

# Bisenzio Valley

A valley to discover

[www.pratoturismo.it](http://www.pratoturismo.it)  
[www.visitvalbisenzio.it](http://www.visitvalbisenzio.it)

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# A valley to discover

CANTAGALLO, VAIANO, VERNIO

The valley takes its name from the Bisenzio river that arises in the Municipality of Cantagallo from the confluence of other watercourses, hence its name Bis Entius which in Latin literally means “waters that flow together”. The river and its tributaries have profoundly marked the economy of the valley. The richness of their waters has favored the birth of numerous mills, over sixty from the Middle Ages to the early twentieth century, mostly dedicated to grinding wheat and chestnuts. The water of the river has been essential for the industrial development of the whole territory, and it is no coincidence that Bisenzio Valley has evidence of industrial archeology among the most interesting in Tuscany both for the variety and for the number of industrial sites.



**Powered by the motion of the water**, mills, fulling and paper mills, iron, copper and textile factories were born and developed over the centuries along the course of the Bisenzio river and its tributaries and still today, together with traces of the past, thrive important avant-garde industries in the production of precious fabrics. In the

decade between 1924 and 1934, the construction of the great Apennine tunnel on the direct railway Florence-Prato-Bologna created an exceptional job opportunity for the whole valley, putting an end to seasonal migrations in Maremma and Corsica where the valley workers went to make coal.





# Cantagallo

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he territory is rich in extensive forests of beech and chestnut trees, with some monumental specimens such as the centuries-old beech tree of Luogomano which, despite its partial collapse in 2013, is still the king of the *Acquerino Cantagallo Nature Reserve*, an uncontaminated place where it is easy to see herds of deer grazing and where roe deer, wild boars, foxes, stone martens and porcupines live, but also birds such as the nuthatch, the great tit, the cuckoo and the buzzard. The rivers are rich in trout, common goby, barbel and freshwater shrimp. In Luiciana, in Palazzo

la Torricella, there is the seat of the Municipality, where outside and inside you can admire contemporary works of art that are part of the *Luiciana Open Air Museum*. Cantagallo is also a land of legends. In fact, it is said of a failure of hospitality of Dante Alighieri who, fugitive from Florence in 1285, had knocked on the door of *Cerbaia Fortress* of the Alberti Counts who refused to host him. The municipal territory, which covers an area of 94.93 sq km, is rich in hamlets and villages, all very active and proud of their territory: *Cantagallo, Carmignanello, Fossato, Gavigno, Gricigliana, Il Fabbro, L'Acqua, Luiciana, Migliana and Usella*.



# Vaiano

**T**he town originated from a small village (pagus Varianus), already known in Roman times, but the first inhabited nucleus probably developed at the end of the 10th century around the *Abbey of San Salvatore*, a monastic complex from the early Middle Ages, founded in 1073 by the Cluniac Benedictine monks, to pass to the Vallombrosans in 1090. The history of Vaiano is closely linked to the origin and development of its Abbey, which was located at the center of the medieval communication routes and throughout the Bisenzio Valley. Traces of medieval settlements are still recognizable on the territory, such as the *Tower of Melagrana* on the slopes of Calvana mountains. Over time, the ancient village of Vaiano was populated by artisans who embarked on arts and crafts that are still handed down: adjacent to the monastery

there were a hydraulic mill and an olive press. Thus began the industrial history of Vaiano which has developed over the centuries and has seen the growth of large and important productions, both industrial and artisanal, in the 1950s. The two most important sites where the industry of the Valley originated are *La Cartai*a, where in 1371 a paper mill was activated by Pietro da Fabriano whose production was marketed by Francesco Di Marco Datini on all Mediterranean squares, and the “*factory city*” of *La Briglia* built in the 19th century, a unique example in Prato area and certainly the most important industrial site in the valley, today a great testimony of industrial archeology. The surface of the municipal territory is 34.24 sq km and its hamlets are *Fabio*, *Faltugnano*, *Gamberame*, *Grisciavola*, *La Briglia*, *La Cartai*a, *La Foresta*, *La Tignamica*, *Popigliano*, *Schignano*, *Sofignano* and *Savignano*.



