

ITALY

The Italian Heart of Darkness

photo by Alessandro Gandolfi



Mattinata (Gargano, Italy), as part of the celebrations for the local patron saint, some priests at the church of Santa Maria della Luce (“Holy Mary of the Light”) watch the fireworks, prior to the start of the procession.



Gargano, Italy: several quarries for the extraction and processing of the local limestone are located on the outskirts of Apricena. In the past, this limestone was used for decorating several palaces in Rome, as well as the Royal Palace at Caserta.

The fascinating Gargano promontory remains a hostile and mysterious land

The Gargano, which is as black as the forest that dominates it, is Italy's heart of darkness. This limestone promontory that looks like an island overlooks the Adriatic: it's a fascinating and mysterious spur of rock that the people of the plains call "mountain of the Sun." In actual fact, the Gargano is a dark, hostile, secret land where the sacred and the profane have always mingled. This was the birthplace of the cult of St. Michael the Archangel, who is said to have appeared in a grotto sixteen centuries ago. And here - in the karst caves that have carved the coastline - pirates, sailors and, more recently, Albanian drug dealers have taken shelter during storms. Brigands and charcoal burners, on the other hand, found refuge in the Foresta Umbra ("the Shaded Forest"), an intricate patch of beech and holm oaks a

thousand meters above sea level that the phenomenon of macrosomatism - due to long isolation - has caused to grow abnormally. Today much of the Gargano is a national park. This is a genuine attraction for travelers who come from all over Europe to visit Vieste and Peschici, the canyons, Padre Pio's tomb, the historic oil mills and those wonderful contraptions built by fishermen which are known as "trabucchi." But this land still has a heart of darkness. And the huge amounts of money brought in by tourism have attracted the so-called "fourth Italian mafia," which is the most secretive and mysterious of them all. It operates in the Gargano and in the nearby city of Foggia, and district attorneys and judges describe the situation as "a real emergency." The area is notorious for the record number of extortions and murders.



Mattinata (Gargano, Italy), having fun with bumper cars or dodgems at the amusement park during celebrations for the local patron saint Santa Maria della Luce ("Holy Mary of the Light").



Lesina (Gargano, Italy), cows grazing on the road along the thin strip of land separating the sea from Lake Lesina.



Mattinata (Gargano, Italy), during celebrations for the local patron saint, villagers observe and take photos of the procession featuring the painting of Santa Maria della Luce ("Holy Mary of the Light").



Monte Sant'Angelo (Gargano, Italy), the lime-painted houses of the ancient Junno district.



Vieste (Gargano, Italy), "Trabucco" (a contraption used for fishing) maker Natale Masella, 77, on the Molinella Trabucco. Natale helps keep the memory of this ancient fishing method alive together with the local association "La Rinascita dei Trabucchi Storici" ("the rebirth of historical trabucchi").

Vieste (Gargano, Italy), the Foresta Umbra ("Shaded Forest"), a protected natural area in the vast Gargano National Park, owes its name to its dense and shaded vegetation.





Vieste (Gargano, Italy), in order to pass the time, some lads gather in the afternoon on the northern pier.



Lake Varano (Gargano, Italy), in the morning fisherman Antonio Sperone collects the nets he set the day before: they are used for catching eels, bream, sea bass and mullet.



Vieste (Gargano, Italy), Gianmichele Ciuffreda's horses resting in the evening at his Il Monticello stables.



Vieste (Gargano, Italy), an abandoned farmhouse surrounded by dry stone walls in the the Foresta Umbra ("Shaded Forest"), a protected natural area in the vast Gargano National Park which owes its name to its dense and shaded vegetation.



Mattinata (Gargano, Italy), as part of celebrations for the local patron saint, at the church of Santa Maria della Luce ("Holy Mary of the Light"), some members of the congregation and two carabinieri get ready to carry the painting of the Madonna in the procession.

Vieste (Gargano, Italy), a view of the rocky peninsula which is home to the town with, at the tip, the church of San Francesco.





Vieste (Gargano, Italy), tasting at "Extragargano," a competition for the best local extra virgin olive oil.



Vieste (Gargano, Italy), in the grounds of the shrine of Santa Maria di Merino ("Holy Mary of Merino"), worshipers gather during celebrations for the patron saint.



Lesina (Gargano, Italy), members of the congregation leaving the Santissima Annunziata church after confirmation services.



Vieste (Gargano, Italy), a parish priest during the procession along the beach in honor of the patron saint, Santa Maria di Merino ("Holy Mary of Merino").



Mattinata (Gargano, Italy), having fun at the amusement park during the patron saint's day of Santa Maria della Luce ("Holy Mary of the Light").



Olive trees on the outskirts of Carpino (Gargano, Italy), which is famous for its olive oil.



The wedding of Matteo Troiano and Margherita Clemente (pictured) on the beach in Portonovo (Gargano, Italy).



San Giovanni Rotondo (Gargano, Italy), worshipers walking toward the shrine of St. Pio of Pietrelcina, where the body of Padre Pio is preserved.



Vignanotica beach (Gargano, Italy), tourists boarding a boat that has taken them to see the high limestone cliffs.



Vieste (Gargano, Italy), tourists canoeing at the entrance to the so-called Grotta Sfondata ("Broken Grotto").



Mattinata (Gargano, Italy), members of the congregation at the church of Santa Maria della Luce ("Holy Mary of the Light") preparing the painting of the Madonna for the procession in honor of their patron saint.

On the outskirts of Apricena (Gargano, Italy), the Ramundo Calcestruzzi company produces and distributes limestone aggregates, which are typical of the area.





Vieste (Gargano, Italy), naturalist Angela Rossini is an expert on the wild orchids of the Gargano and often searches for them in the vast National Park that covers the peninsula.

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