

Spotlight on Montefeltro, Italy: What to See & Do?

by Anna Maria Colivicchi | Sep 26, 2018 | Activities, Destination Spotlight, Europe, Off the beaten path, Travel Tips | 0 comments



Think Italy is too popular with tourists to reserve any real secrets? Think again. The hilly region of Montefeltro, located between Marche and Emilia-Romagna in central eastern Italy, is a fascinating off-the-beaten-path destination. It's situated twenty kilometers west of Rimini and the Riviera Romagnola.



The Marecchia Valley. Image: Anna Maria Colivicchi/All rights reserved

Ruled by the Montefeltro family since the 12th century, this area will surprise you with its charming castles, beautiful villages and delicious traditional food. It's even the stuff of literary legend, since one powerful member of its ruling family, Guido da Montefeltro, makes a starring but infamous appearance in the Italian poet Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. Does this sound like the right place for your next trip to Italy? If so, read on for our complete guide to the hidden treasures of Montefeltro.



Let's proceed north from the capital of Marche, Urbino, to discover all of the riches of this lesser-known but magnificent region.

Macerata Feltria: A Roman Town in the Heart of Montefeltro

Our first stop is Macerata Feltria, an ancient Roman town first known as *Pitinum Pisaurense*. It's situated in a small valley overlooked by Mount Carpegna. It is divided into two main areas: the upper part of the town, whose main attraction is the **medieval castle**; and the lower part, built during the Renaissance.

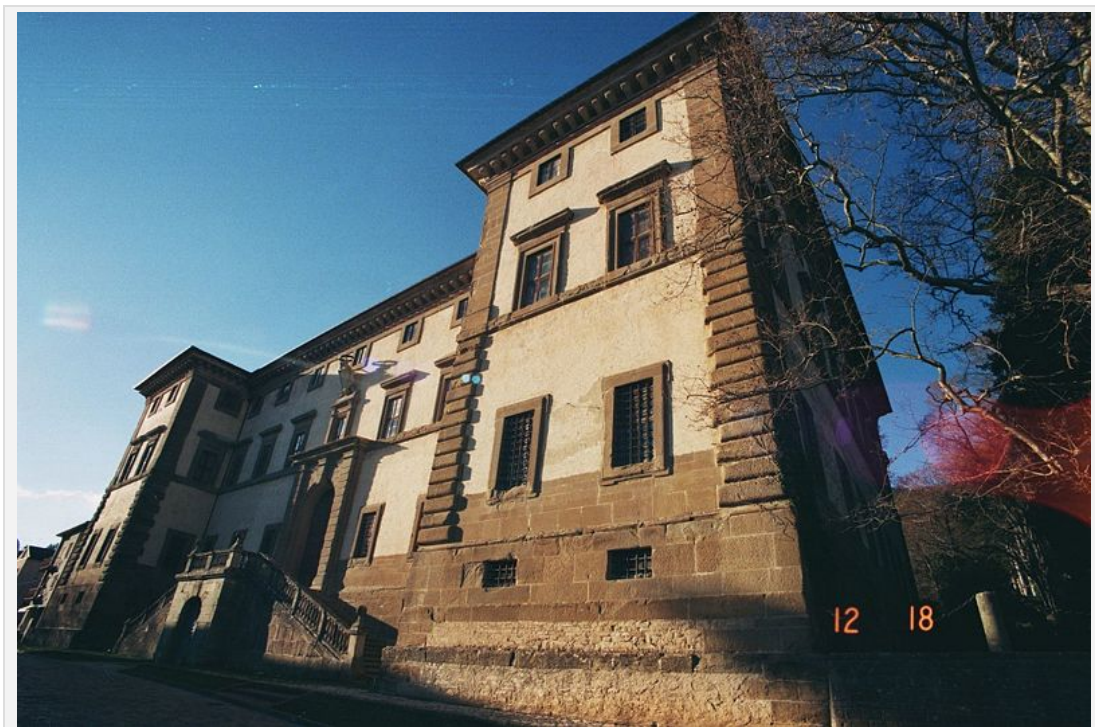
In Macerata Feltria, it is possible to visit the **archaeological area of Pitinum**, which is composed of a medieval graveyard and a Roman main street, called *decumanum maximus*. Here, roam among some impressive Roman ruins.

