

Caserta and Matese

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Royal Palace of Caserta

This is the area referred to as “*Campania Felix*” by ancient populations due to its privileged position and the fertility of its soil. Irrigated by the Volturno and favoured by a mild climate, the province extends from the sea to the Apennines, alternating between lush vegetation and places of great historic and cultural interest. The vast plains of the Caserta area open onto the sea and host one of the most famous and widely visited monuments of the Region: the **Royal Palace (Reggia) of Caserta**. **Santa Maria Capua Vetere, Capua and Sessa Aurunca**, are also of historic and archaeological interest, all concentrated in the area of Caserta known as Terra di Lavoro. The **Domitian shore** is the province's coastline, an area rich with pine stands, wide sandy beaches and famous bathing establishments.

Inland, the massif of **Matese** offers marvellous uncontaminated nature and villages where art and popular traditions are still strongly felt; one of the least contaminated areas of Italy.

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Ente Parco del Matese
via Sannitica
Piedimonte Matese
tel. 0823 917232

Comunità Montana Monte Santa Croce
via Roma 30
Roccamonfina
tel. 0823 921276

Calvi Vecchia
Scavi archeologici di *Cales*
strada statale Casilina
tel. 0823 652533

Capua
Museo Provinciale Campano
via Roma 68
tel. 0823 961402

Santa Maria Capua Vetere
Museo Archeologico dell'antica Capua
via Roberto d'Angiò 48
tel. 0823 844206

Caserta
Reggia e Parco
via Douhet 22
tel. 0823 462078/448084
Oasi di San Silvestro
Centro Ambientale WWF
tel. 0823 361300
Complesso Monumentale del Belvedere di San Leucio
tel. 0823 301817

Giugliano
Area archeologica di *Liternum*
(località Lago Patria sulla Circumvallazione)
tel. 081 8391281

San Tammaro
Museo dell'Agricoltura Meridionale
Real Sito di Carditello
tel. 0823 278311

famous travellers

The palace will be more beautiful than Versailles... the acqueduct is so magnificent that I have never seen one similar elsewhere.

Jacob Jonas Björnstaehl, 1771

not to be missed

- Royal Palace and Park of Caserta
- Casertavecchia
- Santa Maria Capua Vetere
- Sant'Angelo in Formis
- Lake Matese
- Valle dell'Inferno (Valley of Hell)

caserta in 1 day

- Royal Palace and Park of Caserta
- Casertavecchia

caserta in 3 days

- Royal Palace and Park of Caserta
- San Leucio Village
- Casertavecchia
- Santa Maria Capua Vetere
- Piedimonte Matese
- Lake Matese

shopping

- Wooden, copper, wrought iron and wicker objects
- Embroidery, laceware

outings with children

- The Royal Palace and Park of Caserta
- Amphitheatre and Museum of the Gladiators at Santa Maria Capua Vetere
- Variconi Oasis
- Castles and Lakes around the Matese

events

May

- _Artichoke Festival* Maddaloni
- _Strawberry Festival* Vairano Patenora

May-July

- _Leuciana Festival* Royal Belvedere of San Leucio

June

- _Peasant-Style Prosciutto Festival* Liberi
- _Asprinio Wine Festival* Cesa
- _Buffalo Mozzarella and Meat Festival* Pontelatone

June-September

- _Caserta Summer Festival* Caserta

July

- _Gypsy-Style Pancetta Festival* Liberi

July-August

- _Stone Theatres* Concerts and performances in ancient theatres
- _Out of Place Places'* Theatre and music review Letino, Matese Park

July-September

- _Art White Nights* Municipalities in the Province

July-October

- _Light Trails in the Caserta Palace* The Palace describes itself in the moonlight

August

- _Falerno Wine Festival* Cellole

August-September

- _September in the Village* Music, theatre dance, visual arts
- Medieval village of Casertavecchia

September

- _Caserta...In Blues* Caserta
- _Yellow Bread Festival* Casertavecchia
- _Wine-making Contest 'Immortalising Falernum'* Falciano del Massico
- _Wine Festival* Pontelatone

