



WHAT'S NEW IN ITALY

AND THE REST OF EUROPE

News Digest of the
Italo-Australia Network

Your selected news guide
to Italy and Europe

April 2026

ISSUE 3



A tranquil Roman vista near the Caelian Hill



Cloister of Santi Quattro Coronati, a secluded mediaeval sanctuary on Rome's Caelian Hill.

Rome's Mediaeval Cloister

Soave Mestizia (Sweet melancholy) is one of the most historic mediaeval cloisters located in the heart of Rome, near the Colosseum, yet unknown to a vast number of visitors.

To understand the architecture of mediaeval [Rome](#), one should go to ancient churches and basilicas; pause before the ambos (mediaeval stone pulpits), the thrones, the ciboria (canopies over the altar), funerary monuments and the tabernacles of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries; look at the harmony of their parts, the frankness of their decoration, the glittering of gilded enamel, put together in a thousand ways with reds, blues and whites, and surrounded with circular or rectangular tiles of porphyry, verde antico, granites and various marbles.

In an isolated position on the [Caelian Hill](#), the [Basilica of Santi Quattro Coronati](#) may look like a fortress, but it is a genuine convent complex that has been inhabited and run by Augustinian nuns since the 16th century. It is dedicat-

ed either to five stonemasons killed in the time of Diocletian for their refusal to carve a statue of the god Aesculapius, or to four Roman soldiers (Severus, Severian, Carpophorus and Victorinus) who refused to worship it. What is certain is that a visit to this mystical place will leave you breathless.

The building was founded in the mid-fifth century, enlarged in the seventh century, transformed in the ninth by Leo IV — the period to which the bell tower, the oldest in Rome, dates — and rebuilt by Paschal II in 1111. The monastery and oratory of San Silvestro were built in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The church, which can be accessed after passing through the first two cloisters of the monastery, has three naves with women's galleries, a Cosmatesque floor, and fragments of mediaeval and seventeenth-century paintings.

The left aisle leads to the silent Cosmatesque cloister, the work of Roman marble workers from the thirteenth century, onto which opens the [Chapel of Santa Barbara](#), with frescoes

from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In the chapel of the oratory of San Silvestro, consecrated in 1247, there are beautiful frescoes from the same period depicting stories from the life of Constantine. The restoration of the complex has included the recovery of the Gothic Hall on the first floor of the main tower, with a lively painting cycle from the mid-thirteenth century representing the arts and the months of the year.

Whether it is the serene atmosphere of a cloistered monastery or the historical significance of a cloistered basilica, visiting an ancient cloister offers a profound experience that transcends time and space, inviting us to connect with the spiritual heritage of the past.

The early Christian architecture of Rome offers visitors an opportunity to discover a different artistic style from those that dominate much of the city — namely the Renaissance and Baroque. Churches of this kind are also of archaeological significance, offering a window into the cultural expressions of the Greco-Roman and Paleo-Christian eras.



Abruzzo's Green Gold

In Loreto Aprutino, in the province of [Pescara](#), the story of olive oil unfolds across centuries — a landscape where tradition, cultivation and craftsmanship combine to produce one of Abruzzo's most prized treasures.

In [Loreto Aprutino](#), the rhythm of life has long been shaped by the cultivation of olive trees and the production of oil. Just a few kilometres from the slopes of the [Gran Sasso](#), immense expanses of olive groves stretch across softly undulating hills, forming a landscape that is both productive and deeply picturesque. Here, agriculture and heritage are inseparable.

This is the millenary story of olive oil in [Abruzzo](#), a region where the so-called 'green gold' is considered among the finest in Italy. In this rural centre, set between the Adriatic coast and the [Apennine mountains](#), olive growing is not simply an economic activity but a defining cultural tradition. It is no coincidence that one may encounter references to the "Councillorship of Extra Virgin Olive Oil" — a title that may sound curious, yet reflects the seriousness with which this heritage is regarded.

Across nearly fifty thousand hectares of olive groves, this invaluable resource continues to sustain the regional economy. Over the years, the oil of Loreto Aprutino has earned recognition through numerous quality awards and the appreciation of even the most discerning palates. Its success lies in a process that is at once simple and exacting: olives are harvested early, directly from the tree to preserve their delicate flavour, carefully milled, and cold-pressed to maintain purity. The result is an oil that embodies both tradition and technical precision.

