



THE PEARL OF ABRUZZO: A REMARKABLE NATURAL HERITAGE

SCANNO AND ITS LAKE

Clinging to the rock of Mount Carapale, at 1050 metres above sea level, Scanno overlooks the natural amphitheatre of the high Sagittario Valley, deep in the heart of Abruzzo and bordering the Natural Park along the sheep track Celano-Foggia. High mountains, plentiful with a luxuriant and colourful vegetation, surround its lake and are mirrored in its clear water.

SCANNO: THE PEARL OF ABRUZZO

On leaving the tollgate of Cocullo and entering the Valle del Sagittario, go through the village of Anversa degli Abruzzi - much loved by D'Annunzio - and the winding Gole del Sagittario up to Villalago, where, bordering Lake Scanno at the centre of one of the most beautiful valleys of the area of L'Aquila, the splendid town of Scanno suddenly comes into view.

Among the most beautiful Italian towns, it overlooks a natural amphitheatre, deep in the heart of Abruzzo. Scanno is a pleasant resort to be enjoyed all year round and offers tourists a lots of leisure opportunities, from relaxing activities in the quietness of mountain panoramas, to sport facilities, folklore, art and crafts.

The liveliness of the village is evidenced by various local craft-making activities, such as golden ornaments and lacework. Besides the traditional festivities taking place every year on the usual dates, other musical and cultural events and celebrations are held throughout the Summer. In August you can be delighted by the "Catenaccio", a parade unique of its kind: it consists of a bridal procession accompanying the bride and the groom to church first and then to their new home.

The newlyweds and their guests wear festive costumes; friends and relatives walk in pairs, arranged according to the degree of relationship. The joyful parade is repeatedly stopped by colourful ribbons stretched across the streets.

Besides, a natural route between the high Sagittario Valley from "Scanno" and the high Sangro from "Villetta Barrea", the plateau of Passo Goti, 1630 m above sea level is one the best equipped resorts for winter sports in Southern Italy, both modern and safe, rich in traditions and unexpected pleasures.

FINDING THE PAST

The village of Scanno stands on a crag in the shape of a stool, and from "scannum" it has taken its name. About its origins, indeed there have been settlements ever since very ancient times, as shown by the archaeological finds dating back to the Iron Age and brought to light in the area, as well as by some wall structures that bear witness to Roman settlements of the Empire Age. But the present locality has been certified only since 1067. Once a fiefdom of powerful families, such as Counts of Valva, Di Sangro, D'Aquino, D'Avalos, De Pasquale and D'Affitto, after various invasions and ruins caused by natural disasters, at the end of the feudal time (1806) Scanno was ruled by the Caracciolo di Melissano.

From the 19th century onwards, Scanno has been involved in the national historical events, especially the ones of Southern Italy: brigands, the migrations and the following poverty, then the economic recovery due to the emigrants' improved incomes, up to the recent tourist development.

The Historical Centre

The old hamlet is the town's focal point, with its structure rising solid and harmoniously, combining Romanesque and Gothic styles with the Renaissance and Baroque features made from the local stone.

A pleasant walk through the historical centre of Scanno, characterized by a picturesque maze of medieval stone-paved alleys, reveals various religious and not religious buildings, palaces and houses enriched with Renaissance portals or graceful entrance doors, 18th-century Baroque windows, arches and balconies.

From Middle Ages onwards, the inhabitants have carefully preserved the most representative monuments of their town's history, built at the will of well-off landlords, that give evidences of their economical growth due to the wool working process, from dyeing to spinning and weaving.

The medieval centre gives the tourist the opportunity to visit various interesting historical and artistic monuments, whose characteristic views have been shot by famous photographers such as Cartier-Bresson and Giacomelli.

Santa Maria della Valle (The Parish Church)

From an architectural point of view, the most attractive building of the town is the present Parish Church, Santa Maria della Valle, medieval in origin, dating back to the 13th century.

Modified between 1563 and 1567, it still maintains the original splayed portal of Burgundy school.