# Vernio

**M**ountainous, rich in water and vegetation, it is a pleasant summer destination for those seeking relax and contact with nature: it is located at the great bend of the Bisenzio river straddling the Apennines, along one of the main communication routes that connected the territory of Prato and Po valley from the Middle Ages. The first settlements were probably made by the Romans. In the sixth century A.D. the Lombards introduced the exploitation of the resources of the forest and in particular the chestnut, a fruit still today linked to the tradition of the area. Vernio territory includes the hamlets of *Terrigoli, Cavarzano, Luciana, Sasseta, Costozze, Le Confina, Mercatale, Montepiano, S. Ippolito* and the capital *S. Quirico*. Montepiano, a place frequented since the 19th

century by intellectuals, artists and writers, houses the Abbey complex dating back to the 11th century, the House of the Mill and the Garden of the Sun where, among beautiful trees and luxuriant plants, you can meet the red enameled sun by Bruno Saetti. S. Quirico houses the Casone dei Bardi, now the Town Hall, and the Oratory of San Niccolò, dating back to the early 1700s, with one of the last still functioning Traeri organs inside, and the permanent exhibition of the Gothic Line. In the village the Church of San Leonardo and San Quirico is also worth seeing. The Textile Machinery Museum is located in Mercatale at the Meucci Factory. In S.Ippolito to see the Romanesque parish church of Saints Ippolito and Cassiano and the building that houses the Petrarca Public Library. Between S. Quirico and Sasseta is the Vernio Fortress complex.



# 1. Discovering the ancient villages

**O**n the right bank of Bisenzio river, going up the Regional Street 325, you will find San Leonardo in Collina in a panoramic position. On the slopes of the mountain is Faltugnano, built on an Etruscan-Roman settlement, with the medieval Church of Saints Giusto and Clemente. Halfway up there is Parmigno, an uninhabited but suggestive village with the small Church of S. Stefano which preserves fifteenth-century frescoes inside. Not far away is Fabio, also of clear Roman origin. Continuing along the hillside road you will arri-



ve at Savignano, of medieval origin. Continuing further you reach Sofignano, which had its maximum development in the Middle Ages when the Parish church of Saints Vito and Modesto had jurisdiction over a vast territory. On the left bank of Bisenzio river, from Cantagallo you go up towards L'Acqua, a hamlet



along the left bank of the Limentra stream, where once fishing was practiced, flour milled and fabrics were dyed. Continue towards Fossato, a medieval village overlooking Limentra Valley; from here you can go down to the Parish church of S.Ippolito which completely do-

minates the valley. Going up a road full of bends you arrive in Cavarzano, built in the early Middle Ages and particularly linked to transhumance, mountain pastures and the use of the forest. From here, in the direction of the village of Luciana, Montepiano can be reached on foot.



# 2. Fortresses and Villas up and down the Valley

**T**he *Fortress of Vernio* from the beginning had a strategic military role, so much so that in the fourteenth-century statutes of the fiefdom the importance of choosing an expert man for its custody was emphasized. In later times the palace was added which constitutes the main part of the current fortress, where there are beautiful cellars and remains of ancient prison cells. It is currently a private residence.

*The Fortress of Cerbaia* (Cantagallo) was built between the end of the 11th



and the beginning of the 12th century by the Alberti counts on top of a hill from where they could control the Lombardy Road and the cross roads towards Montecuccoli and Mugello area. In 1361 the fortress was sold to the Florentines who, given its important strategic position, installed a permanent military garrison there and strengthened its defenses with the construction of a second wall and other buildings.



*Villa Il Mulinaccio* in Vaiano, owned by the Municipality, was built towards the end of the fifteenth century by Cosimo Sassetti, then it became property of the Strozzi family and from 1661 of the Vai family, under which it became a vast estate

with about thirty-six farms, vineyards, woods and numerous houses. The big kitchen with the huge fireplace and, adjacent to the Villa, the Nymphaeum in the suggestive walled garden are very beautiful.

A large, multi-story stone building with a red-tiled roof and numerous arched windows. A river flows in the foreground, and a green hillside is visible in the background.

# 3. The Museums of the Valley

## **MuMat Museum** *Textile Machinery Museum*

It is located in Vernio, in the hamlet of Mercatale and preserves the history of the textile industrial past, of the method of recycling rags that have made Prato district great. There are textile tools and machines ranging from the end of the 19th century to the mid-20th century: spinning and carding mills, the ancient turbine of the factory powered by the Bisenzio water still active, up to a very rare example of a restored wooden loom. Mumat is part of Prato Museum Network.

[www.museomumat.it](http://www.museomumat.it)







## Materia Museum

*Art, Dyeing, Renewable Energy, Environment*

It is in Cantagallo, in Usella area. The museum is private and the structure that houses it has been recovered from buildings that, since the Middle Ages, have housed a mill with three stones, a fulling mill, an iron and copper factory and ragging machines.