In recent years, olive oil production has contributed significantly to the broader Italian economy, strengthening its presence both domestically and in international markets. The distinctive taste, aroma, colour and bouquet of oil from Loreto Aprutino remain the defining qualities that set it apart.

Yet the olive tree carries a history that extends far beyond its culinary value. In ancient mythology it was sacred to Minerva, goddess of wisdom, while in classical Rome it symbolised victory and



Golden extra virgin olive oil with fresh olives, capturing the essence of Abruzzo's "green gold."

honour, its branches crowning triumphant leaders. In later Christian tradition, the olive branch became an enduring emblem of peace, serenity and hope.

Today, extra virgin olive oil continues to hold a central place in Italian life, valued not only for its flavour but also for its recognised health benefits. Used in moderation, it supports cardiovascular health,

aids digestion and contributes to overall wellbeing.

In Loreto Aprutino, this ancient tradition continues to flow, uniting landscape, history and taste. Here, every drop of oil tells a story — one that has been cultivated over centuries and remains one of Italy's most enduring and cherished expressions of rural life.

Explore Italy "virtually" with our special "What's New in Italy" Google Earth tour!



Your digital copy of What's New in Italy includes special links within each article, taking you directly to the places featured. By clicking these links, you can journey virtually to iconic landmarks, hidden treasures, and charming towns across Italy. Zoom into locations, enjoy panoramic views, or even drop into Street View for a closer look!

For details head to: <https://www.whatsnewinitaly.com/take-the-whats-new-in-italy-tour>



Cattedrale di San Cesareo, Terracina

Terracina: Where History and Myth Meet

In spring, the shores near Terracina reveal a quieter beauty — where history, myth and sea meet along the coast of Lazio.

During springtime, there is a compelling reason to visit the shore of Ulysses: the beaches are free from summer crowds, allowing the landscape and its history to emerge with clarity.

The town of [Terracina](#), with its ancient relics, offers an ideal starting point to discover a lesser-known side of southern [Lazio](#). Within easy reach of [Rome](#), this ancient city stretches along the Tyrrhenian coast, its origins dating back to the

Etruscan era when it was known as Anxur.

Later inhabited by the Volsci, the city was conquered by the Romans around 400 BC and became a vital point along the Appian Way, linking Rome with southern Italy.

Among its most striking monuments is the [Temple of Jupiter Anxur](#), rising above the town on [Monte Sant'Angelo](#), commanding sweeping views of the coastline.

Through the Middle Ages, the town endured invasions yet continued to evolve under the Papal States. Today, its past remains visible in well-preserved ruins

and mediaeval architecture.

Mythology adds another dimension. The acropolis — now [Colle San Francesco](#) — was believed to be where Ulysses observed the island of Aeaea, identified with [Monte Circeo](#).

In the upper town, cobbled streets and silent squares create an atmosphere of suspended time.

In the cathedral precinct, visitors pass [Porta Albina](#) and the Quadrifronte Arch, once the entrance to the Roman forum.

Terracina is more than a destination; it is an encounter with continuity itself.



Venice Beyond Romance

Venice is famed for romance, but beyond its iconic imagery lies a city best discovered slowly — where wandering alone reveals a deeper rhythm within the lagoon.

Inspiring artists, poets and lovers for centuries, [Venice](#) is synonymous with romance. Yet the lagoon city is not only for couples. Travelling alone here is not a limitation but an invitation — an opportunity to explore its streets, waterways and hidden corners at your own pace.

Instead of a gondola, take a seat on the open deck of a vaporetto. From [Piazzale Roma](#), board Line 1 for one of [Venice's](#) most scenic journeys along the [Grand Canal](#).

As the boat glides forward, a procession of opulent palazzi unfolds. The route passes beneath the [Rialto Bridge](#) and the [Ponte dell'Accademia](#), before opening towards the luminous dome of [Santa Maria della Salute](#).

Nearby, at [Punta della Dogana](#), the former customs house marks the meeting point of Venice's waterways, offering views across to [St Mark's Basilica](#).

Continue a little further and step off at San Marco Giardinetti, then walk towards [Castello](#), the largest yet least visited of Venice's historic districts.

In Castello, small boutiques, market stalls and cultural spaces replace the crowds. The neighbourhood is home to the [Arsenale](#), once the heart of the Venetian Republic's naval power.

No visit to Venice is complete without the [Palazzo Ducale](#), where Gothic architecture frames vast chambers adorned with Renaissance masterpieces.