October

- _Chestnut Festival* Roccamonfina
- _Annurca Apple Festival* Valle di Maddaloni

November

- _Bread, Oil and Chicory* Caiazzo

December

- _Living Crib* Casertavecchia



Frescoe in the Royal Palace of Caserta



art and archaeology

- Royal Palace and Park of Caserta
- San Leucio Village
- Casertavecchia
- Santa Maria Capua Vetere
- Sant'Angelo in Formis
- Rovine di *Liternum*
- Sessa Aurunca
- Sant'Angelo d'Alife Castle

nature and parks

- Matese Regional Park
- Lake of Matese
- Regional Natural Reserve of Foce Volturmo and Costa di Licola
- Regional Natural Park of Roccamonfina-Foce del Garigliano

for young people

- Casertavecchia
- Baia Domizia
- Marina of Varcaturò
- Natural Regional Park of Matese (skiing, canyoning, free flight, *free climbing*)

specialities

- Campanian buffalo meat
- Chestnuts from Roccamonfina
- Buffalo Mozzarella Dop

wines

- Falerno del Massico Doc

spas and fitness

- Sinuessa Thermal baths

The Royal Bourbon sites: Caserta, San Leucio and Carditello

famous travellers

The gardens of the park are stupendous, in perfect harmony with strip that is all one garden.

Johann Wolfgang Goethe, 1787

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The **Royal Palace of Caserta** is one of the most sumptuous palaces ever to be constructed for a King. In 1751 King Charles of Bourbon engaged the architect Luigi Vanvitelli to design a palace that could compete with the great residences of the other European sovereigns, in particular Versailles. In just a few years, an enormous complex began to take form on the vast plains, and with time around the Palace the city of Caserta was born.

The immense dwelling is made up of four courtyards and thousands of rooms, chapels, museums and theatres. In the 120 hectare park wide boulevards, fountains, waterfalls and numerous other constructions were created (a bus service is available to help you visit it all). Stunned by the sumptuous architecture, George Lucas chose the Royal Palace as setting for some scenes in the *Star Wars* series.

The Palace has 1,200 rooms, 34 stairways and 1,970 windows. The *lower foyer* opens into the entrance atrium, from which you can admire the four courtyards with their park views. From the honour stairway one goes to the *upper foyer* and directly in front, the **Palatina Chapel**, a rectangular hall with its barrel-vaulted caisson ceiling decorated with gilded rosettes and a semicircular apse. To the left of the chapel are the **Royal Apartments**, pompously decorated with marble and paintings, and furnished with period pieces and precious objects. The **Palatina Library** occupies three rooms. A request of Maria Carolina, it had more than 10,000 volumes. The *Royal Nativity scene* has been reconstructed in one large hall.

The **Gallery** of the Royal Palace of Caserta is divided into various sections. The *Picture-gallery* contains portraits of the kings and queens of the Bourbon family, both from Spain and France.

One of the wings of the palace houses the so-called **Opera Museum**, or the **Vanvitellian Museum**, with a collection of drawings, sketches and plans of Vanvitelli's masterpiece, as well as wooden models of the Royal Palace. In the second courtyard is the **Little Court Theatre**. Built in a horseshoe form, with five levels of boxes and a sumptuous royal balcony, it is a true masterpiece of 1700's theatrical architecture.



bridges of the Maddaloni Valley

The Bridges of the Maddaloni Valley are fruit of the genius of Luigi Vanvitelli, and built in the

1700's for the Carolinian aqueduct that feeds the waterfalls of the Park of the Royal Palace of Caserta. This masterpiece of sequential arches is an imposing structure, made even more monumental by its architectural similarity to Roman aqueducts.

If the Royal Palace is an exultation of architecture and décor, then the **Park** mirrors its importance in the majestic fountains, with subtle plays of water, and in the lush green that disappears into the horizon. The central boulevard, about 3 kilometers long, makes a powerful impact, adorned with fountains, waterfalls and groups of statues tucked away in the geometry of the woods, grass lawns and flower beds. The sequence of water culminates in the **Great Waterfall**, known as the *fountain of Diana*. There is also an **English Garden**, wanted by Maria Carolina of Austria. It is rich with rare and exotic plants, greenhouses, thickets and paths. There is a lovely pond with the statue of *Venus* and, typical of the Romantic style, fake ruins adorned with statues.