[www.materiamuseum.it](http://www.materiamuseum.it)



## Museum of the Abbey of San Salvatore in Vaiano

*“Agnolo Firenzuola”*

Inaugurated in 1993, in 1999 it was reopened in a totally renewed guise after a careful restoration work. The museum also exhibits the artifacts found in the excavations conducted during the restoration. The exhibition shows how the life of the monks of the abbey was carried out and the religious, social and economic function of the monastery in the area. [www.pratoturismo.it](http://www.pratoturismo.it)



## Open Air Museum of Luicciana

Permanent exhibition in the open air and in public places (with works by Prato artists and international masters) which coincides with the urban agglomeration of Luicciana. The Museum is part of the Art in the Landscape project, which includes the Public Art Circuit and the Environmental Art Park, famous for the suggestive Amphitheater of Bisenzio Valley by Giuliano Mauri. [www.pratoturismo.it](http://www.pratoturismo.it)



## 4. A dip in nature

**O**f particular value is the Acquerino Cantagallo Nature Reserve, an oasis made up of beech and chestnut woods including several monumental trees. Do not miss Valle delle Barbe, almost in the center of the Acquerino-Luogomano state-owned forest, where it is easy to see herds of grazing deer; Cascina di Spedaletto, with its centuries-old beech woods; Carigiola valley; the chestnut groves still under cultivation in Migliana area and the majestic Beech of Luogomano, that stands out among the many monu-



mental plants. In the town of Cantagallo there is the Visitor Center of the Reserve, which you can contact for information and organize excursions. From the Visitor Center you can walk to Cascina Le Cave Refuge, a welcome and refreshment point for hikers and a center for environmental education. The Alto Carigliola and Monte delle Scalette Protected Area offers a landscape of extreme and wild beauty, rich in beech and chestnut woods, where an excursion will certainly be worthwhile, as well as on the numerous paths of the Gothic Line. For those who love hiking and want to

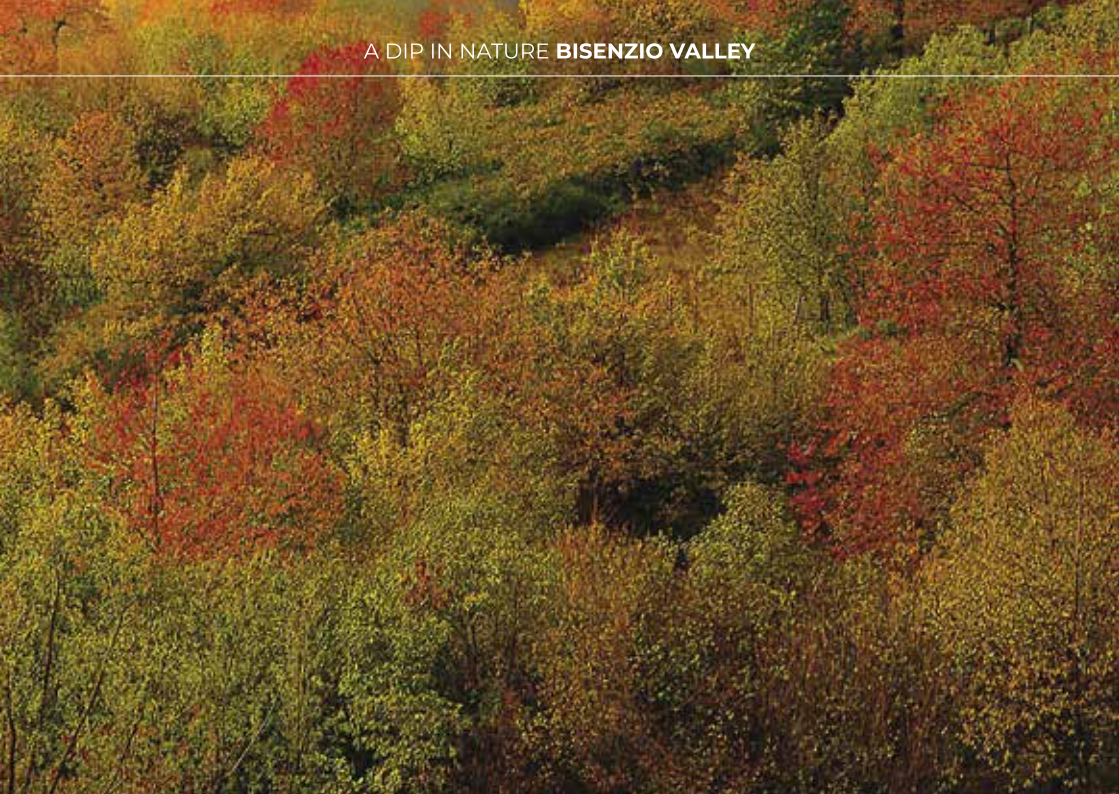


spend a few days immersed in nature, there is the Wool and Silk Route, a path of about 135 km that connects Prato to Bologna and which crosses the territories of Vaiano and Vernio in two of its six stages, descending from the Apennines on the ridge of Calvana mountains. Along the way