Despite its complexity, the layout of Ven-



Gondola glides past the Doge's Palace along Venice's iconic Grand Canal.

ice has remained remarkably consistent. To walk its streets is not to be lost, but to move with the rhythm of the lagoon.

For the solitary traveller, Venice offers quiet connection — revealing itself not as a spectacle, but as a companion.

Stay connected with What's New in Italy

We're extending the pages of What's New in Italy beyond the magazine. Join us on **Facebook** and **Instagram** for regular updates, visual stories, and moments that don't always fit between covers.

Follow along for:

- travel inspiration and lesser-known places
- cultural insights and Italian life, day by day
- previews, highlights, and behind-the-scenes glimpses from each edition

Facebook: facebook.com/whatsnewinitaly

Instagram: [@whatsnewinitaly](https://www.instagram.com/whatsnewinitaly)





Castello di Ama overlooking the Chianti hills, where wine, art and history converge.

A Village Carved in Stone

Set among the gentle hills of Chianti, Lecchi in Chianti is a timeless village where stone, landscape and tradition quietly endure.

The characteristic village of [Lecchi in Chianti](#) stretches along the road leading towards [Castello di Ama](#). With its stone houses and dignified church, it offers an ideal pause — a place to walk slowly and absorb the surrounding landscape.

Clear water flows from the Mulinaccio stream, descending into the valley before joining the Massellone stream, itself a tributary of the [Arbia River](#). These waterways shape the terrain and contribute to the quiet harmony of the area.

Lecchi lies at the foot of a hill crowned by the ruins of [Montelucio Castle](#), which

dates back to 1176. Once part of an area dominated by great estates linked to families such as the Ricasoli wine barons, the village reflects a long-standing agricultural and cultural tradition. From the hilltop, the remains of fortifications overlook the valley, accompanied by a limestone watchtower that once served as a point of observation.

Lecchi is ideally positioned for excursions to [Siena](#), as well as the nearby Chianti towns of [Radda](#), [Gaiole](#), and [Castellina in Chianti](#) — places where the region's wine culture and culinary traditions can be explored in depth.

Just a short distance away, Castello di Ama offers a distinctive experience. Not a traditional castle but a hilltop estate, it combines wine production, hospitality and contemporary art. At first glance, it

appears as a typical stone-built *borgo* nestled in the Chianti hills, yet it reveals a more complex identity where wine, food and art coexist.

Within its grounds, a collection of contemporary installations interacts with the historic architecture and surrounding vineyards. Former functional spaces — including a chapel and wine cellar — have been repurposed to display works that create a striking dialogue between past and present.

In Lecchi in Chianti, life unfolds at an unhurried pace. The village remains poised between vine and sky, where time does not hurry but ripens. Its stone walls hold centuries of memory, and in the soft light of late afternoon, one understands that Lecchi is not merely visited — it is absorbed.



The Enchantment of Abruzzo

A journey through Abruzzo reveals a landscape of extraordinary contrasts — where mountains, sea, history and nature combine in one of Italy's most diverse and protected regions.

Travelling through [Abruzzo's](#) most beautiful villages, you enter a region where nearly half the territory is protected by national parks and nature reserves — more than anywhere else in Europe. This remarkable concentration of protected land has earned Abruzzo the title of the greenest region in Europe. Three national parks, one regional park and dozens of nature reserves safeguard rare species and preserve an environment of exceptional richness.

Culturally, these villages share many characteristics with southern Italy, reflected in language, traditions and history. Yet geographically, Abruzzo belongs to central Italy. This dual identity contributes to the distinctiveness of its villages,

each offering a unique experience shaped by both landscape and heritage.

Abruzzo presents a rare combination of environments: mountains, lakes and coastline existing in close proximity. From the high peaks of the [Gran Sasso](#) and the [Maiella](#), to the wide beaches along the Adriatic coast, the region offers an extraordinary variety of scenery within a relatively compact area.

This diversity is reflected symbolically in the coat of arms of Abruzzo, divided into three colours: white for the snow-capped mountains, green for the inland hills and blue for the sea.

Among its most notable villages is [Pescasseroli](#), considered the heart of the [Abruzzo National Park](#). Its location makes it an ideal base for exploring the surrounding landscape, whether through summer walks or winter activities within the [Alto Sangro](#) ski area, which offers extensive downhill and cross-country slopes.

