



**CALABRIA**  
STRAORDINARIA

DIARY OF A  
**CALABRIAN**  
JOURNEY

**ENOGASTRONOMY  
AND TERRITORY**





**CALABRIA**  
STRAORDINARIA

Regione Calabria  
Dipartimento Turismo, Marketing  
territoriale e Mobilità

This guide is part of a series of five *Diaries of a Calabrian journey*, each on a particular way of experiencing this region:

- **Nature reserves and parks**
- **Art and culture**
- **The historic centres and old villages**
- **The coasts and the sea**
- **Wine, food and the land**

For further information:  
[www.calabriastroordinaria.it/en/](http://www.calabriastroordinaria.it/en/)

The *Diaries* are meant to be a ready to use tool for anyone about to travel round Calabria, wanting to experience it in its fullness and complexity but, in particular, with the intention of looking at it with the eyes of a true traveller.

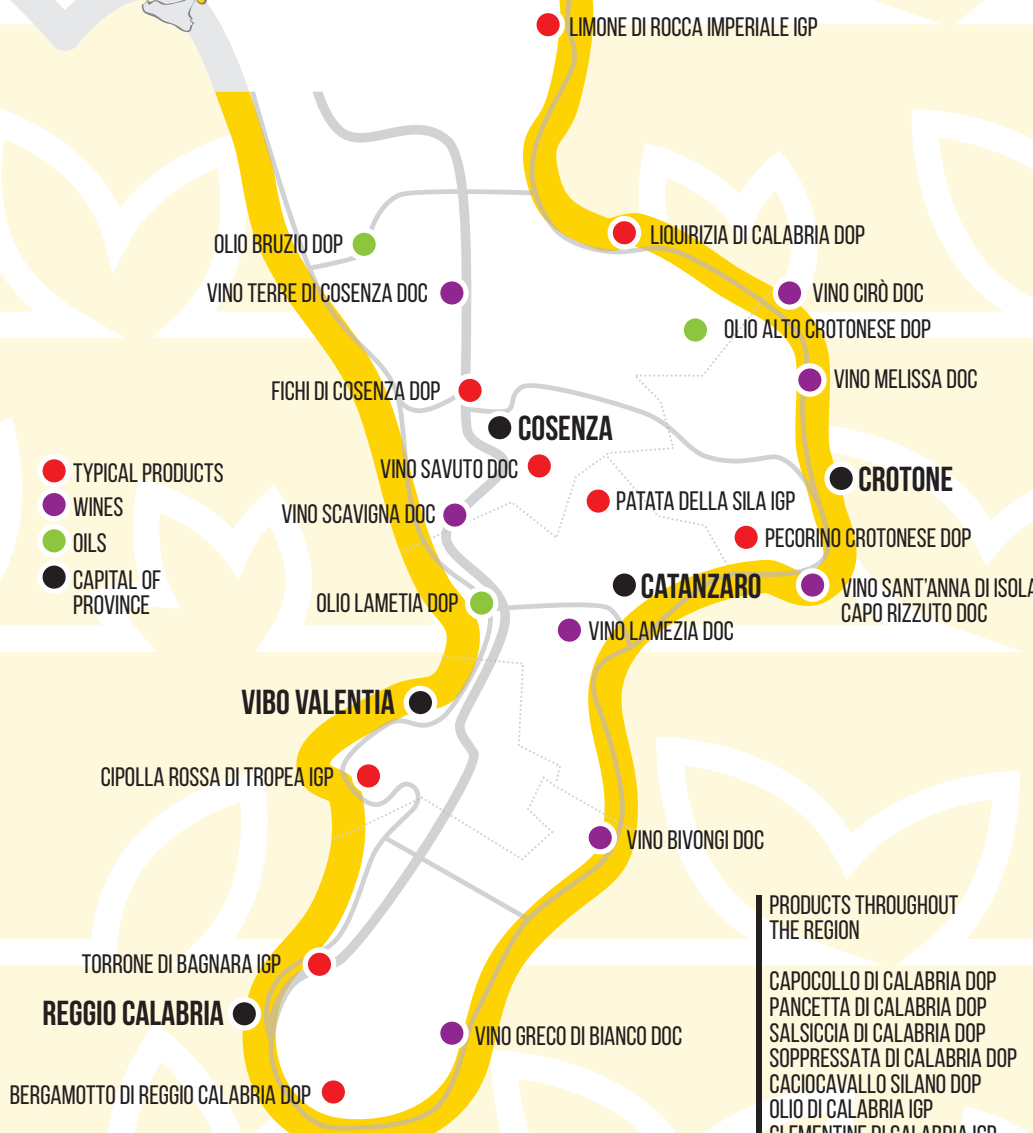
They are guides, full of advice and suggestions, on the physical and also mental paths that help the traveller not to miss any of the wonders in the area without stopping him/her from following their own instinct, interests and way of existence.