For a treat between sightseeing, **we particularly recommend you taste the town's signature cake**, made with raisins, walnuts, sugar, flour and olive oil.

Carpegna and the Prosciutto Festival



Carpegna is located 45 kilometers from the seaside and it's mainly famous for the production of a delicious variety of prosciutto. Every year in July, prosciutto experts travel to Carpegna to join **a four-day festival in the center of the town**, where gastronomic stalls offer free tastings of the pork-based delicacy and others that are typical of the area. In the evenings, live music and performances from street artists bring the town to festive life.



By Germano Perugini [CC BY-SA 4.0], via Wikimedia Commons

During the festival, it's also possible to visit **Carpegna's Principi Palace**, a gorgeous site which was built during the 15th century and opens to the public only on special occasions. The Palace holds original furniture and a library where Renaissance books and documents have been preserved. For those who love trekking, the Montefeltro Jockey Club arranges amazing trips to **Mount Capregna**, following remote dirt paths and picturesque routes.

Pennabilli: Not Just a Place, but a Myth



The next stop we recommend is **Pennabilli**, a village on the west side of the Mount Carpegna. According to legends, Pennabilli was created when the two independent towns of Penna and Billi decided to merge together during the 12th century. Nowadays, the village is home to antique furniture shops, a vintage one-screen cinema, restaurants and stimulating festivals. **Tonino Guerra**, a famous Italian writer and poet, fell in love with Pennabilli and wanted to enhance the beauty of the village. Poems and lines from his works are scattered around the town, for visitors to read and reflect on while strolling through it and discovering its legendary charms.



One of the poems by Tonino Guerra in Pennabilli. "There are people who do not know where to go, and they are rushing to get there now." Image: Anna Maria Colivicchi/All rights reserved.

Here is what the writer said about his childhood in Pennabilli: “ *The village was the Himalaya of my childhood. Not a place, but a myth. When I was a little boy, my parents used to come here to sell fruit. They took me with them, because here the air is fresh.*”



A street in Pennabilli. Image: Anna Maria Colivicchi/All rights reserved

Guerra also created “**L’Orto dei Frutti Dimenticati**” (**The Orchard of Forgotten Fruits**), a fascinating garden where time seems not to exist at all. Plants and fruits that are very difficult to find in any common garden of the present day are cultivated here, and interesting works of art were donated by local artists to decorate the orchard.

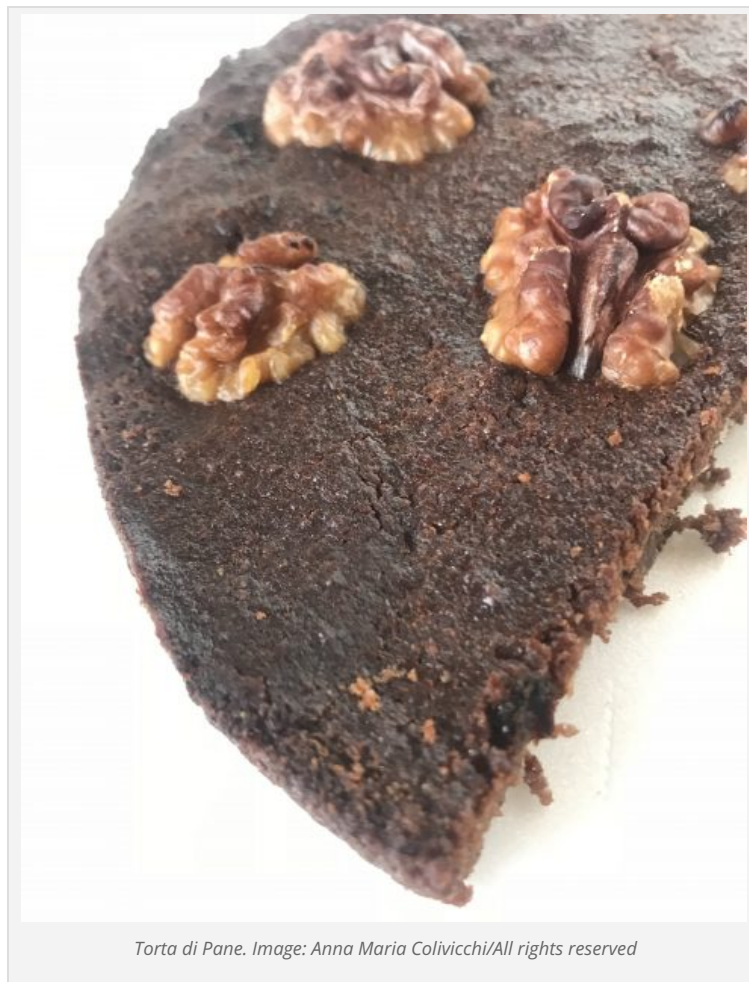
“**La Strada delle Meridiane**” (**The Street of Sundials**) divides the town center in two: walking with your nose up, you can notice several sundials decorating the walls of the houses. Pennabilli attracts international visitors, in particular from Tibet, after the XIV Dalai Lama’s visit to the village in 2009.

