

From the Via Latina Tombs to the Caffarella Valley

Caffarella Valley / Park of the Via Latina

This itinerary links two very interesting areas of the Archaeological Park of the Appia Antica. From the Via Latina Park, which features several important Roman tombs, Via dell'Almone leads to the Caffarella Valley, an uncontaminated oasis enclosed by some of Rome's most densely populated neighbourhoods. Here nature, art, history and archaeology come together in a perfect balance, which never fails to fascinate visitors, with its Roman monuments, such as a Colombarium attributed to the emperor Constantine and the Temple of Ceres Faustina, the Medieval Valca Tower and the Casale della Vaccareccia farmhouse from the 16th century. The continued use of this area over the centuries becomes clear to those who walk through it, enthralled by its beautiful natural landscape.

From the end point, in Largo Tacchi Venturi, follow the map to other itineraries across the Park.



POI

14



Distance

4.98 Km

Poi

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- 2 Costantine's Colombarium
- 3 The Valca Tower
- 4 The Sacred Grove
- 5 Roman cistern
- 6 Temple of Ceres and Faustine - Church of Sant'Urbano
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Scan the QrCode to access the navigable mobile version of the itinerary

The Archeological park of the Tombs of the Via Latina

Roma / Place to visit - Archaeological areas

A section of the 3rd mile of the ancient Roman road called the Via Latina has been preserved, practically intact, on the outskirts of Rome, between the modern-day Via Appia and Via Tuscolana. The road has very remote origins, being the natural prehistoric route used by the Etruscans to colonise Campania in the 8th to 6th century BC.

The paved road was built by the Romans in the 4th-3rd century BC linking Rome to Capua and crossing the Lepini, Ausoni and Aurunci mountains and the valleys of the Sacco and Liri rivers, playing an important role throughout antiquity. Even in the Middle Ages, in fact, it was the preferred road for Naples, because it was in a better condition than the Via Appia and due to the presence of many Christian monuments along the way.

A section with the original paving of the road can still be seen in the Archaeological Park of the Tombs of the Via Latina, which makes for a pleasant stroll to admire the tombs, dated to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, which flank the road and still feature perfectly preserved multicoloured decorations, both inside and outside: vaulted ceilings that are plastered, stuccoed and painted, walls covered with frescoes with funerary subjects and mosaic floors have all been perfectly preserved and look today as they must have looked centuries ago. The road also leads to the Basilica of S. Stefano, a rare example of Early Christian building erected under Pope Leo the Great in the 5th century.

The Archaeological Park of the Tombs of the Via Latina was created in 1879, following the purchase, by the State, of a vast area where a number of Roman remains had been unearthed. Today, it can be visited free of charge and, thanks to the recent restoration work by the Archaeological Park authorities, it is also possible to admire several of the most spectacular Roman tombs:

The so-called **Barberini or Corneli tomb**. This funerary monument, dated to the 2nd century AD, consists of two floors above and an underground burial chamber in excellent condition. The uppermost chamber is cross-vaulted and entirely covered with frescoes with a red background, as well as stucco decorations. The frescoes depict groups of people, winged victories riding on chariots, cupids, birds, marine animals, mythological subjects and architectural elements.

The **Tomb of the Valerii**. The richly decorated underground burial chambers have been preserved, dated to the 2nd century AD, while the part above ground is a hypothetical reconstruction made in the 19th century. The underground chambers feature elaborate white stucco work decorations, with 35 medallions and squares, lunettes and a vaulted ceiling. The medallions depict Dionysian themes, female figures and marine animals, while the central roundel features a delicate veiled figure riding on the back of a griffin, which represents the deceased being taken to the underworld.

The Tomb of the Pancratii. Most of the visible structure is a modern building that protects the underground part of the monument, built on top of the original walls dating to the 1st-2nd century AD, which have been preserved up to a height of about 1.5 metres. Inside, the tomb has several underground chambers marvellously decorated with mosaics on the floor and frescoed walls and vaulted ceilings, painted with brilliant colours and featuring excellently preserved stucco work, all of which depict mythological scenes, natural and architectural landscapes, female figures and animals. In the middle of one of the underground chambers is a large sarcophagus of Greek marble large enough for two bodies.

Given the beauty and exceptional nature of the decorations inside the tombs, the Archaeological Park limits access to the tombs to guided groups, to enable the public to enjoy these wonderful, albeit delicate, monuments, without causing any damage.



