of the village on Easter Saturday.

Finally, in piazza Vecchia, stands the Caselli house, a fifteenth-century building, in durazzesco style, its portal surmounted by a feudal coat-of-arms (winged griffon). Just a few minutes from Montalto and the visitor can reach the town of Rende, where the campus of the University of Calabria lies, and Rende borders with the town of Cosenza, the provincial capital and one of the most important historic centres of the whole region.

The route continues to **San Vincenzo la Costa**, a village with medieval origins. Vercillo building is of special historic-architectonic worth, also known as the Palazzotto, it is a sixteenth-century house for the nobility with an annexed private chapel; Cortiglio building, built by the Jesuits in the seventeenth century and, finally, Miceli building, located in the outlying ward of San Sisto and recently restored. Among the churches, instead, the most important is the parish church of St Vincent Martyr, with medieval origins, successively rebuilt in the baroque period, it contains various works by local artists.

Moving to the right of the River Crati **Rose** is reached, with its small historic centre placed in a panoramic position overlooking the mid-valley of the Crati: here the land is variegated to the point that in just a few kilometres an environment of lush vegetation, typical of the Mediterranean maquis, changes to one of atmospheric beauty where the pines of the Sila mountains reign supreme. Rose makes an excellent base for excursions into the mountains of the Sila Grande, which

can be reached in slightly more than in 20 km, by taking a tortuous but very scenic road. The Castle should be visited, dating from the thirteenth century, rising in the highest part of the historic centre. The parish church is dedicated to St Mary of the Assumption and, despite having been destroyed several times by earthquake, it has always been restored and beautified. The interior contains a fine silver processional cross. Another place of worship to visit is the beautiful church of the Annunciation, its interior containing an interesting sixteenth-century-style wooden chest, the work of local artists. Also from Rose, in a few minutes, the towns of Cosenza and Rende can be reached.

A few kilometres further on our route takes in **Luzzi** and its lovely historic centre, where the church of the Immaculate Conception stands out; its interior contains the Assumption in Glory with cherubs, the work of the famous Neapolitan painter Luca Giordano. The church of Santa Maria delle Grazie should also be visited, where there is an interesting wooden crucifix made between the fourteenth and fifteenth century, and the church of St Joseph, built thanks to the generosity of Luca Sanseverino in 1476, where St Aurelia Marcia is venerated, who effected several miracles: many worshippers come here on pilgrimage on the first Sunday of September. Taking the road that leads to the high plateau of the Sila, to the east, after some kilometres, stands the abbey of Santa Maria della Sambucina, a famous monastery with Benedictine origins, founded in the mid-twelfth century with the name of Santa Maria Requisita and considered a very important heritage for Calabria. Here, midway through the twelfth century stayed Gioac-

chino da Fiore, abbot, theologian and writer, venerated as Blessed by the Catholic Church. The abbey contains a fresco of the Madonna and Child, the altarpiece depicting the Assumption in Glory with the twelve apostles and a canvas depicting the Lactatio Sancti Bernardi.

The route ends at **Bisignano**, also defined as the "balcony on the Crati Valley". The small town is noted for its craftwork, especially those traditional crafts, that still today are an important productive activity, thanks above all to the De Bonis family of lute makers, who have made Bisignano famous throughout Italy. But also for its widespread pottery manufacture. One should therefore not miss a visit to the many small shops in the town centre and the outskirts, where works of the finest quality can be admired. The Cathedral with its adjacent Episcopal Palace is worth a visit. The Bishop's Palace is next to the church. The church of St Francis of Paola is worth visiting, founded by the Friars Minor, on the site of the previous oratory of the Sanseverino family, with its lovely thirteenth-century cloister. Also worth a visit is the church of the Capuchins, dedicated to St Mary of the Angels. Farming is very important and widespread in the Bisignano area: we should mention the prized wines, the bruzio olive oil, vegetables and in particular the dottato fig, a unique and excellent product that has recently been awarded protected status by the European Commission with the assigning of the DOP label. Nowadays, the head offices of the Dried Fig Consortium of the Province of Cosenza are here, made up of production and of processing firms who are working to publicise and promote the Cosenza fig. Also horse breeding and horse riding have a centuries-old tradition in Bisignano.

14.
**Cosenza Dottato Figs
Fresh and Dried LAG
Valle del Crati Area**

15.
**Flowers Cultivation
in Greenhouses LAG
Valle del Crati Area**



14.



15.



16.



17.



16.
**Traditional Work
of Lute Makers -
Bisignano**

17.
**Vineyard LAG Valle
del Crati Area**



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Gastronomy Routes and the
Culture of Flavours

