

PRESSRELEASE
UNDERCOVER



National Castles Days:

25th edition will take place on **Saturday 11 and Sunday 12 May 2024**

Unveiled the 25 sites: 10 castles, 4 fortresses, 1 fortified countryside architecture, 8 cities and boroughs; 1 arcipelago

The charity organizing the Days will further **announce online all the complete roster of itineraries and additional sites all over the 19 involved regions**

Capital cities and small villages crowded by **guided tours, cultural activities and trekking**, special itineraries from North to South, from the center of the country to the islands

Starring architectures are told in **different conservative states**, fruition, destination and valorization

In 2024 the non-profit Istituto Italiano Castelli reaches 60 years of activity

The **Istituto Italiano Castelli**, a scientific non-profit organization founded by **Piero Gazzola** in 1964, announces the dates and **the 25 destinations** of the XXV edition of the National Castle Days. **On the weekend of 11 and 12 May 2024, free guided tours** of 10 castles, 8 cities and villages, 1 archipelago, four forts that have found a new life and destination and a countryside fortified architecture. In this twenty-fifth edition, **two sites are open to public visits for the first time**: the **Bastion of Santa Maria** inside the splendid Medici village and fortress of Terra del Sole (Emilia Romagna) and a **fort in the Maddalena Archipelago** (Sardinia). Various recently restored fortified architectures are also illustrated.

Cultural itineraries designed by the scholars of the non-profit organization and further fortified architecture will **subsequently be announced online on the new website** of the non-profit organiza-

tion <http://www.Istitutoitalianocastelli.it>, which will complete the already very rich parterre of guided tours and extraordinary openings of the National Castle Days 2024.

All year round, followers who follow IIC's national and regional social channels online learn about the many initiatives (including courses, trips and conferences) and new visit ideas thanks to the popular '**a castle a day**' column which allows everyone to plan which castle to discover independently both in Italy and abroad at any time.

2024 brings a special anniversary for this choral initiative that unites the country without distinction between major cultural tourist attractions and lesser-known territories: **the Milanese non-profit organization celebrates 60 years of activity** and the special anniversary will give rise to another **calendar of events in all regions** where the Institute has had an office since its inception.

The National Castle Days offer visits designed and organized by the volunteers of the non-profit organization from north to south of the peninsula, including islands - to **relaunch the study, value and reuse of Italian fortified architecture in every state of conservation which every year, for 25 editions , conquers more and more enthusiasts and tourists, scholars and students who can contextualize the architecture and their history in the landscape and in the territorial community** to which they have belonged for centuries and for which they could be the driving force of a second opportunity for relaunch.

'Last year we returned to offering Italians and tourists the National Castle Days on the traditional date in May.

We thought about expanding the visits with collateral sites and numerous tourist itineraries on foot that families and tourists have greatly appreciated in previous years and reconfirmed again that they like it.' states the **Sicilian entrepreneur Michaela Marullo Stagno D'Alcontres, president** of the organizing non-profit organization.

'We have also, with the great effort of all our volunteers, reopened the same sites and others on a **second date of the Days in September**, coinciding with the **European Heritage Days** which allowed us to double the number of visitors in each affected location . This year too we will double the date, always confident that for the success of the Days we will be able to count on the collaboration of local administrations, universities, superintendencies, the media and all the associations with which we have national agreements including the ASI, the UNPLI and many others.'

'This year marks an important event for us **in addition to the twenty-fifth anniversary** of the Giornate: the **Istituto Italiano dei Castelli, founded in Milan by Piero Gazzola in 1964, is celebrating 60 years of activity**. The same year, the Italian scholar and superintendent wrote the International Charter for the Restoration of Monuments, also known as the **Venice Chart**, the anniversary of which also occurs. The celebrations to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Institute will be organized by the individual regional sections to coincide with the National Days. In October, in Rome, a national conference hosted in the Spadolini Room of the MIC will see the participation of national institutions; the following day, a study seminar in Castel Sant'Angelo will summarize the work carried out by the sections to plan shared future actions.

