



From Vicolo di Sant'Urbano to the Via Appia Antica

Caffarella Valley

This itinerary explores the Caffarella Valley, the setting of many myths and legends of the Roman people, where nature, art, history and archaeology come together in an exciting mix, to the Via Appia Antica.

The itinerary begins in Vicolo di Sant'Urbano; the first monument you come to is the Temple of Ceres and Faustina, built in a dominant position overlooking the valley, and which, in the Middle Ages, was converted into the church of Sant'Urbano. Opposite the church, on the top of a little hill, are three holm oak trees, which are all that remains of a centuries-old wood called the Sacred Grove, which was the alleged setting of the trysts between the nymph Egeria and king Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome, although the tradition is now thought to be wrong.

Further on you come to a monumental water cistern, which almost certainly belonged to a Roman villa, the rest of which, unfortunately, has entirely disappeared. Continuing eastwards, you leave the Caffarella Valley via an underpass leading to the Egeria mineral water bottling plant and, from here, continuing along Via dell'Almone, you eventually reach the Appian Way, where you'll find many other itineraries to continue exploring the Via Appia and the environs of Rome.

Plan this itinerary around the opening hours of the underpass to the Fonte Egeria bottling plant, Monday to Saturday, from 9 am to 5 pm; Sunday and holidays from 9 am to 1.30 pm. The opening times, however, may change.


POI


Distance

7

2.13 Km

Poi

- 1 The Caffarella Valley – Vicolo di Sant'Urbano
- 2 Temple of Ceres and Faustine - Church of Sant'Urbano
- 3 The Sacred Grove
- 4 Roman cistern
- 5 Egeria Spring
- 6 The Appia Pignatelli Artillery Fort
- 7 The Via Appia Antica



Scan the QrCode to
access the navigable
mobile version of the
itinerary

Poi 1

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.

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

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

Poi 2

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 3

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.



Address

Valle della Caffarella - Roma (RM)

 How to get

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

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 4

Roman cistern

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 5

Egeria Spring

Roma / Tourist Services - Info Point

The spring is associated with the very ancient cult of the nymph Egeria, which originated at the time of the foundation of Rome. The water is a medium mineral water rich in calcium, magnesium, potassium and fluoride, and the spring is fed by an aquifer that collects water from the Castelli Romani basin, rich in mineral salts from the volcanic soil it crosses, which also confer its characteristic light effervescence. The aquifer is protected from surface pollution by various layers of clay. The spring was already known to the Romans for its therapeutic qualities. It was rediscovered in the 11th century, after a long period of neglect, and became popular once again in the 16th century thanks to the physician of Gregory VII and Abbot Tommaso della Valle, who enthusiastically mentions it in his "Guide to Holy Waters". In the 18th century the waters were analysed for the first time and the spring was linked to the city by means of two roads, transforming it an attraction and mineral water resort, as well as facilitating the supply of the water for a thriving door-to-door water selling trade. In 1948 a bottling plant was opened, set in a large area of parkland, which still bears the name of the spring and where the water can still be appreciated today, all its properties intact.



 Info

Opening hours:

Summer
From the start of daylight saving time
Monday – Saturday: 8.00 – 18.30
Sunday – Holidays: 8.00 – 13.30

Winter
From the return to standard time
Monday – Saturday: 8.00 – 17.30
Sunday – Holidays: 8.00 – 13.30

Closing days:

1 January, Easter Sunday, 15 August, 25-26 December

 Address

Via dell'Almone 111 - Roma (RM)

 How to get

From METRO LINE B station COLOSSEO take BUS 118 to APPIA PIGNATELLI/ALMONE stop, alternatively from METRO LINE A station ARCO DI



Address

Via Appia Pignatelli 123 - Roma
(RM)

How to get

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

Poi 6

The Appia Pignatelli Artillery Fort

Roma / Other places - Other Places

Beginning in 1877, Rome was surrounded by a defence system consisting of a string of artillery forts and fortresses, located at a distance of 4-5 km, on average, from the Roman Aurelian Walls and forming a 37 km long ring with 15 fortresses and 3 artillery forts, such as this one. The Appia Pignatelli Artillery Fort, built between 1883 and 1888, together with the Porta Furba Artillery Fort, was tasked with the purpose of preventing the enemy from accessing the city along the Via Appia and Via Tuscolana, and controlling the area between the Via Appia Antica and the modern-day Park of the Aqueducts.

The fort has an irregular pentagonal ground plan, with a salient-type outer front. It housed a gunpowder magazine entered from the moat, near the drawbridge, and featured two freshwater wells, useful in the event of a siege. The fort is generally in good condition, although it was slightly damaged in 1944 during an Allied bombing. It was used, since the 1910s, as the headquarters of the Italian Air Force's Artillery Division, and today houses the headquarters of the Automated Information System Unit.

The system of 19th century fortresses and artillery forts surrounding the city have been decommissioned, over the last few decades, because they are now located too close to built up areas, following the expansion of Rome well beyond the Aurelian Walls during the 20th century, and are now used as military storehouses or barracks.

Poi 7

The Via Appia Antica

Roma / Place to visit - Ancient streets

The long story of the Via Appia unfolds in space and time. With its 2300 years of history, the Appian Way bears all the signs of a remarkable and fascinating past, which are still clearly visible among the ruins that flank the road today. Great historic events and minor episodes of everyday life have played out here, in these picturesque surroundings, since the time of ancient Rome, through the Dark Ages, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, until the decision, by Pope Pius IX, in the mid-19th century, to transform it into an open air museum.

The Via Appia began at Porta Capena, one of the gates in the Servian Wall, near the Circus Maximus, and continued southward, with a straight smooth stretch, first until Capua and, later on, to Brindisi and the Adriatic Sea. The initial part of the road is no longer visible and the main monuments can be reached through the modern Viale delle Terme di Caracalla and Via di Porta San Sebastiano. However, at the junction with the Via Ardeatina, and the church of Domine, quo vadis?, there begins a long straight extraordinarily well-preserved stretch of the old Roman road, lined with hundreds of ancient monuments.

These are just a small part of the many relics of the past that adorn this evocative expanse of Roman countryside, where the absence of buildings or natural barriers ensure an uninterrupted view of the nearby Alban Hills.

The state-owned stretch of the Appian Way runs for a length of about 12 km, from house number 195 to Frattocchie, in the commune of Marino.



Address

Via Appia Antica - Roma (RM)

How to get

From METRO LINE B station
COLOSSEO take the BUS 118
to BASILICA DI SAN
SEBASTIANO stop and then
walk for 7 minutes, alternatively
from METRO LINE A station
ARDO DI TRAVERTINO take
the BUS 660 to CECILIA
METELLA stop