

## **INTRODUCTION**

Saint Francis of Assisi defined the countryside around Spoleto, covered with olive groves, as "Jucunda" (jocund). To this day, looking down from the suggestive observation point of Monte Martano (towering at 1094 m./3600 ft; above sea level) the feeling is one of immutability.

Giano is reached following a path traced by thousands of years of civilization, across a land offering many of the richest evidences of man's ingenuity, history and cultural evolution. Spoleto and Todi lay 20 minutes away.

Montefalco and Bevagna are 10 minutes away. Giano is a place of the spirit more than just a geographical name.

This booklet may be used as a sort of compass by the visitor.

It does not point to any specific itinerary but merely describes general theme, apt to surprise the visitor and perhaps to stimulate his desire to discover the land through his senses and through the emotions he feels when confronting art and culture. He may be moved by the everchanging colours of the landscape and by the natural environment and he will certainly enjoy the subtle changes of flavours of the local specialities and gastronomy.

The periplus has no pretention to be complete. The land where so many signs of a tenacious civilization and of a strong speculative spirituality are intertwined finds its natural synthesis in the splendid Abbey of San Felice, the spiritual and urban center of the town.

Paolo Morbidoni, Mayor of Giano dell'Umbria.

## **HISTORY AND ART**

Giano dell'Umbria is erected on a hill at 546 m/1800 ft. above sea level and is dominated on the South by the peak of Monte Martano (1094 3600 ft.). The name Giano is probably derived from the existence here of an old pagan temple dedicated to the god Janus, doorkeeper of heaven and patron of the beginning and of the end of things. He had two faces in opposite directions, one for the rising sun and one for the sunset and he was much revered by the antique Italic populations. Giano undoubtedly suffered the barbaric invasions. However it experienced a rebirth during the Middle Ages and extended its dominion over a few surrounding villages. From the 13th Cent. to the 19th Cent., Giano remained through ups and down, under the domination of Spoleto. Nonetheless, it administered its own territory which included Montecchio and Castagnola. In 1816, Giano was declared an autonomous township and thus remained even after the reunification of Italy.

The castle, resulting from the fusion of two fortified military structures, has kept its very pronounced medieval aspect. Just outside the walls it the monumental complex of San Francesco with its church dating from the second half of the 13th Cent. The exterior, with its pinkish keystones and its sloping roof reveals a facade raised above the original one. The interior, tampered with during the 17th Cent., is decorated by six Baroque wooden altars with scagliola frontals of the Tuscan School. Above the altars hang valuable paintings. Frescoes dating from the original church have recently been rediscovered behind some of the altars. Among them a San Antonio dating from the second half of the 14th Cent and a Madonna del Rosario from the 16th Cent. These are conserved, with painting of the Umbrian School of the 14th Cent. in the apse. Another important pictorial cycle attributed to Giovanni Carraduccio (a 14th Cent. painter from Foligno) is in the chapel of the Crucifixion.

Climbing back through the narrow alleys of the Castle, one reaches the main square dominated by the Townhall and the church of the Madonna delle Grazie, originally built during the 14th Cent. but completely transformed during the 18th Cent. In it two precious paintings are to be seen: A Saint Anthony Abbot by Antonio Cavallucci (1794) and a Madonna with Child by Andrea Polinori (1620). Of particular interest is the 14th Cent. decoration around the Madonna with Child over the

main altar. Also on the Townhall square, one finds the 13th Cent. church of San Michele inside which fragmentary traces of frescoes from 1510 can be seen as well as a wooden crucifix from the 16th Cent.

## **THE SURROUNDING COUNTRYSIDE**

### **Montecchio**

A mighty castle set in a commanding position along the Roman Via Flaminia, already fortified during the 10th Cent., has kept a good portion of its surrounding wall first built during the 12th Cent and extended during the 14th Cent.

On the small central square are the Palazzo della Comunità dating from the 16th Cent. and the church of San Bartolomeo where numerous fragments of frescoes of the Umbrian School are conserved as well as an interesting stone frontal dating from 1430. Outside the village, bordering the highway, is the small church of San Rocco and the ruins of a structure used during the 14th (the Century of the Great Plague) as a hospital.

### **Castagnola**

One of the oldest possessions of Giano, after briefly belonging to the Trinci family, Castagnola fell, during the 16th Cent. under the domination of Todi, as evidenced by the coat of arms placed above the gate to the castle. Few traces remain of the wall once encircling the town and the watchtower near the entrance gate has been converted into a belltower. The only sacred building inside the castle is the church of Santa Croce supported by parts of the city wall.

### **Morcicchia**

This is also one of the oldest settlements of Giano and was probably a fief of the Litaldi or Ritaldi family of Spoleto.

From the old castle built in a suggestive position on the slopes of the Monti Martani, all that remains is the old public building now housing the local administration, a cistern used to collect rain water and substantial remains of the encircling wall. Inside the village is the church of San Silvestro dating from the 14th Cent. but badly restored during the 20th Cent. Near the castle, an imposing tower is all that is left of the castle of Clarignano, already in ruins in the 14th Cent.