Our partnership was the first in Italy and among the first in Europe to deal with the study, protection and reuse of fortified architectures: it still continues in its original mission, with particular attention to the younger generations.

Our non-profit organization is present in 19 Italian regions which give life to a full calendar of cultural events all year round for members and non-members: scientific and continuous learning conferences, conversations, study trips, exhibitions, presentations of books and publications, cour-

ses and insights on fortified architecture. Contributing to the associative life of our institute equals to enhance the protection for our cultural heritage, which is often overlooked.'

Italian castles are a treasure composed of history, social geographies, the deeds of women and men who over the centuries have animated, populated and guided territories and economies, thanks to the culture of Italian know-how. Safeguarding castles is not just a matter of architecture, restoration, philology and high craftsmanship but a collection of actions that bring to light sites that are often forgotten but inextricably linked to cities and villages, valleys and viewpoints. An adequate project to enhance the castle's heritage will allow future generations to rediscover the tangible signs of history. Furthermore, castle tourism would be capable of attracting great interests and reawakening even the most internal areas of our regions by re-evaluating the local economy and resources.

'Our commitment to the study, census and protection of forts, towers, bastions and city walls, of small and large castles in every state of conservation is aimed above all at young people. This is demonstrated by the Institute's many initiatives to facilitate their active participation, starting with the foundation of the local 'Youth' sections in all Italian regions; photography competitions for secondary schools; the degree prize which for over 20 editions has granted a cash scholarship and the publication of the paper, an important first step for a future scientific research activity.

The National Castles Days, which this year have reached their 25th edition, are certainly an indispensable tool with great potential for the growth of the association. The same goes for scientific activities, for the various publications, including the magazines *Castellum* and *Cronache Castellane*, the *Castella* editorial series.' President Stagno d'Alcontres ends.

Abruzzo, one of the richest regions of fortified architecture in Italy, still celebrates **Vasto** with a guided walk around the city walls.

Basilicata opens the **Tramontano castle** (Matera) to guided tours on both Saturday 11th and Sunday 12th May. Of Aragonese style and perched on the Lapilli hill overlooking the city, it will also be the site of a conference open to the public. Left unfinished due to a popular conspiracy against the feudal lord from whom it took its name, the castle has been the subject of restoration with the proceeds of the Lotto game since 2008.

Calabria celebrates **Vibo Valentia city**, whose castle is restored. The **conference to celebrate the 60 years of the Istituto Italiano Castelli** on the themes of the valorisation and future of fortified architecture takes place on Saturday 11 May from 10am to 5pm with the participation of scholars, national, regional and city institutions while on Sunday 12 May guided tours of the Castle.

The castle stands where the Acropolis of Hipponion was probably located in Greek times, which perhaps also extended onto the opposite hill. The first phase of construction of the fortification dates back to the Swabian period. In 1240 Matteo Marcofaba, secretary of Frederick II, was commissioned to found the city of Monteleone on land owned by the Abbey of the SS. Trinità di Mileto and in 1255 the existence of the castle is attested for the first time in sources. The fortification was modified in the Angevin age, starting from the second half of the 13th century, with the increase of rooms, the addition of circular towers and the modification of the main entrance moved to the north-west front. At the beginning of the sixteenth century (1509), the Pignatellis were authorized to make changes and therefore the castle almost completely lost its military function, instead taking on that of a noble residence. The earthquake of 1783 caused significant damage to the fortification, al-

most completely destroying the south-east wing, which was partially rebuilt in the first decades of the 19th century. After centuries of abandonment, its restoration began in the 1970s. The castle preserves intact the wedge-shaped tower from the Swabian period, the cylindrical towers and the main entrance from the Angevin period. It is now home to the **National Archaeological Museum**.

Cilento region (Salerno) is the protagonist of the May Days: the **marquis castle of Camerota** was chosen in Campania by the local members of the Institute.