The 'Royal Site' finds its completion in the nearby village of San Leucio (famous for the production of high quality silk) with its elegant Casino Reale del Belvedere (Royal Lodge), home to important cultural events.

San Leucio is a suburb of Caserta where, in 1700's on orders of Ferdinando IV, a silk factory was installed. The village that grew around it had its own statutes, with utopian (for its time) laws: the workers employed by the *Royal Silk Factory* and their families enjoyed equal rights, free obligatory education for the children, and a fraction of the revenue was invested in a fund for the aid of the sick and the elderly.

The silk production from San Leucio became known all over Europe, and even today is prized the world over.

If San Leucio represented a courageous push towards a new model of industrial development, then the **Royal Site of Carditello** was its imitator in the field of agricultural development, once again instituted by Ferdinando IV. There was buffalo breeding, and a dairy farm for the production of mozzarella. To facilitate the Sovereign on his visits, a small palace, agricultural buildings and a church were built in the mid 1700's. This residence now houses the Southern Agricultural Museum.



Internal view of the Royal Palace of Caserta

Belvedere Lodge at San Leucio

famous travellers

One cannot disagree with the fact that it is a dwelling fit for the ancient masters of the world.

Henry Swinburne, 1777

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The village of Casertavecchia

A visit to **Casertavecchia** is unforgettable, one of the most evocative and well preserved medieval villages in Italy. Here, amid little stone paved streets, aristocratic buildings and ancient churches, old traditions are still deeply felt.

In the summer a festival of music, theatre and dance is held called "Settembre al Borgo", or September in the Village.

A stroll along the medieval streets gives one the sensation of going back in time. At the centre of the village is piazza Vescovado, onto which faces the **Cathedral of San Michele**, a magnificent example of arab-norman architecture with a polychromatic lantern and belltower, the *episcopal palace*, the *seminary* and the *canonical house*, to form a closed rectangular courtyard. Of the characteristic buildings, the **Mullioned House** is worthy of note, an example of a 15th century aristocratic home. The ruins of the **Castello**, built in the 9th century are also preserved.



San Silvestro woods oasis

Protected by the WWF, the oasis is made up of beautiful holm-oak, maple and chestnut woods that

continue from the Park of the Royal Palace, as a sort of theatrical backdrop. It occupies the area of the Royal Holding of San Silvestro, and was used by Ferdinando IV to satisfy his venatory and agricultural passions, based on other European royal holdings. The woods are inhabited by

small mammals, some deer and several bird species.

Cathedral of San Michele

Church of the Annunciation

Virgin with the Child



In Capua there was a magnificent amphitheatre, of which one can still admire the ruins; because it was Capua, the civilised city par excellence, that invented gladiator fights.

Alexandre Dumas, 1857

This vast area of the province of Caserta has many interesting historic and artistic places: from the Roman ruins of Santa Maria Capua Vetere, Calvi and Sessa Aurunca, to the medieval remains in Aversa, Capua and Sant'Angelo in Formis.

Founded by the Normans, **Aversa** has a stupendous romanesque **Cathedral** from the 11th century, home to works of great importance. The complex of the Annunziata with its baroque church is also beautiful. Cicero called ancient Capua *Altera Roma*, or "second Rome", the city where Hannibal idled, and it now corresponds to the modern town of **Santa Maria Capua Vetere**. Its monuments recall the magnificence of the past: the glorious Campano Amphitheatre, the Mitreo, and the Collegiata di Santa Maria.

The remains of the **Amphitheatre** (from the Augustan era in the 1st century AD) are imposing, and second only in size to the Colosseum in Rome. Built following an elliptic plan, it was four stories high and decorated with statues. It could host up to 40,000 spectators. The arena is well preserved, while only some pillars and a lateral arch remain of **Adrian's Arch**, also known as the Arch of Capua, under which the Appian Way passed.

