

From Tolve (Church of Saint Peter) to San Chirico Nuovo (Archaic Hut) via the Sanctuary of Madonna di Fonti

A route of intermediate difficulty, measuring 13.6 kilometres, with 600 metres of ascent and 440 metres of descent, and taking approximately four hours and fifteen minutes to complete. The itinerary winds through hills, woodland and valleys that preserve centuries of history, art and devotion, linking three emblematic sites of spirituality and ancient memory in Basilicata: the Church of Saint Peter, the Sanctuary of Madonna di Fonti, and the Archaic Hut.

The walk begins in Tolve, a village whose origins date back to the Early Middle Ages and which still retains the charm of its stone architecture and ancient fortified walls. Here stands the Church of Saint Peter, founded by Benedictine monks in the second half of the eleventh century. The building, marked by the sober elegance of Romanesque architecture, is distinguished by a majestic stone portal attributed to the school of Melchiorre da Montalbano (late 13th century), richly carved with finely detailed decorations, and by a Renaissance upper extension dated 1546.

Inside, the wooden high altar houses the seventeenth-century painting, *Immaculate Conception with Saints and Angels*, while a side wall preserves the delicate medieval stone sculpture of the *Madonna and Child*, one of the oldest surviving examples of sacred art in Tolve. The quiet, contemplative atmosphere of this place provides a perfect introduction to the spirit of the journey.



Figure 1. Church of Saint Peter (Tolve)

Leaving the built-up area behind, the path enters an unspoilt rural landscape, where rolling hills alternate with cultivated fields and patches of woodland. The walk follows stretches of ancient rural roads—grassy routes used for centuries by shepherds during transhumance—which still shape the natural rhythm of inland Lucania today. Amid the rustling of olive trees and birdsong, the landscape reveals its most authentic harmony.

After a few kilometres, the route reaches the Sanctuary of the Madonna di Fonti (Saint Mary, Fountain of Grace), set deep within the dense municipal woodland of Fonti- Three Gates. The church, belonging to the Cathedral Chapter of Tricarico, preserves a sixteenth-century fresco depicting the Virgin and Child, seated beneath a canopy and crowned by two angels. The Madonna is shown enthroned, holding the Child who blesses and bears the globe of the world, a symbol of divine dominion over the universe.

This ancient place of worship—mentioned by Pope John Paul II in 1991 among the principal Marian shrines of Basilicata—has for centuries been a destination of pilgrimage and popular devotion. In 2024 it was officially recognised as a Diocesan Marian Sanctuary, a place of prayer and popular piety since time immemorial. The tranquillity of the forest and the living presence of tradition make a pause at the Sanctuary a moment of deep meditation and spirituality.



Figure 2. Sanctuary of Madonna di Fonti

The route then continues towards San Chirico Nuovo, a small town in the middle Bradano area, set on a hill overlooking the surrounding landscape. Near the village lies the archaeological site of Serra di Cugno Notaro, where the Archaic Hut has been brought to light—an exceptional testimony to the life of indigenous Lucanian communities in the 6th century BC.

Archaeological investigations have revealed the remains of a circular dwelling built of wood and clay, along with a necropolis containing 23 tombs, documenting the settlement and burial patterns typical of the Archaic period. Today the area has been museumised and protected by a covering structure, and can be visited thanks to a heritage enhancement project involving Italian and international universities, including Sorbonne University and the Humboldt University of Berlin.

The itinerary from Tolve to San Chirico Nuovo is therefore a journey through time and memory, spanning millennia of Lucanian history: from Benedictine churches and Renaissance Marian devotion to the earliest roots of human settlement. It is a walk that brings together faith, art and archaeology, set within a landscape that still preserves a deep balance between nature, silence and spirituality.



Figure 3. Archaic Hut (San Chirico Nuovo)