The origins of Pescasseroli are steeped in legend. One story tells of the tragic love between the knight Serolo and a young woman named Pesca, from whose names the village is said to derive. More likely, however, the name comes from the Latin *pesculum serulae*, meaning “sheer rock”, referring to the rocky spur beneath the oldest part of the settlement.

Nearby stand the ruins of Castel Mancino, one of the most evocative sites in the area, overlooking the surrounding valley.

Today, Pescasseroli remains a place of quiet beauty, with its white-paved streets and flower-filled windows. Among its most significant buildings is [Palazzo Sipari](#), an elegant neoclassical residence that reflects the village's long history.

High above the valley, where stone meets sky, Pescasseroli and Castel Mancino keep their silent vigil. Here, beauty does not proclaim itself — it simply endures.



Pescasseroli nestled in Abruzzo's mountains, gateway to Italy's greenest and most protected region.



Montegridolfo's stone gateway leads into a restored mediaeval village above the Adriatic coast.

A Mediaeval Whisper

Perched in the hills near Rimini, Montegridolfo is a restored mediaeval village where silence, history and landscape combine to create a place suspended in time.

Exploring [Montegridolfo](#), an ancient mediaeval village in the hinterland of [Rimini](#), offers a deeply immersive cultural experience. It can be visited in half a day, leaving time to enjoy the surrounding panorama and absorb the atmosphere of a place that quietly reveals its character.

With just over a thousand residents, Montegridolfo surprises from the moment you arrive. An uphill road leads through an imposing gateway into a village where time seems to have paused. Sound itself feels softened — broken only by the distant echo of footsteps and the subtle life within the castle walls.

The fortified village stretches across the rolling hills of the [Conca Valley](#), forming a harmonious landscape where history and nature merge. At its centre stands the restored castle, a reminder of the village's strategic importance and enduring presence.

The origins of Montegridolfo are uncertain, shaped by legend and fragmented historical accounts. Its position between [Romagna](#) and the [Marche](#) placed it at the heart of long-standing conflicts between the Malatesta and Montefeltro families, two of the most powerful dynasties in the region.

By the fourteenth century, the village had assumed much of its present form, with defensive walls and towers commissioned by Galeotto Malatesta. Control later passed through the hands of Cesare Borgia, the Venetians and, from 1509, the Papal States. In 1797, the municipality was absorbed into [Saludecio](#), before eventually becoming part of the Kingdom of Italy in the nineteenth century.

Walking beneath Montegridolfo's ancient walls, the stillness is broken only by the rhythm of your own movement. Vineyards and olive groves gradually open towards wider skies, until the [Adriatic Sea](#) appears on the horizon — a silver line leading towards Rimini.

There, the atmosphere shifts. The quiet of the hilltop gives way to the move-

ment of the coast — the sound of waves, the energy of the promenade, and the enduring presence of Roman and seaside architecture.

Yet these two worlds do not compete; they complete one another. Between fortress and shoreline, between memory and motion, this corner of [Emilia-Romagna](#) reveals its full character — intimate, historic and quietly alive.



Italian lessons
from a native speaker

for all enquiries
the-editor@whatsnewinitaly.com



The Amiata Donkey: An Authentic Encounter

In the Tuscan hills near Magliano, the Amiata donkey reveals a quiet connection between people, landscape and tradition.

It may come as a surprise that donkeys rank highly among domestic animals for intelligence — often placed ahead of pigs, dogs and even horses. Yet an encounter in the Tuscan countryside reveals something more compelling than intelligence: a quiet, enduring empathy between humans and this much-misunderstood animal.

This experience unfolds in [Tuscany](#), just inland from the resorts of the [Argentario Peninsula](#), in an unspoilt landscape near the hill town of [Magliano](#). On a gently sloping hillside, beside solid nineteenth-century farm buildings, a small herd of Amiata donkeys moves freely, animated by the winter light. These animals belong to a distinctive

breed known as the Miccio Amiatino. The name reflects both local dialect — *miccio* meaning donkey — and its origin near [Monte Amiata](#). The breed is easily recognised by its markings: dark rings around the legs, a pronounced cross along the back, and darker outlines framing its large ears. In winter, their coats appear thick and rough, softening into the characteristic *pelo sorcino* — a smooth, mouse-coloured sheen — as the seasons change.

Their story stretches back to the Etruscan period, when they were introduced to transport iron ore from the mines of [Elba](#). For centuries, they remained central to rural life, carrying wood, wine and agricultural goods across the Tuscan landscape. With the arrival of motor vehicles, their practical role declined sharply. Many were lost, some even bred for meat. Today, however, conservation efforts — supported by European protection

measures — have ensured the survival of this historic breed.