The **Mitreo** is one of the best preserved monuments, used as a place of worship of the persian god Mithras, it dates back to the 2nd-3rd centuries AD. It is a long rectangular subterranean hall, and on the far wall a fresco of the god killing a bull can still be seen (2nd century AD).

The **Cathedral** or *Collegiata di Santa Maria* dates to the 5th century. The façade of the church presents itself with three great doors. The inside of the church, with five naves, has 51 ancient columns of varying forms and materials, almost all topped by moulded capitals. The church contains important works of art. The **Archaeological Museum of Ancient Capua** houses relics from the remains of the Roman city. The original **Gladiator Museum**, unique in its genre, will be particularly appreciated by children.

A few kilometers from Santa Maria Capua Vetere is the present-day **Capua**: in Roman times only a small landing on the handle of Voltorno, known as *Casilinum*, it now offers magnificent examples of medieval art, buildings and churches, as well as an important museum.

Enclosed by a long ramparts (16th century), the city maintains its medieval feeling, particularly in the **oldest part of its centre**. There you will find the three small churches founded by the Longobards: San Michele in Corte, San Giovanni in Corte and San Salvatore a Corte. The heart of the village is the **Cathedral** (9th century), containing prized paintings and sculptures. The pride of the city is the **Campano Museum**, which is rich in historical, artistic, archaeological and religious documentation of the civilisation in Campania. It is situated in the 14th century Palazzo Antignano and is famous for its collection of the *'Matres Matutae'*, the mothers of Capua, tuff statues that figure sitting women with numerous children in their arms dedicated to the fertility goddess (dated between the 5th and 1st centuries BC). There is also a collection of latin epigraphs and archaeological material from Roman Capua, as well as the medieval sculptures from the Gate of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen.

Not far from Capua, on a highland from which a marvellous view of the great plain of Caserta can be enjoyed, is one of the most important medieval monuments of Italy: the **Basilica of Sant'Angelo in Formis**. It was founded in the 10th century on the remains of a temple dedicated to the goddess Diana, but rebuilt in 1072 under orders of the Abbot Desiderio of Montecassino. The inside has three naves and three apses, and is covered in colourful frescoes, a cycle of painting unique in Southern Italy.



the Wine Trail of Terra di Lavoro

The trail includes all the most important gastronomic areas: Caserta, Aversa, Santa Maria Capua Vetere e

Sessa Aurunca, the spent volcano Roccamonfina and the limestone reliefs of Mässico. Wines produced here have been famous since ancient times, as are the other local products: the chestnuts from Roccamonfina, the campanian annurca apple, the buffalo mozzarella Dop