### **The Abbey of San Felice**

With its austere and essential Romanesque architecture, the Abbey is the focal point where history, culture and faith meet. It symbolizes both the lush olive groves surrounding it and the land where the footprints of great Saints such as San Felice and San Gaspare del Bufalo are indelibly marked. The earliest construction, an oratory, dates from the fourth century, while a coenobium, or monastery, was added in the sixth and seventh centuries. A Benedictine community was established there in the two centuries which followed, and the order was responsible for the large scale development, together with the Augustinian ones, that she lived in the centuries seventeen and eighteen. The Romanesque nature of the church, which had been obscured by baroque modifications, was restored to its original state in 1958. Today the Abbey is a spirituality center of the religious order of "Missionaries of the very precious Blood", really founded in this place from S. Gaspare del Bufalo in 1815.

### **The Monti Martani**

This chain of mountains, roughly 30 km. long (20 ml. ) divides the two main valleys of Umbria: The Spoleto valley to the East and the Tiber valley to the West. It was already the natural barrier between two civilizations. The Umbrian and the Etruscan. Through it, Christianity penetrated and was diffused by the great paleochristian heroes who gave their names to important hermitages and abbeys spread along the hillside, such as San Fidenzio & Terenzio or San Faustino in Massa Martana, Sant'Erasmus of Cesi, San Pietro in Monte and San Felice in Giano. Despite the constant

human presence, the complex ecosystem of the mountains has been preserved intact, with its vast areas covered with oaks of various kinds and with beech trees. The fauna and the flora offer a great variety of specimen and one can even find interesting examples of geological and karstic phenomenon. The whole represents a very suggestive "unicum".

A series of trekking paths have been mapped out and marked over more than 100 km. from Cesi to Giano dell'Umbria, practicable on foot, on horseback or on bicycle and easily accessible from Giano where a shelter is open to excursionists. Additional paths, marked by the Club Alpino Italiano widen the choices and it is possible to program itineraries including a visit to the tracks of the antique roman Flaminian highway. ([www.montimartani.it](http://www.montimartani.it))

### **The Extra - Virgin Olive Oil**

Extra-virgin olive oil, which since 1998 has been awarded DOC status, is the chief product of the Giano agriculture. The cultivation of the olive tree, probably introduced by the Romans and preserved by the monks of the Abbey of San Felice during the darkest days of the barbaric invasions, has been considerably expanded, especially during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Cent.

It is still frequent, today, to see, among groves of young olive trees, century-old exemplars, witnesses of an avocation going back to the dark age. Most prominent among them is the olive tree of Macciano, over a thousand years old, which can be seen from the road descending from Giano.

The particularity of the local production confirms the local profound attachment of the population to this land. In fact, the special pedological climatic conditions of the area, a local variety of olives has been selected and developed, the San Felice, which presents organoleptic qualities exalting the fruity flavour of the oil. The discipline imposed.

Those who appreciate the intense fragrance of the freshly pressed oil should not miss the celebration called "Le Vie Dell'Olio" on the last week end of November. The program includes guided visits, degustations, gastronomic itineraries to the restaurants of the region and the "Frasca", traditionally celebrated in every farmyard to mark the completion of the harvest.. A folkloric parade takes place with tasting on the main square of the characteristic "bruschetta" with new oil. ([www.leviedellolio.info](http://www.leviedellolio.info))

### **The Trail of the Sagrantino**

One of the most prestigious grape-vines of our country, the Sagrantino, is cultivated in the area of Montefalco, Giano dell'Umbria, Gualdo Cattaneo, Bevagna and Castel Ritaldi. Sagrantino wine is produced in two versions: Secco (dry) and "Passito" (sweet). For this second version, grapes are left to dry on wooden pallets. This technique (appassire) is particularly congenial to the Sagrantino grapes which can be left to dry for months, without rotting nor losing their sugar content. After an aging period of over 30 months, the wine has a ruby-red colour with hints of darker shades. Its flavour is of blackberry, spicy and warm.

Other renowned wines cultivated in the region are the Red Montefalco DOC, obtained essentially from Sagrantino grapes, the White Montefalco DOC, the wines from the Monti Martani, the Grechetto DOC, the Trebbiano and the Sangiovese. ([www.stradadelsagrantino.it](http://www.stradadelsagrantino.it))

### **Gastronomy and Typical products**

The position of Giano, pre-mountainous and hilly, is not favourable to the development of high yield productions. It rather encourages high quality production. Beside oil and wine, the region produces many typical specialities which enrich the local gastronomy still simple but genuine:

Legumes, cereals among which spelt used in the preparation of rich soups, sheep cheese, honey. Then there are the truffles and the wild asparagus found on the Monti Martani and very much appreciated on dishes on pasta made at home (pappardelle, strangozzi, etc.). Also of importance is the raising of pigs, butchered and processed at home, during the winter months accord, to an age-old tradition. One of the by-products is the lard, used in the preparation of many flavourful basted dishes. The trick being to wrap the lard in straw paper and letting it drip over the meat during the

cooking process. Sweet and pastries are also simple and traditional: tart of almonds, the typical “attorta” (or rocciata), a coil of delicate dough filled with raisins, nuts, apples and dry fruit.