



You may want to visit this city before it disappears...

The Dying City

Civita di Bagnoregio, or as it's familiarly known, the "La città che muore" or, the Dying City," is about 75 miles north of Rome. See the bridge in the photo below? That's the only way to get to it (on foot only, by the way, except for residents who can use mopeds) and since 2013, you have to pay a toll to use the bridge. In spite of the difficulties to get to it, it is one of the most beautiful villages in Italy.



How many residents live there? It varies between ten and sixteen (there are more cats than people). Why is it called the “dying city?” Because it’s crumbling away. Erosion and landslides are the main culprits. There is the danger that the village could disappear. But in spite of all this, it remains a big tourist attraction. During the summer months, tourists boost the population numbers up to a couple hundred because of the bed-and-breakfasts. But more than 700,000 visit the city in the summer. It could be because the mayor decided to charge a minor fee for entry (5 euros), which increased publicity and attendance. Civita di Bagnoregio became the first (and only) Italian city to charge an entrance fee.



The main piazza.



A charming place even though very old



What's the history of this place? The Etruscans, settled in the region during the seventh century B.C.; they founded the city atop a volcanic tower overlooking the Tiber. They likely chose the city's location for its height – what better defense? Who's going to try to scramble up to it? But the volcanic base become unstable over the centuries and today, the ground beneath the city is literally crumbling away. The earth has gradually broken away, sending homes, palaces, and walls toppling into the valley to the point where it's just one-third of its original size. You could walk up to an elaborate door, open it, and find--thin air because the house has fallen down into the valley below. Even today, there are about 20 landslides each year.

Because of its location, it has remained isolated and protected. Its stone streets and buildings are well preserved so it's a living trip back in time.

Whoa! Look at the photo below. What's this?

Twice a year (in June and in September) the “Palio della Tonna” is held. It's an old race with a very small course and donkeys are ridden instead of horses. Everything else is basically the same: jockeys ride bareback and 3 laps must be done. But there is also another difference: only two donkeys can run at the same time, because the race course is very narrow and there is not enough room for all of them. The stars of the competition are the donkeys, that during the race do whatever they want: they stop, graze, kick. People cheer and have a good time. And the winner? The donkey. If the rider falls off, so be it. The donkey can keep going and still win!



And nothing is abandoned in this town. At one restaurant, there is a huge olive press that is 1,500 years old. It is the centerpiece of the restaurant and a curiosity to the many tourists that visit. Bread is toasted on an open fire, drizzled with the finest oil from the press and then rubbed with garlic, and topped with chopped tomatoes--genuine bruschetta!

Rick Steves, the world traveler, summed up his feelings about this small wonder of a city: "I love my cool, late evenings in Civita. After dinner, I wander back to sit on the church steps with people who've been doing exactly this under the same moon, night after night, year after year. Children play on the piazza until midnight in the light of the lampposts. I listen to the sounds of rural Italy, mixed with voices and *fortissimo* crickets. Towering high above, Civita feels well-fortified against change."

And that says it all.

[Here's a quick peek at the centuries-old city.](#)

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