This manor is one of the most important historic buildings in Camerota (the town also has a seaside hamlet where there is another castle). Originally a fortification, it dominates the historic center of Camerota, a medieval village with historic buildings used for cultural functions such as the Museum of Rural Civilization and Crafts, the Piedigrotta Chapel and the Kamaraton amphitheatre, built exclusively with flint fossils.

The castle was built in the Norman period, between the 11th and 12th centuries. The Turkish army destroyed the castle in 1552, but that same year it was rebuilt by the Marquis Don Placido de Sangro. This operation, however, modified the original characteristics of the building. The castle has undergone various modifications and gone through various phases, in 1994 the Italian Ministry for Cultural and Environmental Heritage (now MIC), declared it an "asset of cultural interest". In 2012, works began to consolidate the structure, which was sagging in some places.

In **Emilia Romagna** the **fortified village of Terra del Sole** is open to visits and activities during the Days: it is a stunning Medici fortress-city today and integral part of the municipality of Castrocaro Terme and Terra del Sole, located less than 10 km from Forlì.

In **Friuli Venezia Giulia** the protagonist on Saturday 11 May is the **Casaforte Nussi Deciani Zamr** in Case di Manzano (Udine), a 15th-16th century complex built on pre-existing structures and surrounded by a surrounding wall.

The architecture is made up of rustic buildings located at the edge of the courtyard, including a rectangular building located to the north-east with internal terracotta decorations dating back to the 15th century. In medieval times a watchtower was added. The historical events and the restoration, carried out between 1999 and 2008 by the architect **Toni Cester Toso**, acclaimed member of the regional section of the Istituto Italiano Castelli onlus, will be an opportunity to remember the care and attention paid to the fortified architecture by the members of the section over **the 60 years since the foundation of the Institute**.

The **Castle of Sermoneta** (Latina) is the protagonist of the Days in **Lazio region**.

Open to free guided tours on both Saturday 11th and Sunday 12th May, the castle dates back to the 13th when the Annibaldi family built an imposing fortress. In 1297 Sermoneta and its castle passed to Pietro II Caetani, Count of Caserta, who started expansion and strengthening works. Important works were carried out at the end of the fifteenth century, by order of Onorato III Caetani, who had, among other things, the so-called "Pinte Rooms" created, rooms frescoed by an unknown artist, probably belonging to the Pinturicchio School.

In 1499 Alexander VI Borgia took the castle from the Caetani, to whom it was then returned in 1504 by Julius II. In the seventeenth century the slow abandonment of the castle began, which had lost its strategic importance. Only at the end of the 19th century did the Caetanis return to take care of it by starting massive restoration works.

The members of the Italian Institute Castelli **Liguria** offer a **sustainable guided tour with collective transport to two Ligurian villages**: in the morning in **Finale** and in the afternoon in **Noli**. The visits will take place on foot and in case of bad weather the event will be postponed to a later date.

Finale, whose first written testimony dates back to 916, is on the coast of the Western Ligurian Riviera between the headlands of Caprazoppa to the west, and Capo Noli to the east. The town is crossed by three streams: the Pora, the Sciusa and the l'Aquila.

The urban planning structure of Finale Ligure is divided into three main nucleuses, distinct municipalities until 1927: Finalmarina, the area of most recent urbanization thanks to tourism, Finalpia located on the coast which preserves the original structure of the city and Finalborgo, the capital of the historic Marquisate of Finale surrounded by the ancient fifteenth-century walls and dominated by the Govone and San Giovanni castles.

Closed between medieval walls that are still well preserved, interspersed with semicircular towers and interrupted only at the gates, the village of Finale Ligure immediately offers the visitor a feeling of protection and concentration.

Noli is located in an inlet closed to the east by the island of Bergeggi and to the south-west by the cape of the same name at the mouth of the Luminella stream.

This location is a center renowned for its suggestive ancient seaside village, with narrow streets, the typical caruggi. The Noli area remains one of the few coastal villages to still have local fishermen who go out to sea every night with their small motor boats and return in the morning with the freshest catch. Today Noli is an important seaside resort on the Riviera di Ponente, with beautiful white sand beaches. Furthermore, the sea of Noli is particularly suitable for diving. The seabed, which exceeds 35 meters deep, is rich in fish, seahorses, squid, anglerfish and small lobsters. The clarity of the water also allows underwater shooting.