The word 'diary' automatically evokes a book whose pages are normally full of notes, supplemented by sketches or photos. That's why it was chosen as the metaphor for the journey and a very particular way of describing it using both words and pictures - more emotional than educational. It's an experience that purposely recalls the *Grand Tour* which, from the 18th to the early 20th centuries, included an almost compulsory trip into Calabria for European intellectuals of that time who, luckily, left an indelible trace for us in the pages of their invaluable travel diaries.

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JANUARY GIVES THE **CHESTNUT**  
FEBRUARY THE **PIGNOLATA**  
MARCH **RICOTTA**  
APRIL **FOCACCIA** WITH EGGS  
MAY **SWORDFISH**  
JUNE **CHERRIES**  
JULY **FIGS**  
AUGUST THE **ZIBIBBO**  
SEPTEMBER THE **PRICKLY PEAR**  
OCTOBER MOSTARDA NOVEMBER **WALNUTS**  
DECEMBER **ORANGES**

A LARGE AREA OF SOIL  
IS ALREADY CLEANED AND **PLOUGHED**  
**FACES** STREAM WITH **SWEAT** IN THE SUN  
WHICH GROWS HOTTER AND HOTTER  
A SHORT REST AT NINE  
TO EAT A **PIECE** OF BREAD  
SOME OLIVES, PERHAPS A PEPPER  
ALL WITH A **SIP** OF THAT GOOD WINE  
THE **COLOUR** OF BLACK CHERRIES

LEONIDA RÈPACI, CALABRIA GRANDE E AMARA, 1964



# Travel notes

Food is acquiring more and more importance in our lives but differently from in the past and so it isn't only functional in ensuring our simple survival. The added value sought today in food or wine is linked to the pleasure of tasting it, the feelings we have from seeing it, smelling it and, obviously, tasting it, thus involving at least three of our five senses.

This can particularly happen when we're on holiday and we have all the time necessary to enjoy food not only as nutrition but also as pure enjoyment. When we're able to taste what we eat calmly and, far from our daily routine, also in terms of food, we have the opportunity to experience, discover and appreciate new flavours.

This is how food and its culture become part of a travel experience that can't be limited to the beauty of the landscape and interest in the art, history and traditions of an area. This is how wine and food contribute to defining the contours of a region where 'sitting down at table' can't mean just eating but is part of the whole surrounding us and, in addition to giving us the items that make dishes attractive and tasty, also offers an environmental context to eat them in which considerably enhances the value.

Calabria is a welcoming land that has made tourism a vocation, also as a result of its position at the centre of the Mediterranean, the sea that was all the known world in ancient times. One of the main features of the region is the variety of the terrain - the coasts and mountains of the interior are always very close and it almost seems that they can communicate, exchanging the scents and benefits of their mutual climates through the air - but also the agri-food products that migrate easily from the sea to the mountains and vice versa.





For all these features, The New York Times recently suggested Calabria as one of the places in the world to visit and 'taste'. In addition, the important research of Ancel Keys on the 'Mediterranean diet', recognised as an Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO, took place at Nicotera in Calabria from 1957. The recognition was certainly for the goodness of the dishes and also for the advantages the health and well-being of the human body can obtain from their habitual consumption.

The Calabrian agri-food excellences have always been like all over the world and have become part of the 'basket' of delicacies seen as belonging to an area which has made the culture of food one of its strong points. There's nowhere in Calabria that doesn't have a traditional dish or at least a local interpretation of a regional dish. And this further valorises a cuisine that is already varied with a wealth of products and flavours that combine magnificently and creates very tasty menus unique in the world.



Sila Piccola, Ancient chestnut trees





## FROM OLIVES TO THE YELLOW GOLD OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

The culinary tradition of the Mediterranean, codified in the famous '**Mediterranean diet**', well-known and liked all over the world, has always been based on extensive use of extra-virgin olive oil, considered a healthy, precious food since ancient times. The olive is also widespread in the Mediterranean basin. As a result, the production of olive oil is also abundant in Calabria.

A visit to the **Archaeological Museum in Reggio Calabria** will help visitors to understand better the importance this food has had, and still has, in Calabrian wine and food culture. The Museum illustrates the history of oil with many objects used in the past to produce and conserve it but there are

Lamezia Terme, The olive harvest

also the **Olive Oil and Peasant Civilisation Museum** in Zagarise, the **Oil Museum** at Bagaladi, in Greek Calabria, the **Ethnographic Museum of the Art of Oil and Peasant Civilisation** at Trebisacce, the Oil Museum, in the **National Archaeological Park of Scolacium**, at Borgia, and many others scattered throughout the region.