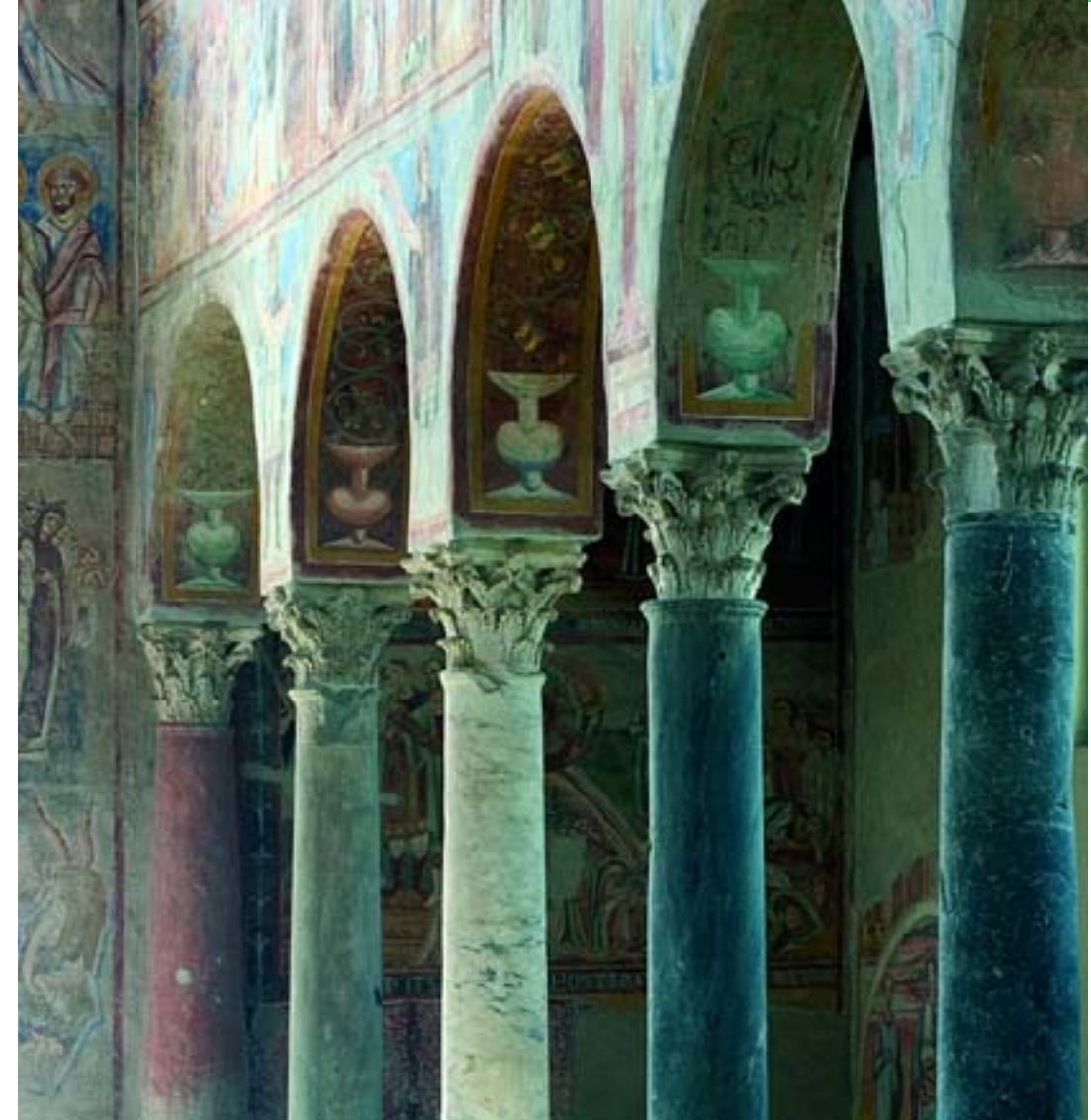
and the smoked provolone cheese. (www.sito.regione.campania.it/agricoltura/home.htm).



the annurca apple

The queen of apples is cultivated only in the Campania region, and its greatest concentration is in

the province of Caserta. One of the peculiarities of this apple is that it ripens on hay on the ground. The popular feast dedicated to the fruit is held in autumn in Valle di Maddaloni.



Basilica of Sant'Angelo in Formis

"Mothers" of Capua Museo Campano

Amphitheatre Santa Maria Capua Vetere

Basilica of Sant'Angelo in Formis, apse





Church of the Annunciation of Aversa

Roman Theatre of Teano

In the area near **Calvi Risorta** the rests of *Cales* are found. Ancient crossroad of antique people, the Auruncans, Etruscans, Latins and Samnites, it has now become famous for its agricultural machinery, amongst which the "calesse", a two wheeled 'cart'. Aside from the **Romanesque Cathedral of San Casto** there are Roman remains to be visited: of particular importance are the **Central Thermal Baths** and the **Theatre**, both from the 1st century BC.

Close to the border with Lazio is **Sessa Aurunca**, ancient city of the Auruncans. Situated between orchards and olive groves, it preserves proof of its glorious past.

The Romanesque **Cathedral** goes back to the 12th century. Inside there are lovely mosaics and re-used Roman columns. The **Duke's Castle**, built during the reign of the Longobards over ruins of a Roman building and enlarged by the Hohenstaufen emperors, it hosts the Museum in the Castle, with relics from the necropolises, the temples and the Roman villas of ancient Suessa.