🕒 Opening Hours

09:00 - 19:00	On weekends mandatory reservation at least one day in advance by calling 067886254 during opening hours.
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📅 Closing Days

Monday

📍 Info

Opening hours:

From Tuesday to Sunday from 9.00 to 19.00 with last admission half an hour before closing.

Visits on weekends must be booked by phone at least one day in advance.

Reservations for the weekend by calling 067886254 during opening hours.

Closing day:

Monday.

📍 Address

Via dell'Arco di Travertino, 151 - Roma (RM)

🚶 How to get

METRO LINE A station ARCO DI TRAVERTINO, then walk 7 minutes.



Costantine's Colombarium

Roma / Place to visit - Tombs

This is the name given to the remains of a temple tomb, dated to the 2nd century AD. The red and yellow brick rectangular building, elevated on a podium, featured a portico with two columns, which have since disappeared. The monument was two storeys tall, with a burial chamber below, accessed via a door on the longer side, and an upper chamber used for the funeral rituals.

📍 Address

How to get

Da METRO LINE B station COLOSSEO take the BUS 118 to APPIA PIGNATELLI/S.URBANO stop, alternatively METRO LINE A station ARCO DI TRAVERTINO take the BUS 660 to ALMONE stop



Address

Valle della Caffarella - Roma (RM)

How to get

From METRO LINE B station COLOSSEO take the BUS 118 to APPIA PIGNATELLI/S.URBANO stop, alternatively from METRO LINE A station ARCO DI TRAVERTINO take the BUS 660 to ALMONE stop.



Address

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Inside there are traces of frescoes and the marks left by the marble slabs that covered the walls. In the middle of the far wall was an arched recess – called an *arcosolium* – with a barrel vault, where the deceased was laid to rest. The building has been heavily altered over the centuries. For example, several windows have been bricked in, with tuff blocks or bricks, and a niche cut into the wall to house a sink. In the Middle Ages the building became a mill, used until the Renaissance, when it was partially buried; then, in the 17th century, it was converted into a house.

The monument has recently been accurately restored. The Columbarium is a short distance from the Egeria Source, which can be reached via an underpass or by crossing Via dell'Almone.

Poi 3

The Valca Tower

Roma / Place to visit - Towers

This tower was built between the 12th and 13th centuries over a previous Roman building, to control a bridge across the river Almone and a road. It was probably used by the Counts of Tusculum, and then the Caetani, to control the surrounding area and the access to Rome, after having acquired the Tomb of Caecilia Metella and the neighbouring land.

The tower has a square ground plan and is two storeys tall, originally divided by a wooden floor, which no longer exists although the holes in the walls for the beams can still be seen. The entrance to the tower is on the side opposite to the river and is framed by a short porch with Roman brickwork decoration. There are several rectangular windows for sighting and the entire building is made of blocks of peperino and yellow tufa blocks.

The name “*valca*” refers to a type of mill used, in the Middle Ages, to wash wool for making cloth, and is probably of Longobard origin, a theory regarding the purpose of this tower which seems to be supported by the presence, nearby, of several tanks. Based on the results of archaeological excavations, it has been surmised that the mill stopped operating in the 16th century. After the excavation work, carried out in 1999, the heavily damaged tower was restored to prevent its collapse.

Poi 4

The Sacred Grove

Roma / Place to visit - Natural area

Not far from the nymphaeum of Egeria is a wood which, according to a Renaissance tradition, was used by the water nymph Egeria and the second king of Rome Numa Pompilius as a meeting place for their trysts, although historians have recently moved this spot to closer to the ancient Porta Capena gate. This is probably all that remains of an ancient *lucus*, the sacred groves often planted near suburban villas, in ancient times, and in this case the sacred grove on the estate of the villa built by Herodes Atticus in the 2nd century AD, where he lived with his wife Annia Regilla. This was also a favourite spot for landscape painters in the 18th century. The wood, located on the top of a hill overlooking the entire valley, has been preserved, in part, from Roman times. From 1999, another 50 holm oak trees (*Quercus ilex*) have been planted around the only 3 remaining oak trees of the original grove, in an attempt to recreate its appearance.

Poi 5

Roman cistern



Address

Valle della Caffarella - Roma (RM)

How to get

From METRO LINE B station COLOSSEO take the BUS 118 to APPIA
PIGNATELLI/S.URBANO stop.