In **Lombardy**, visits and programs focus on the very central **Castello Sforzesco** (Milan). On Saturday 11 May the Institute will offer a **study meeting open to the public** (*The Sforzesco Castle and Milan*) and on Sunday 12 May **three rounds of free guided tours**.

In **1991**, for its excellent reuse and careful maintenance, the Italian Castle Institute awarded the Sforzesco Castle its **excellence plaque**. Starting from the foundation of the Institute, there have been many study, research and scientific dissemination activities proposed by the Lombardy Section on the castle and in the castle itself, the National Castle Days which coincide with the celebration of the sixtieth year of activity of the non-profit organization are therefore the opportunity to remember this important union and the scholars who promoted it over time.

A quiet asylum of art and city memories, this is how the architect Luca Beltrami closed in 1912 the account of the decades of work that had transformed the Castello Sforzesco, **the unpopular fortress, into a privileged place, home to the museum collections and infield libraries of Milan**.

The physiognomy of the imposing building had been respected in the volumes of the basements and the rooms as well as the open spaces; the restoration had accentuated the castle features with the reconstruction of the battlements and, on the main front, the raising of a tower in memory of the one erected by the prince architect of the first Sforza age, Antonio Averulino known as Filarete.

The salient phases of the history of the Sforzesco Castle can be identified in the foundation of the Visconti era, in the medieval city walls, in the famous Renaissance residence which welcomed the pictorial experiments of **Leonardo da Vinci** and in the fortress of the Spanish and Austrian rulers.

No longer peripheral, but now incorporated into a metropolis, in recent years the Sforzesco Castle has been at the center of flows of visitors, professionals, scholars; it is still the subject of new investigations dedicated to the architectural structure, a unique and extraordinary testimony emerging in the city of Milan.

The volunteer members of the **Marche** section of organizers chooses another **extraordinary village**, that of **Sassocorvaro** (PU) with its **well-preserved fortress**, the protagonist both on Saturday 11th and Sunday 12th May.

On the occasion of the Days, **the fortress will have free entry for participants in the Days** and on both days it is possible to **bring forward or postpone the visiting times**.

Built by Francesco di Giorgio Martini around 1475 by order of Duke Federico di Montefeltro, the Rocca di Sassocorvaro is an important piece of the imposing defensive system protecting Urbino, the capital of Montefeltro, so much so that it is considered "one of the most extraordinary and fundamentals of the Renaissance". We are in the so-called "Transition Period", in which we move from the cold weapon to the firearm, the bomb, the "Diabolical invention". The medieval castles, now obsolete and unsuitable to resist the impact force of the new weapons, are gradually replaced by fortresses and fortifications, built to more effectively withstand the impact of firearms.

The Rocca di Sassocorvaro is much more than the extraordinary war manor. Sassocorvaro belonged (since 1474) to Count Ottaviano Ubaldini, brother of Federico, his "Alter ego" "he who almost always governed the state", a man of extraordinary culture and wisdom, friend of the Muses, Italian prince of astrology and great expert on alchemy and esotericism. Ottaviano wanted the building to be representative of that synthesis (diarchy) that he was creating alongside Federico in the management of the duchy. This will emerge already from the choice of the plan of the Rocca which has the shape of a turtle and represents, with the shell, impenetrability, as Federico wanted, but with the inside of the shell itself, with the living animal, it exalts the thinking man. This means that **the building should be seen as a place to exercise thought, where to acquire "virtue and knowledge"**. **The construction is a kind of "Stone Book"** which tells, through symbols, the message left to us by Ottaviano, as can be clearly perceived by observing the very particular shapes and spaces, far from the typologies of military structures and much closer to those of a palace and, why not, a "convent". Therefore the Rocca should be seen as "Arx and Domus, heterogeneous elements merged into a single construction governed by a superior harmony". The great merit of F. di Giorgio Martini is that of having been able to merge the requests of Federico and those of Ottaviano, so different, opposite and complementary to each other, creating a complex characterized by a "superior harmony", which has no equal, "unique of its kind."

