

# ACUTO: A PLACE AMONG THE CLOUDS

## GENERAL OVERVIEW

Acuto is a town in the Province of Frosinone in the Italian region Lazio, located about 60km east of Rome and about 20km northwest of Frosinone on a ridge of the Monti Ernici. Acuto borders the following municipalities: Anagni, Ferentino, Fiuggi, Piglio, Serrone. It is the home of famous people like Umberto Guidoni (politician and astronaut), Maria de Mattias (teacher and Saint who founded the Adorers of the Blood of Christ Catholic Sisters), and Andrea Martini (priest and sculptor) and Salvatore Tassa (star michelin winner chef of the restaurant *Le colline ciociare*). At the moment there are about 2000 inhabitants living here.

Acuto is situated on a hill at about 750 meter above sea level. It is believed that Acuto was founded by a population called Ernici before Christ was born. They used to wear the head of a dead wolf to scare the other populations and dangerous animals. They also used to wear only one sandal as a shoe in order to absorb the power of the Earth. According to some sources, Acuto dates back to the V century B.C. when a group of people from Anagni, to escape a barbaric invasion, found shelter on this hill. Other sources tell us that Acuto dates back to the XI century and that it was property of several local lords and bishops. We like to believe the first version.



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## THE CHURCH OF SAN SEBASTIANO

The Church of San Sebastiano dates back to the 13th century. Built at a certain distance from the inhabited centre, it carried out the dual function of welcoming pilgrims in Jubilee periods and travellers in general, on the quarantines imposed during plagues. The naming of the church was then extended to San Rocco, another saint able to heal and protect people. The interior of the church is characterized by 16th century frescoes with the images of St. Jerome, the Annunciation, the Father Almighty in the apse, inserted into architectural structures of Renaissance taste, thickly decorated with grotesque motifs. On the background we can identify the profile of a country that is probably Acuto as it appeared 500 years ago. San Sebastiano

and San Rocco are represented together with a Madonna with child inside the apse. The two side chapels were frescoed in the 18th century: the right one was built by the Savelli family, and was later dedicated to San Rocco. The left one is dominated by the "magic square" that bears the palindrome inscription *Deo Gratias*, and was dedicated to the Madonna. It is probable that in this niche the statue of the *Madonna di Acuto* was housed, a famous wooden statue of the 13th century, exhibited today in the Museum of Palazzo Venezia in Rome. During the first half of the 19th century the church of San Sebastiano was finally used as the first extra-urban cemetery of Acuto for the cholera epidemics.

*"The Church of San Sebastiano dates back to the 13th century..."*

### OLD BUT GOLD

In Acuto you can find lots of Ancient shops like the Olive-Oil-Mill (*Frantoio*) and the Blacksmith's shop



Do you have something similar in Germany? Have you ever seen one of those? This is a very ancient olive oil mill. Inside you can see a rudimental olive-press. Here is where olives were crushed in order to make some homemade olive juice that, through a complicated procedure, was transformed into delicious Extra Virgin Olive Oil.

### OLD ARCH AND ST. MARIA'S MUSEUM

This is the entrance to the fortress of Acuto. There used to be a wooden door here, you can still see the door hinges. On the arch you can see the Town Shield. If you overstep the arch, on the left, you will see a closed door. If you knock on that door, you will meet a kind nun that knows everything on the life of the saint that changed the lifestyle of this little town forever. Maria de Mattias was born 4 February 1805 in Vallecorsa, in the Province of Frosinone, Italy, to a religious and upper-class family which valued education. She was the second of four children of a rich family. Although women during her time did not normally receive a formal education, she was able to teach herself how to read and write. In her mid-teens, she was withdrawn and focused more on her looks than religion. She was proud of her long blond hair, and spent hours before her mirror, posing and arranging her clothes. However, at the age of 16 she was inspired by a mystical vision and began to break out from her sheltered upbringing. Inside the museum you can find:

- The bed where the Saint died
- The suitcase that she used as a wardrobe
- The pitcher and the basin she used to wash her face
- A wooden statue representing the Saint
- The writing desk she used to write important letters
- The hallows of the Saint





*THE ANCIENT ENTRANCE TO THE FORTRESS*

## THE STATUE OF SANTA MARIA DE MATTIAS



This statue was carved by Padre Andrea Martini, a great priest and sculptor. He is known worldwide. From Italy to U.S.A., from Spain to Japan. He is famous for his skinny and lengthened figures. Santa Maria de Mattias before being a saint was a nun and a teacher. Pope Pius IX sent her to Acuto to found a school for girls. She came here by riding a donkey.

### MARIA DE MATTIAS'S BEDROOM



## WAR MEMORIAL

This is the World War I and World War II memorial. On the stone you can find some names and surnames of your hosts' relatives that fought during the two wars. Sabene, Perinelli, Santonico, Meloni, Bellucci are just some of the surnames. If we turn around we can see a tall building. This is not, as you may think, the castle of Acuto. This used to be one of the walls of the Ancient fortress. The actual castle does not look like a castle. The castle is in fact the modern nunnery, and it is in the opposite part of the town.



## COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA ASSUNTA

Collegiate Santa Maria Assunta is considered one of the most beautiful churches of the 18th century in the Lazio region. Majestic and imposing in a dominant and central position is so old that the exact date of its foundation is unknown. The original building dates back to the end of the 11th century. The current structure of the church is the result of various transformations that took place over the centuries. In 1870 the Papal State financed with 17,700 shields the grandiose restoration work that gave the current form of the church, endowing it with the rich stucco decoration that characterizes the interior. A particularity is constituted by the monarchic star hidden by a vase in the part of the columns, while the

eagle symbol of the monarchy in an attitude of evident superiority is opposed to a crow, symbol of the clergy, who frightened loses his excrement. Of particular artistic interest of the 18th century are the altarpiece of the high altar depicting the Assumption of the Virgin, Sant'Antonio Abate, the Madonna del Salvatore, the altarpiece of S. Maurizio, the painting by S. Carlo Borromeo and the bronze tabernacle cast in wax by the academic Ranocchi.



## THE CHURCH OF SAN PIETRO

The Church of San Pietro is one of the oldest buildings in Acuto. The current bell tower was built just at the beginning of the 20th century and was completed in 1907, with limestone, in several orders, in imitation of the ancient Romanesque style.

The current façade was completed in 1949, and bears the imprint of the work of the then parish priest Aristide Tosco, who is responsible for the preservation of the beautiful frescoes on the right wall. The churchyard consists of the square in front of the façade and still serves as a gathering place, especially on holidays.



## CANTINA PETRUCCI: THE HOST FABRIZIO TELLS THE TRUTH

“Hello, I am Fabrizio. My parents have a restaurant and next to it there is our winery. Our winery is in part carved into the rock. Inside my winery there are a lot of bottles, ancient tools and my grandfather's motorcycle. My ancestor used it to make a wine called *cesanese* famous all over the world. Today my brother produces it in modern cellar. So we use this Place to preserve all our memories and to conserve and taste wine that we produce today”.



## PIAZZA SAN NICOLA

The above square is dedicated to Saint Nicola or, as we know him, San Nicola. Until 1758 this area was occupied by the church, built around the 11th century, and dedicated to St. Nicholas Bishop of Mira. A single stone window, on the eastern side of the entire building, part of the ancient bell tower, has come to the present day. The church was destroyed a long time ago. In time this place was turned into a square because of its marvelous view. From the side of the Ernici mountains the view opens up south to the Lepini mountains. You can see the cities of Anagni and Pali-



ano, and more over Sgurgola, Segni, Colferro and Valmontone. At the end of the 16th century, since it was impossible to extend it, San Nicola lost its main church status in favor of the church of S.

Maria Assunta, although it remained the most populous parish in the country. It was finally demolished in the mid-18th century due to structural problems and water infiltration by order of the Bishop of Anagni, Monsignor Monti, that wanted a more modern and high-rise building, which opened directly onto the main road.



## TYPICAL PRODUCTS: HOW TO MAKE *CORTICCHIOZZE*

1



2



3



.Apart from honey, asparagus, *Cesanese del Piglio* wine, olive oil, sheep and goats cheese and some others products like *Patacche* (pasta made with water and flour), *Panpepato* (Christmas cake), *Tortolo* (Easter bread), *Ciambelle di Magro* (donut made with lean meat), you cannot leave Acuto without trying the *Corticchiozze* (hard donuts made with wine).

### INGREDIENTS:

- *Flour (1.5 kg)*
- *Sugar (0.5 kg)*
- *Extra Virgin Olive Oil (half a litre)*
- *White or Red Wine (half a litre)*
- *Aniseed (a spoonful)*

### PROCEDURE:

1. *Pour the ingredients into a bowl: oil, wine, sugar, flour, aniseed.*
2. *Mix everything until you obtain a dough*
3. *Put the dough on a work surface and work it a little.*
4. *Cut out some dough and give it the shape of a thick sausage*
5. *Let's make the thick sausages become rings.*
6. *Let's put them in the oven for 40 minutes (180°)*

4



5



6



6

## TRADITIONS AND BANK HOLIDAYS

**JANUARY 17:** Saint Anthony the Great; blessing of animals

**CARNIVAL:** Carts parades, people wearing masks

**GOOD FRIDAY:** Live recital staging “The Death of Christ” or Parade with the statue “Our Lady of Sorrows”

**EASTER MONDAY:** trip to *Madonna di Mezzomonte*

**MAY 1:** Labor Day at the pond

**HOLY TRINITY:** Pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Vallepietra

**CORPUS DOMINI:** Traditional flower deck through the streets of the town

**JULY-AUGUST:** Folk games and various attractions; Acuto Jazz festival; Celebration of the Assumption day and St. Maria de Mattias day

**SEPTEMBER 22:** Patron’s day “St. Maurice”

**SEPTEMBER 23:** Fair of goods and livestock. *Palio delle Contrade* “horse ring bit”