The remains of the **Roman Theatre** (1st century BC) are at the edge of town, surrounded by a grandiose **cryptoporticus** from the 1st century AD. Next to the theatre we can find remains consistent with ancient thermal baths. Take a relaxing stroll to the **Ponte degli Aurunci**, on the road that connected old Sessa to the via Appia near the coast. This ancient viaduct was built in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD and consists of 21 arches.

In the area around Caserta many other towns have also known how to enhance their historical patrimony: **Maddaloni** with its Archaeological Museum of Antica Calatia (in the charming lodge of the dukes of Carafa), **Teano** with its Archaeological Museum of Teanum Sidicinum (in a splendid late-gothic building in the heart of the historic centre of town), and **Succivo** with its Archaeological Museum of Agro Atellano.



the rites of Holy Week at Sessa Aurunca

The rites of Holy Week at Sessa Aurunca represent one of the most intense popular religious moments,

deeply felt by the entire community. Whether in the Procession of the Mysteries of the Passion, or in the group of the Deposition of Christ from the Cross or of the Grieving Virgin, everyone has a role to play: the little boys with their thuribles full of burning incense, little girls dressed

as winged angels, the hooded monks or the women dressed in mourning to sympathise with the Grieving Virgin over the dead Christ.

The Cathedral of Sessa Aurunca

The Cathedral of San Paolo, Aversa



The Domitian Coast: from Licola to Baia Domizia

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The other hub of tourism in this area is the beautiful **Domitian Coast**, famous for its many kilometers of white beaches.

The scenery, designed by the dunes of fine white sand and the green pine stands, twists its way along the ancient Via Domiziana, northeast of Naples. The entire area is a strong tourist attraction, well equipped with hotels, resorts, pensions and camping grounds. Although mostly visited in the summer, above all by families with children and by young people, is also very nice in the off-season. It is a land of wide open spaces and many resources; a tranquil sea and protected nature (the Regional Natural Reserve Foce Volturno and Costa di **Licola** and the Regional Natural Park Roccamonfina-Foce del Garigliano).

Going from Naples towards the north along the via Domiziana, there are many interesting towns: the first is Licola, noted for its ample and quiet beaches. There is a pine forest equipped with accommodations and sports facilities.

Marina di Vercaturo, developed in the 1950's, is a favourite of young tourists. The lidos offer wide beaches, swimming pools and the possibility to take part in various sports.

On **Lago Patria**, a small body of water on the coast, there once was the city of **Liternum**, of which today only some remains are visible. The Forum has three main monuments: the Temple, the Basilica and the Theatre. A little further on is the Patria tower and the tourist swimming establishment of **Marina di Lago Patria**.

The area between Villaggio Coppola (with an 18-hole golf course) and Mondragone attracts thousands of tourists every year for the beauty of its miles of coast: near the mouth of the river Volturno is **Castel Volturno**, a centre noted for the production of buffalo mozzarella and for its lovely pines, then **Mondragone**, a lively town. You can enjoy a relaxing holiday at **Bagni di Mondragone**, in the thermal baths that take their name from Sinuessa, the Roman colony famous for its hot springs.

At the centre of the Gulf of Gaeta, just before the mouth of the Garigliano river, **Baia Domizia** finally appears, a lovely tourist oasis with a balsamic pine forest and very fine sand.

Along the entire coast the visitor can count on wide sandy beaches, ideal for children and equipped with sports facilities. Here you can practise any sort of sport, from deltaflying to diving, from golf to waterskiing, as well as enjoy a day at the water parks. The beaches are usually very full and in the evening young people come out to meet up in the bars and 'gelaterias'.

The domitian area is famous for the production of exquisite buffalo mozzarella: it is certainly worth visiting one of the many dairy farms in the area between Mondragone and Castel Volturno where you can watch them hand-make it.

Falciano Lake Reserve



Buffalo herds on the domitian coast



the Roccamonfina Regional Park

The Roccamonfina and mouth of the Garigliano river Regional Park includes the mountainous region of

the spent volcano of Roccamonfina, and the mouth of the river that marks the northern border of the coast of Campania. The volcano, covered in woods, has a diameter of 15 kilometers. Lovely trails run through the Park.

famous travellers

The azure bay seems to borrow more of the blue of heaven as it stretches far away to the horizon; the little steamers and innumerable yachts that ply between the islands give the scene animation and variety.