During the Second World War, the Rocca di Sassocorvaro was chosen by the superintendent Pasquale Rotondi as the **"ark of art"** or refuge for a significant part of the Italian artistic heritage (**around 10,000 pieces**), for "the greatest concentration of works of 'art never created in Italy in wartime', the subject of the exhibition held at the Quirinale stables in 2023.

The National Castle Days in **Molise** offer **guided tours, conferences and concerts**.

On Saturday 11 May, within the walls of a Molise castle, a concert will be held by the "Lorenzo Perosi" Conservatory of Campobasso.

On Sunday 12 May in the morning the conference open to the public 'Giovanna I Queen of Naples and the Angevin Castles in Molise' precedes the visit to the **Angevin Tower of Colletorto** (Campobasso); in the afternoon visit to the **fortified village of Montorio nei Frentani** in the same province followed by a visit to the **mother church** to admire the **sixteenth-century "Annunciation"** by Teodoro D'Errico.

The ancient *Collis Tortus*, as shown by the Angevin registers of 1273 together with its first feudal lord, William of Anglona, was a walled village with a circular urban layout. The defense of the town with the cylindrical tower was an Angevin work, as Tria hypothesizes, built at the time of Queen Joanna I of Anjou, whose reign began in 1343 and ended in 1382.

The tower was built on part of the area previously occupied by an old Norman fortified structure, of which the square layout of the wall perimeter inside the tower remains. The Norman complex included walls and a castle, on whose ruins the palace of the Marquises Rota was built in 1700, restored in the second half of the 1900s and currently used as the municipal headquarters.

The **Colletorto Tower** is located in the south-eastern part of the town, in front of the church of S. Giovanni Battista. Its position allowed control of the territory characterized by the wide valley of the Fortore river, once crossed by transhumance which took place on the important Celano-Foggia sheep track.

The tower is accessed via an external staircase that starts from the square in front. The architectural structure, of a perfect cylindrical shape with no obvious tapering, rises **25 meters high**. The Colletorto tower is one of the few of its kind in Molise (those of Roccapipirozzi and Campochiaro should be remembered) while similar cylindrical Swabian-Angevin towers are more numerous in Puglia and Abruzzo.

The first feudal lords of **Montorio** that history remembers, we are in 1167, were Vitus Avalerius and Henricus de Ceria, each of whom owned half of the fiefdom. The dual nature of possession has not yet been clarified although it can be hypothesized that one had the fortress under his jurisdiction and the other the walled land.

Subsequently, in the Angevin era, the fiefdom passed to the Molisio family until the marriage of Tommasella, Guglielmo's eldest daughter, with Riccardo Monforte of Gambatesa from whom he had Carlo who managed to reunite the fiefdom during his regency.

The fortified village of Montorio is characterized by two very distinct and easily identifiable urban agglomerations. More precisely, it is the architectural expression derived from two phases of development that marked the Frenta area.

Along the curtain wall ran the main road called Capo di Vaglia (today Via Garibaldi), a place where, according to tradition, the Greek-Epirote families who escaped the Ottoman persecutions settled in the mid-15th century.

One of the masterpieces of European art history is located in Montorio nei Frentani. It is an Annunciation painted on panel by Teodoro D'Errico shortly before 1580.

The work has always been in the town, but the inhabitants were unaware of its high value; thanks to the help of the architect Franco Valente, president of the local section of the Italian Institute, the painting was reevaluated and was selected for the 2015 Expo in Milan, protagonist together with other Italian works of art.

In **Piedmont**, the **privately owned Volpiano castle**, whose foundation stone dates back to the 14th century, is open for guided tours on both Saturday 11th and Sunday 12th May. It stands on an elongated hill formation on the borders of the **Vauda Natural Reserve** and dominates the town below. The activities will take place even in case of bad weather. In addition to the inspection of the remains of the castle, **didactic conferences** and **visits to other sites** of historical-cultural interest in the area are planned.