The Amiata donkey is also celebrated in local tradition. While many are familiar with the Palio di Siena, fewer know of the donkey race held in [Torrita di Siena](#). Each year on 19 March, the town honours San Giuseppe with a lively Palio, where competing districts — or *contrade* — race donkeys instead of horses.

Though the pace may be slower, the spirit is no less intense. The event forms the centrepiece of a week-long celebration, complete with communal meals, local cuisine and the presentation of the Palio itself.

In these hills, the donkey is more than an animal of the past. It remains a living symbol of continuity — a reminder that tradition endures not only in monuments and landscapes, but in the quiet relationships between people, animals and the land they share.



Riders compete in Torrita di Siena's lively Palio, where donkeys replace traditional racehorses.



Reconstructed grandeur evokes the scale and significance of ancient Nida's Roman religious complex.

Nida: A Roman Cult Revealed

Beneath modern Frankfurt, the rediscovery of Nida's cult district reveals new insights into religious life on the northern frontier of the Roman Empire.

Beneath a modern neighbourhood of [Frankfurt](#), archaeologists have uncovered one of the most remarkable religious complexes in Roman Europe. The vast and well-preserved cult district of the ancient city of Nida is now the focus of an international research project seeking to reconstruct how religion was practised on the empire's northern frontier.

In Roman times, Nida — located in what is now the Frankfurt-Heddernheim district — was one of the most important urban centres in Germania. Known for its cultural diversity and strategic significance, the city thrived until its abandonment around

275 CE. The newly uncovered sanctuary lay at its centre, highlighting the central role of religion in daily life.

The cult district stands out for both its scale and complexity. Archaeologists have identified eleven stone buildings constructed over multiple phases, together with around seventy shafts and ten pits used for ritual depositions. Its layout is unlike any other known site in the Germanic or Gallic provinces, suggesting a distinctly local approach to sacred architecture.

Thousands of fragments of painted wall plaster, along with bronze fittings from doors and windows, indicate richly decorated interiors. These remains offer rare insight into the structure of the sanctuary, allowing researchers to reconstruct room heights, spatial organisation and decorative schemes — details seldom preserved

at comparable sites.

The most compelling evidence of ritual activity lies in what was left behind. The shafts and pits contained ceramic vessels alongside plant and animal remains, interpreted as the traces of ritual meals and offerings to the gods. For the first time, an interdisciplinary research project is enabling a comprehensive examination of these practices at a Roman site in this region.

The discovery of Nida's sacred district came as a significant surprise. With its distinctive features and remarkable state of preservation, the sanctuary underscores the importance of Nida within Roman Germania. Its continued study promises to deepen our understanding of religious life and ritual practice across the northern reaches of the Roman world.



Subscribe today!



Scan to subscribe

Subscribe to "What's New in Italy and the Rest of Europe?" and receive the best of Italian travel and culture delivered to your inbox eleven times a year.

With an annual subscription costing just \$20.00, that's less than a cappuccino a month!

Don't miss out - visit <https://www.whatsnewinitaly.com/subscribe>



**"What's New in Italy and the Rest of Europe?"
is the news digest of the Italia Australia Network**

Editor: Mr Luciano Pirrottina

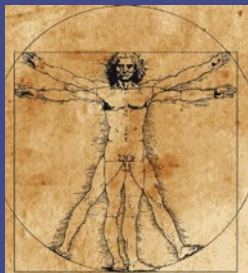
Email: the-editor@whatsnewinitaly.com

Web: whatsnewinitaly.com



 Scuola Leonardo da Vinci Leading Italian Language Schools since 1977	
Long Term Italian Language Courses Short Term Intensive Courses Academic School Year - Gap Year	www.scuolaleonardo.com

Copyright. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or otherwise, without the permission of the publisher. The publication is not to be sold, and it is available only on subscription. Material contained in this publication is general comment and it is not intended as advice on any particular matter. What's New in Italy, its officers, the editor and authors expressly disclaim all and any liability to any person whatsoever in respect of anything done by any such person in reliance whether in whole or in part upon the contents of this publication.



Scuola Leonardo da Vinci

Leading Italian Language Schools since 1977

Florence, Milan, Rome, Siena

Long Term Italian Language Courses

Short Term Intensive Courses

Academic School Year - Gap Year



Online courses available



www.scuolaleonardo.com