Its interior with a central nave and two side aisles, decorated in the 18th-century Baroque style, houses remarkable works of sacred art, such as a wooden pulpit of 1766, the remains of some splendid Renaissance frescoes, a representation of the Pietà and the altar of St John the Evangelist. Most interesting, we can also find the magnificent canvas depicting the "Deposizione", influenced by the Neapolitan naturalistic style and the "Transito di Giuseppe" of the 17th century. Some traces of the medieval decorations are still visible on the pillars at the beginning of the central nave.

But jewel of the engraving art, there is the Baptistery, on the left of the entrance, of exquisite 1500 or may be early Baroque workmanship.

SCANNO: THE MONUMENTS

Another church of remarkable interest is Santa Maria di Costantinopoli, built in 1400 but modified at the beginning of 1700. On its altar it preserves a fresco of the "Madonna in trono con il Bambino", the most valuable work of art of Scanno.

Also the church dedicated to Santa Maria di Loreto and Sant'Eustachio, that has been considered the cradle of the population's faith, should be noted. Completely reconstructed, it is an example of the local features of Baroque style.

At a short distance from the town centre, you can see the Church and the Convent of Sant'Antonio, built starting from 1590.

The aisle-less interior is decorated with beautiful stucco works.

San Rocco or Madonna del Carmine

Finally there is the Church of San Rocco, with a simple façade and a simple interior, but famous thanks to its photo taken by Cartier Bresson from the frontal building. Dedicated to San Rocco, this church is called "Madonna del Carmine" by the population of Scanno, since it has been home to the Confraternita del Carmelo. The current structure was modelled by joining together two contiguous churches, the Church of S. Rocco and the Church of SS. Sacramento, probably around the end of the 17th century. The building has undergone various alterations, some of which can be seen at just a glance.

The Palazzi

There are various and interesting noble palaces at Scanno, such as the complex formed by Palazzo de Angelis (1766) and Palazzo Tanturri de Horatio with a picturesque court (18th century), the monumental Palazzo Di Rienzo (19th century) and the rich Palazzo Serafini-Ciancarelli (17th century).

Palazzo Mosca (16th century) is certainly one of the most elegant. Various and extremely attractive are also the houses with lodges, towers and portals.

The Fountains

The fountains are the most ancient public structures of Scanno and arouse a large interest for their refined decorations.

Amongst the most appreciated ones, we would like to mention Fontana Sarracco (1332) featured by two Romanesque arches, one of which hosts a bas-relief representing the Annunciation, and the Fonte del Pisciarello (18th century), smaller but no less interesting.

CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

Museo della Lana

The Museo della Lana, planned by Michele Rak of Siena University and realized by the Centro Studi per l'Immagine dell'Abruzzo, is a full representation of the identity of a town (Scanno) and a valley (Sagittario Valley). This important meeting point between wool manufacturers and fashion is a revival of the shepherds' culture that can be discovered by following the trails of the ancient working processes of wool, skins, cheese and vellum; it collects the historical documents of families and communities that have lived and worked in the Sagittario Valley.

The tools have been displayed into three sets: work, house and religion. The first exhibition was held in 1996.

Museo della lana, Via Calata S. Antonio, Scanno (AQ) - Tel. 0864-74441

Prenotazioni tel. 0864-747203 - oppure cell.330-749745.

Apertura: estate, lunedì, domenica; festivi tutto l'anno orario: 11-13 / 17-20.

Info allo I.A.T. tel.0864-74317.

The pride of Scanno is the typical women's costume, even useful for the historical research about the origins of its population.

The costume consists of a head scarf (maccaturo), a square coloured woollen cloth, folded to wrap women's head; a large cotton apron (mantera) edged with a coloured border (pedera), put over the skirt usually dark green coloured and woven by hand; a black bodice (commodine) with long sleeves. There is also precious pillow lace collar to light up women's face.