The complex had an important strategic role until the beginning of the seventeenth century, when it became part of the Savoy possessions: it was, in fact, the protagonist of the military events of the first half of the sixteenth century as an imperial garrison on the outskirts of Turin, at the time subjected to French rule.

The first evidence dates back to 1014, the year in which the place, described "cum castello et capella", was dependent on the abbey of San Benigno di Fruttuaria. However, no material evidence rela-

ting to this phase has been received. The fourteenth-century chronicle of the Novara notary Pietro Azario, reporting the episode of the conquest of the castle by the troops of John II of Monferrato around 1340, describes it as composed of «a very high and crenelated wall [...] surmounted by an exalted tower in the where a caretaker lived permanently." The passage under marquis control was followed by strengthening interventions: the defended surface was expanded with the addition of a new wall and a palace was built inside.

In the absence of data for the 15th century, what is crucial is a map of the village drawn up by an anonymous engineer in the run-up to the siege of 1555, which culminated in the capture and partial destruction of the castle by the French army. It, which finds precise confirmation in today's ruins, represents a fortification already updated "to modern", extended on several levels in a south-east-north-west direction. The fort has an arrowhead shape facing the village; the western front is made up of a curtain with a brick wall facing, protected by cylindrical towers to the south and by a bastion to the north; the southern and northern sides are both bastioned. In the intermediate level, an octagonal walled nucleus is indicated: this is probably the late medieval castle, developed over time to fulfill primarily residential functions. Nothing has been preserved above, but the terraced lawn is still visible. The third level, to the west, was separated by a cut from the rest of the fort, and protected it thanks to a large bulwark facing the Vauda.

The remains of the fortress that have come down to us include the bastioned front of the lower level towards the village; in particular, in the south-eastern area, in correspondence with an opening perhaps corresponding to the main access, the remains of the southern cylindrical tower survive, with sections of the curtain, and of the northern bastion.

The castle, in the 15th century, constituted the fulcrum of a complex defensive system, which included a refuge, extending to the flat area close to the hill on which the castle itself stood, and a larger city wall, which survived until the beginning of the 19th century, which protected the entire village.

In **Puglia**, the volunteer members of the Italian Castelli Institute are offering **a day of studies at the Castello Svevo (Bari) on 10 May from 9.30 to 13.15**, also open to non-experts. Among the speakers, the president of the non-profit organization Istituto Italiano Castelli Michaela Stagno D'Alcontres, the members of the scientific council of the Istituto Italiano Castelli (Enrico Lusso, President, Antonella Calderazzi vice president), representatives of the MIC, superintendents, scholars who, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the Institute, they will discuss the protection of Apulian castles between restoration and the future. The visit, on a new itinerary, to the Alfonso Castle also known as 'Forte a Mare' in Brindisi has been postponed until the National Castle Days in September. Dating back to the Aragonese era, it stands on the island of Sant'Andrea and its construction is part of the fortification program of the eastern coast of the Kingdom of Naples, implemented by the Aragonese after the fall of Constantinople by Mohammed II (1453).

In **Sardinia** the **forts of the northern coast of Sardinia** will be the protagonists, part of the larger defensive system which also involved the entire La Maddalena archipelago, with guided tours organized by the volunteers of the Sardinian delegation of the Istituto Italiano Castelli and with the collaboration of the University of Cagliari which since 2018 has conducted in-depth studies on the fortified heritage also thanks to the collaboration with the Ministry of Defence.

An **extraordinary first time opening and visit to a site is scheduled for Saturday 11th and Sunday 12th May** and is unique for its historical-architectural and landscape interest: the fort is also known as **Opera Capo**. It is a significant and complex military system of batteries, casemates and fortifications, built starting from the end of the 19th century to defend the La Maddalena ar-

chipelago and the coastal area in the stretch between Punta Altura and Capo d'Orso, including the stations of Montiggia and Punta Sardegna.