In June, a **festival called “Artisti in Piazza” (Artists on the Streets)**, brings music, dance and circus arts to the town. In July, Penabilli hosts the biggest antique furniture market in Italy, which attracts collectors and experts from all over the peninsula.

Maiolo, the Bread Festival and the Maioletto Rock

In Montefeltro there’s a small village that made a daily practice, the baking of bread, its main attraction. During the last weekend of June, Maiolo hosts **the Festa del Pane (Bread Festival)**, a unique chance to taste delicious bread, prepared following traditional recipes. The festival lasts two days, starting on a Saturday evening with live music in the central square of Maiolo, where a long wooden table is set.

Spianata (a particular kind of pizza produced in this region, which we strongly recommend you try) and freshly baked bread with different toppings are served for dinner. This is an occasion for conviviality that will make you feel at home even if it’s your first time in Maiolo. On Sunday, the Bread Festival continues with visits at the stone ovens scattered around the village (in private houses, cottages or bakeries) where the bread is made. A different variety of bread is baked in every oven, together with other local products, which are then available to purchase.



Torta di Pane. Image: Anna Maria Colivicchi/All rights reserved

Our personal choice is **torta di pane** (literally 'cake of bread'), a thin cake made of cocoa, raisins, walnuts and, of course, Maiolo's bread. At the end of the Festival, the bakeries compete in a contest and a prize is awarded to the best bread.



The Maioretto Rock. Image: Anna Maria Colivicchi/All rights reserved

If you get the chance to visit Maiolo, we also advice to take a trip to the **Maioretto Rock**. The very few ruins of the old castle of Maiolo, which crumbled during a flood in the 16th century, have recently been restored; the walk to

reach the top is guaranteed to leave you speechless.

Petrella Guidi: a Medieval Jewel



By lo.tangelini from Soliera / Modena, Italia (Petrella Guidi) [CC BY-SA 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons

The painter **Antonio Saliola**, known for his landscapes featuring fantastic creatures like fairies and gnomes, often chose his garden and house in **Petrella Guidi** as subjects for his art. This village, situated on the right bank of the Marecchia river, is the smallest on our suggested itinerary around Montefeltro, but it's definitely worth a visit. The **medieval atmosphere** is kept alive in Petrella Guidi thanks to several festivals staged here during the warm season. The ruins of a medieval fortress add to the dramatic effect. The **tower, all that remains of a 12th-century castle that once stood here**, was renovated a few years ago. A climb to the top offers breathtaking views over the Marecchia Valley.

Novafeltria: Food, Classical Music and Much More



Novafeltria, called “Mercatino Marecchia” until 1941, is the biggest town center in this part of Montefeltro and has a lot going on, especially if you enjoy trying local food. Every Monday, the town hosts a massive **market**, that, from the main square, stretches through the streets of Novafeltria, and that sells literally everything you might wish to buy, from shoes to fruit and vegetables, toys, and the famous and tasty pesce fritto (fried fish), a street food that we strongly recommend.

Read related: [These Are the World's 11 Best Food Markets](#)

The **Marecchia river**, which can be reached in ten minutes from the center of town, is the ideal place to sunbathe and enjoy picnics during summer, or to stroll during autumn and spring. Some very good restaurants are located on the river bank– perfect locations for a quick stop or a proper lunch.

Our pick is **Ristorante Il Parco**, a family restaurant run by friendly people, which has a wonderful terrace overlooking a garden on the riverbank. The restaurant serves the typical food of the region and on Wednesdays, you can enjoy cocktails and finger food on the terrace, for an Italian-style *aperitivo*.