you can admire beautiful wild horses, explore some karst caves and in the height of summer enjoy a refreshing break in the Nosa and Rio Buti streams.

For more information visit the website [www.viadellalanaedellasetta.com](http://www.viadellalanaedellasetta.com)





## **The deer roar**

The beginning of autumn corresponds to the mating season of the deer: the woods come alive and the silence is broken by their roar, a poignant call of love, audible even from miles away, which serves the males to establish their dominance, to conquer females. There are numerous proposals for night excursions to listen to the roar of deer in the deep valleys of the Acquerino Cantagallo Nature Reserve.





# 5. Discovering good tastes

**P**otato tortelli are the pride of Bisenzio Valley, each house has its own recipe and everyone knows where you can taste the best among restaurants and festivals. The filling is made with potatoes, Parmesan, nutmeg and salt, but there are many variations. The ideal condiments are meat-based sauces, porcini mushrooms from the Valley, butter and sage. There are many initiatives dedicated to potato tortelli, real challenges with the help of flour, rolling pin

and elbow grease. Other challenges are instead consumed to affirm the various Zuccherini recipes, biscuits that were once offered at wedding lunches and whose shape is reminiscent of the wedding ring. Bisenzio Valley is a land of chestnuts, so recipes with sweet flour abound and are exquisite: from the Castagnaccio to the innovative Castagnoli and Sassi della Calvana biscuits. Other typical products of the Valley are: oil, honey, game, Calvanina meat, black truffles, porcini mushrooms.

## Polenta or Pulendina Festival

On the first Sunday of Lent in Vernio there is a historical re-enactment among the oldest and longest-lived in Tuscany: the Polenta or Pulendina Festival. For centuries, the town has seen the free distribution in the square of sweet polenta made from chestnut flour, herring and cod. It all begins with a historical fact: in 1512, during the Spanish invasion of Tuscany, there was a severe famine and the Bardi Counts, feudal lords of Vernio, distributed sweet polenta, herring and cod to the population. Even today, after so many centuries, there is a feast throughout the day with a corollary of appointments led by the traditional procession in historical costume with hundreds of figures that parade through the streets of Vernio since the morning.



## Recurring events

### **Festa della Polenta**

1st Sunday of Lent - Vernio

### **Sant'Ippolito Carnival**

Vernio

### **Vaiano Carnival**

Vaiano

### **San Giuseppe Fair**

March - Vernio

### **Roosters and hens**

June - Usella/Cantagallo

### **Literary walks**

June/October - Cantagallo

### **Vaiano a Tavola**

1st weekend of July - Vaiano

### **Sant'Anna Feast**

July - Cascina di Spedaletto-Cantagallo

### **Open cloister**

July/August - Vernio

### **Dinner with Matilde**

August - Fossato-Cantagallo

### **La Torricella**

September - Vernio

### **Art in genius**

October - Vaiano

### **Sweet Vernio**

October - Vernio



# How to get to Bisenzio Valley

VAIANO, VERNIO, CANTAGALLO

## **FOR THOSE COMING BY CAR**

A1 Roncobilaccio, Barberino exits (for Montepiano, Vernio)  
A11 Prato Est or Prato Ovest exits (for Vaiano, Vernio, Cantagallo)  
SP 325 Prato - Bologna

## **FOR THOSE COMING BY TRAIN**

From Bologna and Prato there are daily connections with Vaiano and Vernio  
For more information, timetables and tickets: [www.trenitalia.com](http://www.trenitalia.com)

## **PRATOTURISMO INFOPOINT**

Piazza del Comune, 59100 Prato  
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FB @pratoturismoufficiale - IG @pratoturismo

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# Toscana



## PRATOTURISMO

Prato Tourist Area includes the municipalities of:  
Prato, Cantagallo, Carmignano, Montemurlo,  
Poggio a Caiano, Vaiano, Vernio

[www.pratoturismo.it](http://www.pratoturismo.it)  
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