

## 1 Le Noci Terraces

A path leads off from the hamlet of Le Noci, stretching over the first two hundred metres through perfectly preserved terraces, in a rugged rocky landscape. The olive groves are intersected with at least two large clearings, bordered by drystone walls, which once helped move the herds.

*This area is linked to the ancient ritual of transhumance, a pastoral practice followed by the shepherds who, in June, before the feast of St. John, used to move with their flocks of sheep to Valle Venafra and Monte Cavallo on the Mainarde mountains. The typical dish 'L. spzzat' originates from the traditional habit of storing sheep's meat pieces inside special holes made in the ice of the snowfields.*

## 2 Torricella

At an altitude of 437 metres above sea level, Torricella stands on a rocky spur overlooking Venafro. The Roman walls from the 1st century BC extended as far as that point to surround the rocky spur. Only in the Lombard times, around the year 1000, Torricella became an important checkpoint for the area.

*Many legends are told about this tower, including one that narrates that the devil's treasure is kept inside. The tower was probably used to house a garrison of soldiers to watch for the enemy in the valley. "Some believe that the tower was used for smoke signaling (G. Cotugno, Memorie storiche di Venafro, Naples 1824)".*

## 3 Cyclopean wall

In the area of Madonna della Libera, there is a complex system of cyclopean terraces of polygonal stones, which is considered by most authors to be the basis villae of a republican villa rustica of the 1st century B.C. A concrete cistern is located in the overlying area.

*The system of polygonal terraces could be the villa rustica of Venafro mentioned by Marcus Porcius Cato (c. 234 BC - 149 BC). When he was 42, he bought, or perhaps received as dowry from his wife Licinia, a vast piece of land in Venafro: 240 iugeri (60 hectares), probably already planted with olive trees.*

## 4 Mule tracks

Two mule tracks branch off from the old town of Venafro and the Cathedral and were the only way connecting Venafro and Conca Casale until the 1950s. The path climbs along the remains of Roman walls, including polygonal ones, and up the ancient terraces amidst ancient olive trees.

*The mule tracks were travelled on foot and with mules for olive harvest and cold meat and cheese trade. During the coldest winter days, peasants would stop to sleep in the 'Masserie' (stone farmhouses) along the way. Even the town doctor in Venafro, travelled along the mule track when he was called to Conca Casale to deal with emergencies.*

## 5 Garden of the Green Patriarchs of Italy

The Garden of the Green Patriarchs of Italy gathers twenty genetically twin trees of the most ancient olives in Italy. A true gene collection of Italian ancient olive-growing tradition, featured in a specially signposted area with educational tables and trails.

*The garden is not only a gene collection of Italian ancient olive trees, but also a wealth of stories and legends about the olive trees that are represented here by their twins. Near the Olivo di Sant'Emiliano in Trevi, the first bishop of Trevi, after whom the plant is named, was martyred in 303; the Olivo della Strega in Magliano in Tuscany was so named because legumes were unexpectedly found to grow under its canopy. The Leucolea Chrism oil was used to anoint emperors and high-ranking prelates.*

## 6 Winterline Museum

In 1943, during the winter time, the Allied troops reached and crossed with great sacrifice the Winterline, a German defensive line. The important military history museum dedicated to these extraordinary events is housed in a building in De Utris street, bearing the same name, in the old town of Venafro.

*"Venafro, Venafro, the wind shakes the ashy olive trees where the sun goes down, Venafro, the echo reverberates amidst the crows scattering under the shining tide of the fuselages..."; "Voices are taken away, faces are wiped out, along the yellow banks of the Volturno, And the only prayer is the cold wind of Abruzzi". This is how Frederic Jacques Temple, French poet and storyteller who took part in the Italian campaign (1943-1944) with General Juin's French army, remembers Venafro and its olive trees.*

## 7 Roman theatre and Amphitheatre

The Roman theatre, built between the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, is, along with the amphitheatre, the most representative Roman vestige in the area. The enlargement in the 1st century, with the construction of the tribunalia and the summa cavea, turned it into one of the biggest existing Roman theatres. The Amphitheatre, the Periliasium, lies further down in the outer part of the Roman town.

*The theatre was mostly dismantled and reused following the terrible earthquake of 346 and in the Middle Ages; today, the old town bears testimony to this renovation in the marbles and decorations of its buildings and churches. Interestingly, the name of the Amphitheatre is Verlaschio, from Periliasium, combining the Greek words peri (around) and elao (turn).*

## 8 Archaeological Museum of Venafro

The 18th-century Convent of Santa Chiara is home to Venafro Archeological Museum. The exhibits include the admirable Venus of Venafro, a Hellenistic copy from the 2nd century AD, the aquarium table from the Augustan aqueduct (11 AD) and the oldest chess pieces in Europe dating back to the 10th century AD.

*One of the most important findings is the beautiful Venus of Venafro discovered in 1958. The owner of a small plot just 50 metres away from the Periliasium, the Roman Amphitheatre, came across a large 'stone' during his farm work. The statue, which is in the Landolina style, certainly had to belong to a residential building.*

## 9 Pandone Castle

The Castle originates from a megalithic fortification transformed into a Lombard keep in the 10th century. Enlarged in the 14th century with the addition of circular towers, it was completely transformed in the 14th century by the Pandone family. Count Enrico turned it into a Renaissance residence which today is home to the National Museum of Molise.