Ristorante Il Parco in Novafeltria, on a summer night. Image: Anna Maria Colivicchi/All rights reserved

Every year in August, the theater in Novafeltria hosts the **Montefeltro Belcanto Festival**, a series of opera and classical music concerts in the town and in the other villages of Montefeltro. Singers and musicians from all over the world travel to Montefeltro to perform in these concerts, which take place in splendid locations, not only theaters but also churches and in the open air.

Montefeltro is also very well known for its delicious truffles, which can be found pretty much everywhere in the region. About ten minutes by car from Novafeltria, there's one of the most renowned restaurants of Montefeltro, which has been on the Michelin Guide to Italian Restaurants for decades, **Da Marchesi**, which we heartily recommend if you want to try black truffles at a very reasonable price.

San Leo: Italy's Most Beautiful Town?

Umberto Eco, an internationally renowned writer and journalist, was fascinated by **San Leo's Fortress and churches**, and defined the town as Italy's most beautiful. The village bears the traces and the scars of Italian history, and offers many occasions to celebrate Italy and its historical and artistic heritage. Situated on a spur of rock, **San Leo** is accessible via a single road, excavated in the rock itself. Due to its remote location, this village was a refuge to **Dante** and **Saint Francis of Assisi**, but it was also a prison to the magician **Cagliostro**, who died in the fortress in 1795.

View of the Fortress from a terrace in San Leo. Image: Anna Maria Colivicchi/All rights reserved

The **Duomo** of San Leo is a real master piece of Romanesque art, while the other church in town, the **Pieve**, just a few footsteps away, is the most ancient religious building of the region. The **Fortress**, designed during the Renaissance by one of the most important architects of the period, **Francesco di Giorgio Martini**, was turned into a prison in 1631 and is nowadays open to visitors.



The convent of Sant Igne. Image: Anna Maria Colivicchi/All rights reserved

A lesser-known but equally fascinating attraction near San Leo is the **small church and convent of Sant'Igneo**, a quiet place for meditation, immersed in the woods. At the end of August, San Leo hosts a festival called **Alchimia Alchimie**, which aims to celebrate holistic arts through shows and conferences. The exceptional quality and unique location of the festival make it the most famous in the area.

Talamello: Of Art and Cheese

Last but certainly not least on our suggested itinerary for exploring the charms of Montefeltro: the town of **Talamello**. In the central square here, the **church of San Lorenzo** holds on display a **painted crucifix attributed to a disciple of Giotto, Giovanni da Rimini**, which was brought there by the monks of Poggiolo in 1374. In fact, this precious crucifix is not the only work of art that Talamello has to offer: **The Gualtieri museum** holds over forty paintings – spectacular oils on canvas, still life pictures and self-portraits – donated by the famous artist **Fernando Gualtieri**, who is himself from Talamello.



The village is also renowned for its **formaggio di fossa**, a local cheese which is produced in distinctive pits. Some of these, hidden in the basements of restaurants or in private stables, are open for tourists to visit and to enjoy the cheese's peculiar and strong taste.

Not far from Talamello, the **Mount Pincio** is the perfect location for **mushroom and chestnut picking** in autumn, and for sports such as paragliding and hang-gliding. Given the absence of light pollution, the mount is also an amazing place for stargazing, especially during the summer.

About the Author

Anna Maria Colivicchi is an Italian writer who is interested in travel, art and food. She lived in Rome and in the UK, which is her home away from home. You can follow her on Instagram to see more of her stories and photos.

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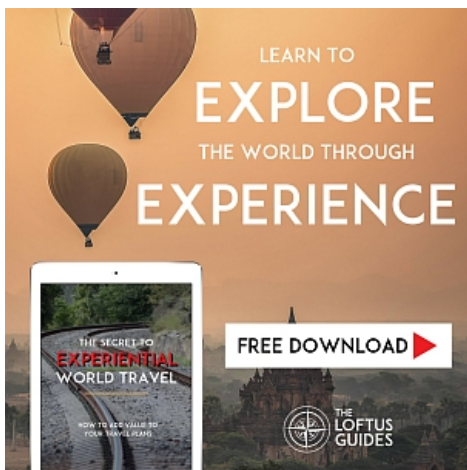
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