

From Genzano di Lucania (Monteserico Castle) to Banzi (Abbey of Saint Mary)

A moderately difficult itinerary, covering 16.8 kilometres, with an elevation gain of 430 metres uphill and 390 metres downhill, and an average walking time of around five hours. The route winds through hills, valleys and wide horizons, linking two emblematic sites of Lucanian history and spirituality: Monteserico Castle, an ancient Norman fortress set in the silence of the Genzano countryside, and the Abbey of Saint Mary in Banzi, one of the most important monastic complexes in southern Italy.

The walk begins in Genzano di Lucania, at the foot of Monteserico Castle, built in the Norman period (550 metres above sea level), in a commanding position overlooking the Bradano valley. Located in a strategic border area between former Byzantine lands and Lombard–Norman territories, the fortress was conceived as a military stronghold and became the scene of clashes between Normans and Byzantines, from which the former ultimately emerged victorious. Later, during the Swabian period, the castle reached its greatest splendour under Frederick II of Swabia, who chose it as one of his favoured hunting residences, drawn by the abundance of birds of prey inhabiting the area. According to historical sources, it was here that the emperor established a centre for horse breeding and agricultural experimentation within the Royal Domain, known as the *Magister Massarium Apuliae*.



Figure 1. Monteserico Castle (Genzano di Lucania)

From an architectural point of view, the castle is an emblematic example of medieval military design. It features a truncated-cone plan, surrounded by a moat, with a central square tower flanked by sloping curtain walls. The entrance, reached via a bridge and a stone portal, leads to a square inner courtyard separating the keep from the outer enclosure. The upper levels, now partly lost, were once connected by a spiral staircase, while in the underground areas prehistoric caves open out, bearing witness to the site's continuous use over millennia.

The route then follows ancient transhumance routes and rural paths, set within a landscape that alternates wheat fields, vineyards, olive groves and wide grazing areas. The gentle undulations of the Bradano valley accompany the walk, offering evocative, silent views that reflect the enduring harmony between humanity and nature. Near the Monteserico area, an extraordinary panorama opens towards the hills of the Vulture and, on the clearest days, towards the distant outline of the Lucanian Apennines.

The journey ends in Banzi, a village of ancient Oscan–Roman origins, closely associated with the famous *Tabula Bantina*, a legal document written in the Oscan language dating to the second century BC, now preserved in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples. At the centre of the village stands the Abbey of Saint Mary, built on a site already considered sacred in Roman times and founded in the eighth century. Donated by the Lombard duke Grimoald II to the Abbey of Montecassino, it became an important religious and cultural centre of southern Italy.

The church, with a single nave, preserves valuable works of art: a bas-relief from 1331 depicting the Virgin enthroned; a thirteenth-century Romanesque wooden statue of the Madonna and Child, typical of the Lucanian *Sedes Sapientiae* group; and a Baroque wooden throne dominating the presbytery. Restoration work carried out after the 1980 earthquake brought to light fragments of early medieval mosaics and structures belonging to the ancient crypt, documenting the complex's historical stratification of the site. Today, the abbey houses a library and a hostel, continuing its long-standing vocation as a place of hospitality and learning. The itinerary from Genzano di Lucania to Banzi is a journey through more than a thousand years of history—a walk that weaves together the power of Norman castles and the spirituality of Benedictine monasteries, set within a landscape where light and silence seem to safeguard the memory of a Middle Ages that remains vividly present. It is a route that invites reflection on the relationship between nature, faith and human ingenuity—a dialogue that for centuries has shaped the deepest soul of Basilicata.



Figure 2. Abbey of Saint Mary (Banzi)