In **Sicily**, the protagonist on Saturday 11 May from 9am to 8pm will be the **castle of Taormina or Monte Tauro**, whose foundation stone dates back to the 10th century. Closed for around thirty years, in the recent past it was the **subject of an accurate and indispensable restoration and functional adaptation carried out by the Superintendence for Cultural and Environmental Heritage of Messina** which, together with the safety works of the access staircase, of the neighboring rock face and the creation of lighting in the area, have allowed its reopening and **free use**, even at night, **as a cultural hub**.

Located in a prominent position with respect to the underlying city of Taormina, since its origin it has represented a point of guard and control of the pass between the valley of the Alcantara river and the Ionian sea.

In synergy with the overlying Mola Castle and the urban fortifications of Taormina, of which today remain Porta Messina on the north side, Porta Catania on the south side and the intermediate, rebuilt, Torre dell'Orologio, the fortress has responded, throughout history, to the defense needs of the settled inhabitants.

From it you can enjoy a breathtaking 360° panorama. To the north the Strait of Messina, to the south the valley of the Alcantara river and the slopes of Etna, in the background the city of Catania, and again, to the west the Peloritani mountains.

The beauty and mystery that Taormina Castle emanates do not go unnoticed by those who admire it and what is most striking is the balance between the natural environment and the one man-made over the centuries. In a kaleidoscope of unique landscapes like few in the world.

The monumental complex stands on Monte Tauro at 396 m. above sea level, where the Greek acropolis was. Founded by the Arabs in 902 and therefore called "Saracen", it was part of the system of fortifications built throughout Sicily in naturally strategic points. **The castle is accessed via a staircase carved into the rock**, which starts from the charming little church of the Madonna della Rocca and climbs up to reach the door, which in turn is preceded by an open forepart and guarded by patrol walkways, has a trapezoidal shape with an imposing keep. On the south side stands, on a high escarpment, a tower with a sentry box and an alarm bell.

Florence will be the protagonist in **Tuscany** (17 May) with a **conference on the memory of Gazzola and the restoration of castles** with interventions by Nicoletta Maioli (President of IIC Tuscany), Domenico Taddei (IIC) and Maurizio de Vita, architects and university professors.

In **Trentino Alto Adige**, the protagonist on Saturday 11 May is the **Forte Belvedere** which is now a **monument to peace and the condemnation of the atrocities of war**, visited by over 28,000 people per year.

Werk Gschwent of Lavarone, today better known as Forte Belvedere, is the only well-preserved and visitable structure of the seven fortresses built by the Austrians at the beginning of the 20th century to face a possible Italian invasion (towards Trento). Today it is a unique testimony as a museum of the events of the war on the highlands and the First World War in general.

The fort was built starting in 1908 in the locality of Gschwent on a spur of limestone rock (1177 m altitude) overlooking the Val d'Astico, with functions as a hinge between the forts in the Vezzena area (Luserna, Verle and Cima Vezzena) and of Folgaria (Cherle, Sommo Alto, Dosso delle Somme).

After the Second World War, the fort became the property of the Trentino-Alto Adige Region until, in 1966, it was purchased by private individuals (the Osele family from Lavarone) who, having cleared away the rubble, rebuilt the shapes of the original domes in concrete, restored the internal lighting, they make it visitable.

Thanks to this providential intervention, the fort was transformed into a "museum of itself" and managed to be preserved until 1996, when it was purchased by the Municipality of Lavarone which proceeded with the conservative restoration in collaboration with the Autonomous Province of Trento and with the valorisation of the site, transforming the structure into an organic museum dedicated to the fort, but also to the main events and repercussions of the First World War on a local and international scale.

Umbria opens both to guided tours and to a conversation open to the public on Saturday 11 May the **castle and fortified village of Antria** in the municipality of **Magione** (PG) built on the top of a hill on the remains of an ancient Roman *pagus* which played an important role important in the early medieval road network, due to its strategic position. The need to defend transit and trade led to the fortification of the settlement which, mentioned for the first time in 1185 in a document which attributed its ownership to the Perugian rectory of San Lorenzo, in 1258 was indicated as a castrum with a robust city wall.