It seems likely that the bobbin lace was imported from Venice. Whatever is its origin, the lace-making flourished in Abruzzo more than elsewhere, thanks to the long winter seasons which induced women to devote more time to it. In the kitchens, in the streets or even on the steps before entrances, you could hear the light beating of the "mezzerielli", crossing and weaving around the lace. Laces designed for embellishing sheets, towels and trousseaux, were made with cotton thread; for special or more important laces, such as the "scolla", the silk thread was used. In the mid-60s, at the will of Suor Maria Vecchio, the school Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice was founded at Scanno and, since then, it has been exploiting the skill of expert workers.

Also the golden jewels, proudly worn by ladies, were very elegant. Art of ancient origin, the goldsmith counted in finely wrought bottles for perfumes in the shape of little flower-vases, baskets, sirens and snuffboxes. Handed down through the generations, many artisans still continue the tradition of the goldsmith's art.

LAKE SCANNO / SINCE 2004 FEE - BLUE FLAG AWARDED

Lake Scanno, a little masterpiece of nature, lies at the centre of one of the most beautiful and wild areas of Abruzzo.

Off the eastern borders of the National Park, along the Valley of Sagittario towards Anversa degli Abruzzi, you can stop at the lookout of Frattura Nuova to catch the sight of the splendid green lake: oval shaped, in the heart of an attractive and characteristic plateau, it reflects the surrounding vegetation rich in durmast oaks, poplars, willows and lime trees.

Lake Scanno originated in the Prehistoric Era from a landslide of Mount Rava that, collapsing, interrupted the course of the Tasso river.

It is situated at 922 m above sea level, in the high Valley of Sagittario between Monte Genzana and Montagna Grande, an important naturalistic area that features the famous Gole del Sagittario.

The lake is 1700 metres long, 700 metres wide and has a depth of 32 metres, seemingly without any outlets thanks to a karstic phenomenon.

There are some evident underwater sources that produce air bubbles on its surface. It represents a unique heritage, whose environment and colours change according to seasons.

The fish fauna includes trout, tench, eels, rudd, perch and the excellent whitefish but even more interesting is the fauna of birds with wild ducks and mallards, peregrine hawks, fish hawks, owls, tawny owls, goshawks and eagles.

Scanno is the only lake in the Apennines that (like Lake Cannobio in Piemonte and Lake Sirmione in Lombardia) has been awarded the Blue Flag, acknowledged every year after a series of stringent controls: bathing water quality, depuration, refuse handling, coast quality, respect towards the environment and safety measures.

The lake is a remarkable tourist attraction since it offers relaxation, lakeshores, bars and restaurants, horse-riding, biking, pedalò and fishing. Lake Scanno is the widest natural lake in Abruzzo and there is nothing better than a pleasant and healthy walk along the "Circumlacuale", the ring road 5.4 km long running all around it.

We would suggest a visit to the small Chiesa dell'Annunziata (La Nunciata), better known as Madonna del Lago, set into the rock, that hosts the nice wooden statue of the Vergin, an accurate copy of the original of 1500-1600, stolen in 1979.

Cuisine

The food specialities of Scanno still maintain the fragrance of nature and is a reminder of past times.

The ancient traditions of butchery (veal, lamb and wether meat) have brought genuine taste up to the present, to be appreciated any time, not only on special occasions.

At Scanno, pork meat has always been worked to produce a large selection of products, such as salami, flavoured or spicy, salsicce, lardo, lonza, coppa, pancetta, bresaola, prosciutto.

Cheese production offers an excellent selection as well, among which ricotte, caciotte, pecorini, all made from sheep's milk, worked according to ancient traditions and certified by modern processing techniques.

Even local cakes, such as mostraciuoli and pan dell'orso can still be tasted.

Getting to Scanno

In auto: Autostrada A25 (Roma - Pescara) uscita al casello di Cocullo, proseguire sulla S.S. 479 per Anversa degli

By car and by bus: A25 Motorway (Roma-Pescara), Cocullo exit. Then drive along SS 479 towards Anversa degli Abruzzi, Le Gole del Sagittario, Villalago, Lago di Scanno, Scanno.

By train: Roma-Pescara FS railway - Sulmona Station; bus connection.

By plane: Pescara Airport; bus connection to the railway station.

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