However, to see the beauty of the centuries-old olive groves that are still in the region, you have to go to some special areas, such as the **Grecanic area** of Locri, the upper Crotonese area with the old farms of **Cirò** and **Crucoli**, the Vibo area where there is even an **'oil town'**, Francica, and lastly the Lamezia area. There are also many ruins of old oil presses that can still be found in Calabrian villages.

Calabria Region attends the leading national and international fairs from Bologna to New York with its extra-virgin olive oil. Some of the oils, such as the **Alto crotonese**, **Bruzio** and **Lametia**, have the PDO brand, obtained from the pressing of olives mainly of the 'Carolea' variety, a traditional Calabrian olive, and the PGI brand associated with the **Olio di Calabria**.



Marchesato, Olive groves overlooking the Ionian Sea



Cosenza, Olive oil

Presila Catanzarese, An olive grove







## THE ANCIENT TRADITION OF CURED MEAT

It's impossible to separate cured meat and Calabria. The delicacies skilfully obtained from the different parts of a pig have a thousand-year-old tradition, dating to Magna Graecia era. They are still one of the best-like traditional Calabrian products in the world and the best indication of a regional identity also seen on the table.

Anthropologically speaking, the killing of a pig was a custom in Calabrian families until about 50 years ago. Processing was done at home and involved all members of the family, and often relatives and neighbours ending up with a large party where some parts of the pig not used for the cured meat were eaten.

Spilinga, 'Nduja and Calabrian chilli pepper

The pig, raised close to the house, was therefore considered the 'Calabrian's larder', because its meat, conserved in the form of cured meat, could ensure the existence of a family for a whole year. Production is now frequently partly artisan but strictly rooted in tradition with results similar to those of the past. At table, cured meat is mainly found amongst the *hors d'oeuvres* and are the 'showpiece' of the typical 'Calabrian hors d'oeuvres'.

PDO brand Calabrian cured meat are **Capocollo**, **Pancetta** (bacon), **Salsiccia** (sausage) and **Soppressata**, all made with meat from pigs raised in Calabria and processed in the region. Other well-known and like meats are '**Nduja** from Spilinga, a centre on the slopes of Monte Poro in the Vibo area where the typical spicy, spreadable cured meat is produced, and the ham from the **black pig** from the Valle del Crati in Calabria; this pig is native and has recently recovered after being at risk of extinction.



Sila, Capocollo





Calabrian soppressata

Baia degli Dei, 'Nduja from Spilinga and Schiacciata







## MANY TYPES OF CHEESE

Milk is the food *par excellence* that man has learnt to process over the centuries, creating various types of cheese so that it can be eaten in different ways and also conserved for long periods. Cheese production is inevitably linked to cattle breeding and, often, a very old tradition of which there are still considerable traces in Calabria. This is **transhumance**, i.e. the seasonal movement of herds of cattle or flocks of sheep from one pasture to another by the shepherds. Taking part in a transhumance is a truly evocative experience, so much so that it has been made a candidate to become an Intangible World Heritage of UNESCO.

Monte Poro, Pecorino cheese

Transhumance involves all the main Calabrian mountain areas - the Pollino massif, the Sila plateau, the Serre plateau and the Aspromonte massif. The **Podolica** breed of cattle, which lives outside all year round, is found in Calabria. It is a very ancient breed, typical of southern regions and was originally used as a draught animal. Today, these animals are valuable for their lean meat with low cholesterol content. They also produce high quality milk, although not in great quantity, which is also used for the production of a particularly fine *caciocavallo* cheese.

Calabrian PDO cheeses are the **Caciocavallo Silano**, one of the oldest and most traditional in the whole of southern Italy, and the **Pecorino Crotonese**, produced in the *Marchesato* (province of Crotona) and available either soft or matured. However, there are many traditional cheeses in Calabria liked for their particular features and as a delicacy. These include the **Pecorino del Monte Poro**, about to receive the PDO designation, the **Pecorino del Pollino**, produced in the National Park area, the **Musulupu**, from a Grecanic area on the eastern side of Aspromonte, and the **Caciocavallo di Ciminà**, differentiated from the more widely available one by the processing and its taste.



Caciocavallo Silano



Sila, Podolica cows

Crotone, Preparation of pecorino cheese







## AGRICULTURE AND ITS BEST PRODUCTS

Calabria has a wealth of products from agriculture and more generally, it is able to give little treasures that grow naturally and only have to be found. Products grown in the soil are typical of Calabrian cuisine, originally very simple but then valorised, particularly with the discovery of the health benefits of the so-called '**Mediterranean diet**'. Products are often processed to be put in oil or pickled so that they can be conserved for a long time. In addition, they can now be tasted at 0 km in the **farm tourism centres** dotting the Calabrian countryside.