The economy of the area, thanks to the presence of waterways, was predominantly agricultural but there was no shortage of artisanal activities including the cultivation of dyeing plants and the production of bricks. The involvement of the castle in various war events caused destruction and renovations: between 1260 and 1364 it was seriously damaged by the continuous incursions of Perugian exiles and mercenary soldiers including the arrival in the Perugian territory of the English mercenary company of Giovanni Acuto (John Hawkwood)-. In 1426 it surrendered to Braccio Fortebracci da Montone who received the Perugian ambassadors Sacco Saccucci, Andrea di Guidarello, Andrea Guidoni and Cianello d'Alfano Alfani in the castle. Today's Antria presents itself as an evocative place with a strong medieval connotation starting from the main door which reveals the presence of the drawbridge in the past, continuing with the city walls which are largely in a good state of conservation characterized by solid perimeter towers; inside the houses, close together, overlook narrow alleys, some of which are vaulted, which lead to two small squares with their wells in the centre. **Off the tourist itineraries, the village is a place of silence in everyday life**, but comes alive at two specific times of the year around the lighting of the medieval community oven which calls together the inhabitants remaining inside and outside the walls. The bakery, which is located in the fifteenth-century Confraternity of San Rocco and Sant'Antonio Abate, sees the perpetuation of a tradition in the days immediately preceding Easter that has a vague flavor of ritual: the women bring the Easter cake, the **typical Easter bread**, to be baked Umbrian, which will be blessed on Holy Saturday and brought to the table for breakfast on Sunday morning together with other blessed foods. The oven is turned on again for the festive summer festival of the Goose, symbol of the rediscovery of traditional peasant values, which attracts locals and tourists to revive, even if for a few days, this characteristic and unique medieval village.

In **Veneto** the **rediscovery of Verona** is proposed both on Saturday 11th and on Sunday May 12th with an important **conference** and on Sunday 12th May for **guided tours** to the **walls and forts of the defensive system** of the key city of the Habsburg Quadrangle with the cities of Peschiera, Mantua and Legnago.

The volunteers of the Veneto section of the Istituto Italiano Castelli invite the public of experts and enthusiasts to two days of meetings in Verona and in other castles in the region on other weekends in May. With the municipality of Verona, the Superintendence, the Order of Architects and the Piero

Gazzola Foundation, the conference, *Architecture of military origin: from restoration to contemporary use* presents two recent publications on Piero Gazzola's oeuvre with a reflection on the works of restoration of military architecture built over time in Verona. A dialogue between project, management and public use to better understand how the recovery of fortified architecture has changed in these 60 years.

In Verona the guided tours extend, in collaboration with the Veronese associations, to the rediscovery of the city walls and forts of the city, to remember that the **city is protected by UNESCO for the fortified heritage stratified over the centuries** starting from the Roman age, continued in the periods of the Scaligeri and Visconti, then strengthened and expanded by the Republic of Venice and the Habsburg Empire. **Forte Monte Tesoro**, one of the most important Italian armored forts built in the first decades of the 20th century, will be open to visitors again. The guided tours of the fort will also extend beyond the days of 11-12 May 2024. The volunteer members of the non-profit organizing the Castle Days opened the first visits to this architecture - with incredible figures in audience- in the Days of a few editions ago, as soon as this architecture was reopened to the public: the Fort was in fact recently restored - its second life offers citizens and visitors a new cultural and tourist function

On May 18th the Days continue in Conegliano Veneto with the conference *Memory and restoration of fortifications in the contemporary city*, followed by guided tours of the castle.

End of press release

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National Castle Days, XXV edition, Saturday 11 and Sunday 12 May 2024

free or paid guided tours, conversations, conventions and conferences, continuous learning, degree awards, exhibitions and presentations, book presentations, trekking and other visiting activities, historic car parades, heritage walks

Organizer: Istituto Italiano Castelli Onlus (IIC),
1964-2024: 60 years

Regions involved: 19

hashtag: #nationalcastlesdays2024

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