Roma / Place to visit - Cistern

The Caffarella Valley, thanks to the lay of the land and abundance of water, being crossed by the river Almone, was much exploited in Roman times for farming, while at a later date it also became much appreciated as a setting for a number of wealthy villas, with large rooms, baths, gardens and fountains. This explains the presence of the many large cisterns here, such as this one, located between the church of S. Urbano and Via dell'Almone. The structure, about 21 metres long and almost 7 metres tall, was originally dug into the earth, to better support the enormous pressure of the water stored inside, and was brought to the light only after the large-scale excavation works in this area in the Late Imperial period (4th-5th centuries AD). Today, all that remains of the original structure is its concrete core containing flint gravel aggregates. The lower part of the outer walls feature traces of brickwork added much later, probably to strengthen the structure after the excavation. Inside, there is a *cocciopesto* (broken pottery beaten to powder) floor, while the walls were plastered. The short walls are semi-circular in shape, while the vault has an acute angle. Its date is uncertain, but it was probably built in the 1st century AD. Over the centuries, after being abandoned, the cistern was used as a warehouse or even a house, as well as a watchtower, as suggested by the crenellations at the top.

Poi 6

Temple of Ceres and Faustine - Church of Sant'Urbano



Address

Vicolo S. Urbano, Roma - Roma (RM)

How to get

From METRO B station COLOSSEO take the BUS 118 to APPIA
PIGNATELLI/SANT'URBANO stop.

Roma / Place to visit - Churches

Easily accessible from Vicolo Sant'Urbano, which branches off Via Appia Pignatelli on the left, at about 800 metres from the Catacombs of Pretestato, there is a Roman temple which, in the 9th century, was modified and consecrated as a church dedicated to St. Urban.

The original temple, erected in the 2nd century AD by Herodes Atticus as a "prostyle" temple with a colonnaded porch, on a low podium and with the cell in the centre, is believed to have been dedicated to Ceres and Faustina, as a memorial to his deceased wife Annia Regilla.

Its appearance was radically altered in 1634, during the restoration work commissioned by Pope Urban VIII, who had the spaces between the columns bricked in and a bell tower added on the roof.

Poi 7

The Nymphaeum of Egeria



Address

Valle della Caffarella - Roma (RM)

How to get

From METRO LINE B station COLOSSEO take the BUS 118 to APPIA
PIGNATELLI/S.URBANO stop, alternatively, from METRO LINE A station ARCO DI TRAVERTINO take the BUS 660 to ALMONE stop.

Roma / Place to visit - Nymphaeum

The nymphaeum owes its name to a Renaissance antiquarian tradition, according to which, based on the interpretation of several ancient texts, this was the location of the legendary grotto of the water nymph Egeria, trusted advisor and lover of king Numa Pompilius. However, the actual water springs and grove sacred to Egeria were probably located close to the Porta Capena gate, at the beginning of the Via Appia, while the so-called Nymphaeum of Egeria we see here is a brick structure dating to the 2nd century AD, belonging to the huge estate of the wealthy Athenian orator Herodes Atticus, one of many buildings the remains of which still dot the Caffarella Valley today. Rather than being a monumental fountain archaeological investigations have shown that it was a recreational building, designed to host banquets and other leisurely activities in the summer months, of a type commonly found in the wealthy countryside villas built on the edges of the ancient city, fashioned to look like a natural cave set in a rural landscape. The building consists of two rectangular chambers arranged to form a T shape; the first chamber is barrel vaulted and has three niches on each longer side and a large niche at the end, which, today, hosts a marble statue of a river god, probably the god *Almo*. The floor was paved with slabs of green serpentine marble, while the walls were clad with *verde antique* marble and the niches faced with white marble. The grotto was also decorated with colourful glass-paste mosaics, sea shells and pumice stones in imitation of a natural cavern.

Poi 8

River Almone (North)

Roma / Place to visit - Natural area

In Roman times, the stream crossing the entire length of the Caffarella Valley was called *Almo flumen* (river Almo) and was the third most important waterway of the ancient city. Its headsprings being located in the Alban Hills, near the modern-day town of Marino, and it crossed the Roman countryside before reaching the city.

