

From Oppido Lucano (Roman Villa of Saint Gilio) to Genzano di Lucania (Church of the Annunciation)

A medium-to-high difficulty itinerary, 17.7 kilometres in length, with an elevation gain of 430 metres uphill and 310 metres downhill, and an average walking time of around five hours. The route links two sites of outstanding historical, archaeological and religious significance: the Roman Villa of Saint Gilio in Oppido Lucano and the Church of the Annunciation in Genzano di Lucania.

The Villa of Saint Gilio (1st century BC – 7th century AD) stands in a commanding position on a hill overlooking the upper Bradano valley, along an ancient rural road that in Roman and medieval times connected inland Basilicata with Apulia. It is one of the most significant Roman residential complexes in Basilicata and was recognised in 2009 by the World Monuments Fund in New York as a site of international importance, subsequently being included in the 2010 Watch List for its historical value and need for protection and enhancement.

Archaeological excavations have brought to light monumental architectural remains of the *basis villae*, two bath complexes, a monumental fountain and a system of cisterns (*castellum aquae*) designed for the collection and distribution of water. These elements testify to the high technical standard and refined elegance of a residence that, between the late Republican period and the Early Middle Ages, served as a vital centre for agricultural production and social life in the area. The villa was continuously inhabited for over six centuries, until the 7th century AD, confirming both the continuity of settlement and the central role of this area within the region's road and production networks.



Figure 1. Villa of Saint Gilio (Oppido Lucano)

The walk then winds through hills, valleys and cultivated fields, following ancient rural roads that cross the heart of inland Basilicata. The landscape, silent and harmonious, alternates pastureland, vineyards and olive groves, offering evocative views over the Bradano and Basento valleys. In this timeless setting, the traveller rediscovers the slow rhythm of the traditional agricultural world, where nature and historical memory merge into a single, balanced whole.

The journey concludes in Genzano di Lucania, a medieval village set on a plateau overlooking the valley of the River Basentello. Here stands the Church of the Annunciation, one of the town's principal religious monuments. The church was founded in 1324 by Aquilina of Monteserico together with a convent of the Poor Clares, on the ruins of an earlier church dedicated to Saint Vitale, dating back to the 9th century. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the building underwent major transformations, which gave it its present Renaissance and Baroque appearance.

The Renaissance-style stone portal leads into a richly decorated interior, where stuccoes, gilded frames and elegantly frescoed vaults stand out. Of particular interest are the gilded wooden pulpit set against a red background and decorated with the coat of arms of the De Marinis family, and the 1759 painting depicting the Holy Family by the Neapolitan painter Paolo De Maio, one of the leading figures of southern late Baroque art. A masterpiece of delicacy and spirituality, this painting has been displayed in major exhibitions such as Splendors of the Reserved Baroque and Invisible Baroque.



Figure 2. Church of the Annunciation (Genzano di Lucania)

The itinerary from Oppido Lucano to Genzano di Lucania is a true journey through history, embracing more than a millennium of civilisation, from the Roman age to the height of the Baroque period. It crosses ancient lands and pastoral scenery, inviting reflection on the age-old dialogue between humanity, faith and the land. In this part of Basilicata, every stone and every path speaks of continuity: a culture deeply rooted in the soil, where the past is never erased but continues to live on in the architecture, art and spiritual tradition.