*Pandone Castle features magnificent life-sized horses painted using a technique that anticipated the 3-D concept, created in flattened relief, which Count Enrico Pandone requested in order to decorate the rooms on the main floor between 1522 and 1527. Each specimen bears a caption with the horse's name, breed, age and intended recipients, most of whom were Italian noblemen. The horse donated to Emperor Charles V is particularly noteworthy.*

## 10 The Passion Olive groves

The Cathedral's ancient olive groves are the venue for the "The Passion" performance, which is staged in the scenic setting of Campaglione olive groves. Impressive scenic views follow in the darkness, through lighting effects using modern technology.

*The latest editions of the "Living Passion", always performed in line with tradition, are also culturally linked to the monuments of Venafro. The Nottingham Polyptych, composed of alabaster panels representing seven scenes from the Passion of Christ, one of the most precious*

## Point of interest

*works of art in the Church dell'Annunziata (nowadays kept in the National Museum of Pandone Castle), have led to carefully choose the costumes for this Easter event, such as those of the soldiers in the Temple.*

## 11 Ancient olives of Venafro

There are many ancient, large olive trees growing around the foothills. The best-known variety is Aurina, the ancient 'Licinia' praised by the Romans for its oil. Other typical varieties are the straight and short Olivastro, Sperone di Gallo, Rossuola and Lagrimella.

*No other place in the world where olives are grown has a longer tradition and is more frequently mentioned in ancient sources than Venafro. Pliny, in his De Oleo, points out that Venafro holds a world record for olive oil, thanks to its renowned Licinia olive. In his Odes, Horace also praises Venafro's green oil. "What oil could I compare with Venafro's oil?" declared Marcus Terentius*

*Varro in De re rustica, while Marcus Valerius Martialis praised the qualities of Venafro oil for ointments preparation. Juvenal described it as an indispensable seasoning.*

## 12 Villae Rusticae and cisterns

The Park includes a number of sites of archaeological interest, many of which are brick vaulted masonry, mostly underground, dating back to Roman times, such as cisterns used to collect rainwater, cryptoporticus or areas intended for farming activities.

*In Venafro there were many medium and large villae rusticae (farmhouses), which were used to support production in the extensive olive groves. In De Agricultura, Cato the Censor suggests adopting the method applied in Venafro for selling unharvested but still hanging olives. This was the famous Lex olea pendentis that set out specific rules for the sale of olives and their purchase price, a reference system for the whole Ancient Roman world.*

## 13 Exhibition of the Historic Rural Landscape of the Olive Trees of Venafro

The lower floor of the 'Art Nouveau building', the town's multifunctional and tourist centre, is home to an exhibition dedicated to the historic rural landscape of the Regional Olive Park of Venafro, which features dioramas and objects linked to the traditional customs of the area.

*The exhibition was launched following the Park's inclusion in the National Register of Historic Rural Landscapes (Ministerial Decree no. 6149 of 20.02.2018), a list created by MIPAAF that gathers Italy's highly representative landscapes. It features, among other things, some typical representatives of Venafro's peasant culture, such as the "vachiatrici", poor women who picked the olives left on the ground after harvesting, or the "Sanzani", middlemen who handled negotiations between the owners and the workers-gatherers.*

## 14 "The law is the law" with Totò and Fernandel

The harsh mountains overlooking Venafro were the proper setting for the film "The Law is the Law" by Christian Jaque, starring Totò and Fernandel and shot entirely in Venafro in 1957. The town was turned into a film set and called Assola, an imaginary Alpine village halfway between Italy and France.

*The film still brings back memories, reviving in many people the emotions of the time spent with Totò, Fernandel and Nino Besozzi. Totò, "a true gentleman and a kind man", as he was defined by Giovanni, the young doctor who treated his retinopathy in Venafro, was lodged with his wife Franca Faldini in a house in Venafro. Today, the Mario Lepore Foundation is planning to create a path to walk around the film's locations in the old town of Venafro.*

## Events

### 4 National Walk among the Olive Trees Last Sunday of October

The Regional Olive Park of Venafro takes part in the national event launched by the National Association of Olive Oil Towns, which aims to increase tourism visibility of the area. The walk goes through the park and ends in the old town with tastings of local products prepared with Venafro oil and a visit to the town's historic buildings.

### 9 Weekend in Venafro - Venafro oil tastings

Venafro oil, a Slowfood Presidium, is also tasted with typical dishes such as salt cod "alla m'tanara" salt cod, soup "alla santè", Venafro salad with Venafro biscuits, and some new successful creations such as panettone made with olive oil and beer flavoured with olive branches. All these events take place in the town's buildings and monuments, and excursions into the park are also offered.

### 10 The living Passion - Saturday and Palm Sunday

The Passion of Venafro is one of the oldest performances of this kind in Italy, which has been staged in Venafro since 1967. Lighting scenes, accompanied by the narrator's voice of Umberto Taccola, follow on from sunset, in a landscape that more than any other recalls the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. The Park collaborates with the Biblic Village of Nazareth for the organization of this event.

### 13 Venolea - 8 December

This event is the venue of major initiatives linked with the National Register of Historic Rural Landscapes of the MIPAAF, which the Park is part of, and to food and wine and oil tourism, with the permanent participation of the National Association of Olive Oil Towns. A ceremony is also held to award the Plinius Prize, which recalls the first classification of oils in history by Pliny the Elder, who cited Venafro as the best production site in the ancient world.

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**Venafro**  
Italy  
Community map





Point of interest

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