In this area, near the Tenuta della Caffarella estate, the river was fed by the Fonte Egeria springs, after which it crossed the Aventino Valley and then flowed into the Tiber. Ovid mentions a solemn festival linked to the river and held every year on 27 March, since 205 BC, called the *lavatio Matris deum*, during which the black stone symbolising the goddess Cybele (Magna Mater) and the sacred ritual objects used in her temple on the Palatine hill were washed at the point of confluence of the Almone and the Tiber. Almo, Virgil recounts in Book VII of his Aeneid, was also the name of a young woman at the court of the Latin king, associated with the legend of the arrival, on the coast of Latium, of the Trojan Aeneas, fleeing from the destruction of Troy, the first to die in the clash between the Latins and the Trojans. Since the 16th century the river has also been called Acquataccio (Bad Water), from which marrana dell'Acquataccio or marrana della Caffarella, marrana meaning ditch in the Roman dialect. In 1939, the river, after the point where it is crossed by the Via Appia, was covered over and channelled into an underground pipe to the wastewater treatment facility of Roma Sud.

At the Casale della Vaccareccia farmhouse the river is crossed by a small brick and tufa bridge.



Address

Via della Caffarella - Roma (RM)

How to get

From METRO A station COLLI ALBANI walk for 11 minutes along Via Marco Menghini towards Largo Tacchi Venturi.

Poi 9

Casale della Vaccareccia

Roma / Place to visit - Casali

The Casale della Vaccareccia farmhouse is one of the many farmhouses built in the Caffarella Valley and incorporates a Medieval watchtower built to defend the Roman countryside. It was erected in 1547 by the Caffarelli family, and important family of the Roman nobility, who had started purchasing land in the area since 1529 and eventually built up an estate covering almost the entire valley. The Caffarelli sold the estate in 1695 to the Pallavicini, who, about a century later, in 1816, sold it to the Torlonia.



Address

Via della Caffarella - Roma (RM)

How to get

From METRO LINE A station COLLI ALBANI walk for 11 minutes along Via Marco Menghini towards Largo Tacchi Venturi.

Poi 10

Torlonia Cistern – Barn

Roma / Place to visit - Cistern

The Caffarella Valley, thanks to the lay of the land and abundance of water, being crossed by the river Almone, was exploited since Roman times, for farming purposes, as well as being appreciated as a setting for several wealthy suburban villas, with large rooms, baths, gardens and fountains. This is the reason for the presence, in the Valley, of a large number of cisterns – storage tanks for collecting water – an example of which is the so-called “Torlonia Cistern – Barn”.

Built originally in the period between the end of the Republic and the Early Imperial age (between the end of the 1st century BC and the beginning of the 1st century AD), it probably



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Via della Caffarella - Roma (RM)

How to get

From METRO LINE A station COLLI ALBANI walk for 11

minutes along Via Marco Menghini towards Largo Tacchi Venturi.

belonged to a large villa the remains of which have been unearthed between via Carlo de Bildt and the Casale della Vaccareccia farmhouse. The walls of the cistern are built of concrete containing leucite aggregates and it has a rectangular ground plan measuring 14 x 5.50 metres. Its unusual name is down to the fact that, between the end of the 19th and the early 20th centuries, it was converted into a barn by the owners of the estate, the wealthy and powerful Torlonia family, as part of the refurbishment of the Tarani cistern. On that occasion, an upper floor was added, to be used as a warehouse. The building partially collapsed, in 2011, after which restoration and strengthening works were carried out.

Poi 11



Round cistern

Roma / Place to visit - Cistern

Very little remains of this circular Roman cistern, only a few centimetres of its structure jutting out of the soil. With a diameter of 30 metres, it was made of concrete containing flint gravel aggregates. The limited thickness of the wall has led archaeologists to think that it probably lacked a roof and was, therefore, open to the skies, to collect rainwater for crop irrigation. The Caffarella Valley, thanks to the lay of the land and abundance of water, being crossed by the river Almone, was much exploited for farming, since Roman times, a fact testified by the numerous cisterns found there.

Address

Valle della Caffarella - Roma (RM)

How to get

From METRO LINE A station FURIO CAMILLO exit to Via Baronio and walk for 14 minutes

Poi 12



Via Latina – Caffarella Valley

Roma / Place to visit - Ancient streets

Near the junction between the Via Latina and Via di Vigna Fabbri lies a stretch of the ancient Via Latina, the road which, in Roman times, linked Rome and Capua. The route, used since proto-historic times by the Etruscans, for their conquest of Campania, was paved beginning in the 4th century BC, and became the second most important road, after the Appian Way, connecting Rome with the south of Italy. In Roman times the Via Latina was flanked, like all the important roads leading out of Rome, by tombs, residential buildings, shops and inns serving travellers.

