

# From Largo Tacchi Venturi to Vicolo di Sant'Urbano

## Caffarella Valley

This itinerary explores the Caffarella Valley, an uncontaminated natural environment in the heart of the city, the setting of many ancient Roman myths and legends.

The itinerary begins at Largo Tacchi Venturi, one of the entrances into the valley, and ends at Vicolo di Sant'Urbano; along the way you will see many archaeological remains and buildings from different periods, testifying to the fact that this area has always been a popular spot. Water is a great feature here, with the river Almone, the main waterway in the valley, used since ancient times to irrigate the surrounding fields. In fact, there is an abundance of water-related structures, such as a Roman nymphaeums and cisterns, one of which was converted into a barn by the wealthy Torlonia landowners. In ancient Roman times the area was the location of a large estate owned by a wealthy Athenian called Herodes Atticus.

This is the period to which many of the monuments along the way belong: the Nymphaeum of Egeria, dedicated to the nymph who, according to some scholars, inspired and advised king Numa Pompilius, the Temple of Ceres and Faustina, converted into the church of Sant'Urbano in the early Middle Ages. Later on, in the 16th century, the wealthy landowning Caffarelli family built the Casale della Vaccareccia farmhouse, as part of a plan to put the valley to good use as farmland.



POI



Distance

10

2.86 Km

### Poi

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- 3 Via Latina – Caffarella Valley
- 4 Round cistern
- 5 Torlonia Cistern – Barn
- 6 Casale della Vaccareccia
- 7 River Almone (North)
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- 9 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

# Poi 1

## 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.

# Poi 2

## 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 3

## 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,



**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.

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.

## Poi 4



### 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 5



### 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 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 leucitite 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.

**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 6

## 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 7

## 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 8

## The Nymphaeum of Egeria

### 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



#### 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.

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 9



### Temple of Ceres and Faustine - Church of Sant'Urbano

#### 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.

#### 📍 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.

## Poi 10



### The Caffarella Valley – Vicolo di Sant'Urbano

#### Roma / Place to visit - Natural area

The Vicolo di Sant'Urbano is an alley on the southern edge of 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.

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#### 🕒 Info

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#### 📍 Address

Vicolo di S. Urbano - Roma (RM)

#### 🚶 How to get

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