

From Rapolla (Co-Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Assumption) to Venosa (Archaeological Park)

An itinerary linking two villages emblematic of the history and culture of the Vulture area, Rapolla and Venosa, crossing a landscape of gentle hills, thermal springs and ancient vineyards. With a total length of 15.9 kilometres, an elevation gain of 430 metres uphill and a descent of 450 metres, and an average walking time of around four hours and forty minutes, this intermediate-level route offers a well-rounded experience combining nature, spirituality and archaeology. The trail alternates paved, compacted and unpaved sections, following rural roads and panoramic paths that connect two of the most captivating centres of northern Basilicata. The walk begins at the Co-Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Assumption, built in the twelfth century at the behest of Roger II and completed in 1253 by the master builder Melchiorre da Montalbano. Despite numerous earthquakes, the building has retained its Romanesque character, restored during works carried out in 1930. The interior, with three naves divided by pillars, features Romanesque decorations, bas-reliefs depicting the Annunciation and the Original Sin, and symbolic motifs such as lions' heads among vegetal ornaments. Among the most precious works preserved inside are a thirteenth-century Crucifix, medieval wooden statues, a Byzantine Black Madonna dated 1278, a nineteenth-century canvas by Giambattista Vela depicting the Assumption, and an eighteenth-century painting of the *Madonna and Child* with Saints by an unknown Lucanian artist.



Figure 1. Co-Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Assumption (Rapolla)

Walking through the narrow streets of Rapolla, one discovers wine cellars carved into the tuff rock, bearing witness to the long winemaking tradition linked to the renowned *Aglianico del Vulture DOCG*, a wine as noble and deep as this land itself.

Leaving Rapolla behind, the path winds through fields and vineyards, following the gentle contours of the hills as they slope down towards the valley. The landscape reveals a simple and authentic beauty: centuries-old olive trees, small watercourses and dry-stone walls line the route. In some stretches, the route passes close to the ancient thermal springs of the Vulture area, already known in Roman times for their healing properties. The volcanic soil, rich in minerals, gives rise to lush vegetation and creates an ideal environment for the cultivation of vines and olive trees.

Along the way, the views open out towards the horizon, revealing the silhouettes of Melfi and Venosa, with their towers and bell towers rising from the hills.

The final part of the walk leads to ancient Venosa, one of the most historically rich towns in Basilicata. The route ends at the Archaeological Park, an area of outstanding interest that preserves the remains of the Roman colony of Venusia, founded in 291 BC. Among the ruins,

visitors can admire stretches of defensive walls, paved roads, baths, mosaics and patrician houses—evidence of a once-thriving and powerful city.



Figure 2. Archaeological Park (Venosa)

The park lies beside the majestic Abbey of the Most Holy Trinity, a complex that encapsulates centuries of art and spirituality: from the Roman temple incorporated into the structure to the “Unfinished Church”, where columns and incomplete walls evoke the fascination of great works suspended in time. A short distance away stands the Aragonese Castle, built in the fifteenth century and now home to the National Archaeological Museum “Mario Torelli”, which houses artefacts ranging from the Bronze Age to the medieval period.

The route from Rapolla to Venosa is a journey into the heart of the Vulture area, where nature and history coexist in harmony. It is an itinerary that guides the traveller through the scents of the land, the traces of ancient civilisations and the medieval architecture that has shaped life in these places. Rapolla, with its agricultural and spiritual soul, and Venosa, birthplace of the poet Horace and home to one of the region’s most important archaeological areas, represent the two poles of a walk that reveals the deep cultural richness of Basilicata.

An ideal itinerary for lovers of cultural trekking, landscape photography and slow travel, where every step becomes an encounter with the understated and authentic beauty of this land.