A.J. O'Reilly 1884



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The Domitian Coast



the kingdom of the Buffalo

This is the most famous and appreciated mozzarella, produced with whole buffalo milk. Hailing ancient

origins, Mozzarella takes its name from the moment in which the curd, after being poured, is "mozzata", that is "cut". Buffalos are mostly bred in the province of Caserta, between Aversa and Mondragone, and on the Sele plain. The buffalo mozzarella of Campania carries the Dop

marking, quality guarantee for the consumer.

Rarely does one find similar magic in any other place.

Johann Gottfried Seume, 1802

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Horizons of rocky crests, sheer rock faces and steep gorges, majestic tops which reach 2,000 meters: Matese, a synthesis of marvellous unspoiled nature, of art and deeply rooted traditions is an immense territory between valleys, lakes, rivers and mountains, dotted with charming villages on hilltops and splendid woods.

The itineraries for the exploration of the **Regional Park of the Matese** are numerous. Some take you along ancient paths through wonderful landscapes, fortified villages, and medieval castles, so that the pleasure of walking can be combined with visits to the most interesting places in the area. One can also walk into the elm and oak woods or onto the ample high plains, a scenario which is mirrored in the intense blue of the many pools of water, or amid majestic summits that touch 2,000 mt. There are fascinating naturalistic destinations like the Lake of **Matese**, the **Valley of Hell**, the **Lete river**, the **grottoes of Canto** and the **Quirino Canyon** (the largest canyon in Italy).

Other trails are created for the tourist looking for an alternative way of enjoying nature through a more direct contact with it: trekking, horseback riding, birdwatching, mountain biking, four-wheel driving, endurance, spelunking, free climbing and flights with deltaplanes or hang-gliders.

The main villages of the area are in a circle around the massif of Matese. **Piedimonte Matese**, the most important town and the natural entrance to the park, has a vast artistic patrimony, and is the starting point for interesting hikes to the lakes, the panoramic points, and the many hiking trails on the mountain.

At **Castello Matese** one can admire the many picturesque medieval towers and enjoy the local cuisine, all the while taking in the magnificent panorama from an outcrop that dominates the Volturno Valley. **San Gregorio**, in the heart of the massif, is a noted weather station; **Letino**, with its lovely castle, is at an altitude of almost 1,000 mt and looks onto the lake that borrowed its name. The other towns of Matese, on the slopes of the mountain, conserve evocative testimony to an ancient past: castles, convents, and medieval villages will surprise the visitor in **Prata Sannita**, **Gioia Sannitica**, and **Sant'Angelo d'Alife**. From December to April it is even possible to ski around the area of **Bocca della Selva**; **Monte Orso** has a nice cross-country skiing trail.

Back down in the plains, do not miss a visit to **Alife**: at the feet of the massif in the valley of Volturno, it still preserves intact the ancient Roman city closed in by massive walls.

The Matese area is not just history and nature. Here old crafts and traditions still live: artisan and artistic ceramics, the old art of woodworking, of copper and wrought iron, popular music, songs, fables, tools and the traditional costumes worn for the village festivals.

For those who would like to stay for a few days, there is a wide choice of accommodations around the park; hotels, pensions, agritourisms and Bed & Breakfasts. An additional pleasure can be found in the traditional Matese cuisine, with its simple and genuine flavours.

The cheese production is highly prized: look for the 'pecorino lauticauda', that takes its name from the breed of sheep from whose milk the cheese has been made.

the famous onions of Alife. Of the numerous local wines varieties, the Pallagrello is the best known. The hills and the mountains of Matese are an ideal habitat for mushrooms and truffles, both white and black, for all the varieties of berries, honey and chestnuts.



Matese products

There are many genuine high-quality products to be found here: from the olive oil of Piedimonte Matese to



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View of Matese

Lake Matese

Regional Park of the Taburno