The stretch visible here was paved with slabs of volcanic rock. The road was about 4 metres wide, not including the pedestrian walkways at the sides; this is the typical width of Roman roads and had been calculated to allow to carts travelling in different directions to pass each other without having to give way. Some of the paving stones feature deep ruts carved by cart wheels. In this area of the Appio-Latino neighbourhood, after World War II, a shanty town was built, called the Borghetto Latino, to provide a shelter for the many people who had lost their homes. The huts were built against the ancient Roman ruins, even using stones and other materials removed from the monuments. In the 1970s, the local authorities decided it was high time to find a more permanent solution for the people still living in the shanty town, decades after the War, so plans were drawn up to demolish the Borghetto Latino and regenerate the entire area, also including the Roman ruins.

Today, the remains of only a few ancient buildings can still be seen here, including, near the preserved stretch of the Via Latina, a small pillar tomb, so-called because it is taller than it is wide, resembling a pillar, with a small square base erected, as a marker, over an underground burial place. As is often the case in pillar tombs, only the core of the base has been preserved, made of concrete and tufa aggregate, while the external stone or marble cladding has long since been plundered.

Open every day

Address

Via Latina - Roma (RM)

How to get

From METRO LINE A station COLLI ALBANI and then walk for 8 minutes along Via Marco Menghini.

Poi 13



Cistern – Nymphaeum

Roma / Place to visit - Cistern

The Caffarella Valley, due to lay of the land and abundance of water, being crossed by the river Almone, was used since ancient Roman times as prized farmland, as well as the preferred setting for a number of wealthy suburban villas with large rooms, baths, gardens and fountains. This also explains the many water cisterns found here, for storing and supplying water to both the farms and the villas. One of these, the so-called Cistern - Nymphaeum, is the closest to the Via Latina: a building with a rectangular floor plan, almost 10 metres long, built of brick, which features the peculiar characteristic of five buttresses against the south wall, framing three arched recesses. This unusual feature has led archaeologists to believe that it also doubled as a monumental fountain called a nymphaeum. It was probably part of a villa the remains of which have been unearthed near the Via Latina. No information has yet come to light regarding how and from where water was supplied to the cistern, although its proximity to the aqueduct and dating have led archaeologists to assume that it was fed by the *Aqua Antoniniana*. The structure was abandoned in Late Antiquity (4th-5th century AD) and was later reused first as a burial site, then, after a stair was opened in the floor leading to an underground chamber, for wine production, based on the presence of a tank where the grapes could be pressed.

📍 Address

Via della Caffarella - Roma (RM)

🚶 How to get

From METRO LINE A station COLLI ALBANI walk for 10 minutes along Via Marco Menghini towards Largo Tacchi Venturi

Poi 14



The Caffarella Valley – Largo Tacchi Venturi

Roma / Place to visit - Natural area

Next to the ancient Via Latina, in a densely populated modern neighbourhood, is one of the most popular entrances to the Caffarella Valley, a huge expanse of public land, covering an area of 190 hectares, bounded by the Aurelian Walls, Via Latina and Via dell'Almone. Its name comes from an estate owned by the noble Caffarelli family, who built a farmhouse here, in the 16th century, known as "Vaccareccia", and which can still be seen in the Park. The area was listed as public parkland in the 1965 Zoning Plan, and today visitors may enter and appreciate its natural beauty and archaeological remains via a number of gates in the surrounding neighbourhoods. This green valley, crossed by the river Almone, features many archaeological remains, tombs, villas, towers and waterworks, having been inhabited since the 6th century BC. Initially consisting entirely of farmland, in the Imperial age it became a highly prized residential area. In particular, we know from the ancient sources that, at the time, Herodes Atticus, a prominent Athenian orator and politician, who lived in Rome in the 2nd century AD, owned a vast estate and built a huge villa here (known as the *Pagus Triopius*), the core of which, having passed into the hands of the emperor, later became the Villa of Maxentius.

Evocative buildings here are the so-called "*nymphaeum* of Egeria", the church of Sant'Urbano, originally dedicated to Ceres and Faustina, the tomb of Annia Regilla, the deceased wife of Herodes Atticus. Also of interest is the "Valca Tower", built as a mill in around the 11th century, on the shores of the river, as part of a fulling mill for manufacturing cloth.

🕒 Info

Free admission.

📍 Address

Largo Tacchi Venturi - Roma (RM)

🚶 How to get

From METRO LINE A station COLLI ALBANI and then walk for 8 minutes along Via Mario Menghini.