Sila Grande, A potato field

Calabrian agricultural products with the PDO or PGI brand are the **Fichi Dottati di Cosenza**, dried figs with a sweet, honeyed taste, the very well-known **Cipolla Rossa di Tropea**, with the characteristic sweet taste which has become one of the ingredients in the preparation of some starred dishes of famous chefs, the **Patata della Sila**, excellent fried and the key player in many '*sagre*' (festivals) that are a great attraction for gourmets and tourists during the summer.

Tables in the region are also enriched by the **Pomodoro di Belmonte Calabro**, a sweet and especially tasty tomato, **Chilli pepper**, a symbol of Calabrian cuisine, quintessentially spicy, celebrated with the '**Festival del Peperoncino**' at Diamante each year, herbs, like **Oregano**, highly perfumed and essential in the preparation of many traditional recipes, wild vegetables, like **Chicory**, a field herb with purifying, diuretic and detoxifying properties, the **Fragole di Acconia**, strawberries grown in the plain of Lamezia Terme which can be eaten fresh or used in the preparation of cakes and jams, and the **Porcini mushrooms** and **Truffles**, surprisingly



Cosenza, The Dottati variety of fig





Ionian Coast, Chilli peppers

Aspromonte, Porcini mushrooms and chestnuts







Tropea, red onions

Sila potatoes

found in the internal and mountainous areas of Calabria. The **Riso di Sibari** deserves a special mention; it was first grown on the plain in the early 1950s and sold unrefined to companies in the north of Italy. It is only recently that all the processing has started in Calabria. The main feature of this rice is the saltiness, probably because the paddy fields are close to the sea but the warm micro-climate and Calabrian sun also contribute to its goodness.

Sibari rice







## CITRUS FRUIT AND ITS BRIGHT COLOURS

Generally, citrus fruits are a traditional crop, typical of the whole of southern Italy, and so also Calabria. However, before they even arrive at home to be eaten as fruit, ingredients of many cakes or squeezed for juice, they make a beautiful show - in the orange groves, still attached to the branches of the trees. Their bright colours range from green to yellow and orange, and bring joy to the heart just looking at them.

The PDO or PGI citrus fruits in Calabria are the essential oil extracted from the **Bergamot**, obtained from fruit grown only in some areas of Calabria, used worldwide in the composition of perfumes

Upper Tyrrhenian area of Cosenza, Citrons

and cosmetics, **Clementines**, a fruit similar to mandarin oranges but very sweet and juicy whose segments have the considerable advantage of being practically seedless, the **Limone di Rocca Imperiale**, a lemon with a strong, intense scent, full of essential oils.

However, there are also very good **Oranges** in Calabria while the **Citron**, grown in an area known as the **Riviera dei Cedri** because of the abundance of these plants, is particularly sought-after for the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) by rabbis from around the world who often go to the area to choose the best fruit personally.



Bergamot



Rocca Imperiale lemons  
Calabrian clementines









## TREASURES OF THE SEA FOR FISHERMEN

Calabria has a coastline of 800 km and is, above all, a seafaring region. It is almost completely surrounded by the Mediterranean, full of fish and fishing boats and fishermen who do everything they can to bring the raw materials essential for cooking a delicious fish dish to the tables of Calabrians and tourists alike.

The sea and fishing, a very old human activity, can be seen and valued in fishing villages like Crucoli, the '**sardella village**' where the special sauce made of whitebait and red chilli pepper, or Fuscaldo, is prepared, and the '**Alici in Festival**' is held annually.

Costa Viola, swordfish

There are also museums like the **Fishing and Sea Museum** (MUPEM) at Montepaone or the **Mediterranean Food Museum** at Altomonte.

All the varieties of fish that live in the Mediterranean Sea can be found in Calabria - the **Swordfish** and **Tuna**. Fishing for these with traditional methods, the *tonnare* and *spadare*, is the source of myths and stories in literature and film, like the unforgettable scenes of **Vittorio De Seta's** documentaries which told in a way that few others can of the 'hunt' for the swordfish and the '*mattanza*' for tuna. Then there are the **Oily fish**, one of the basic ingredients of the so-called '**Mediterranean diet**', various types of fish which are very abundant and highly digestible as well as being extraordinarily tasty, if cooked well. The preparation of dishes with **Stocco** (from stockfish) and **Baccalà**, two fish products obtained from drying cod, have become traditional, particularly in the Mammola and Cittanova areas. Although these products are from northern Europe, they have rightfully entered the local culinary culture and so are now famous throughout Calabria and also beyond.



Tyrrenian coast, Tuna



Strongoli, Oily fish

Soverato, Fishing boat







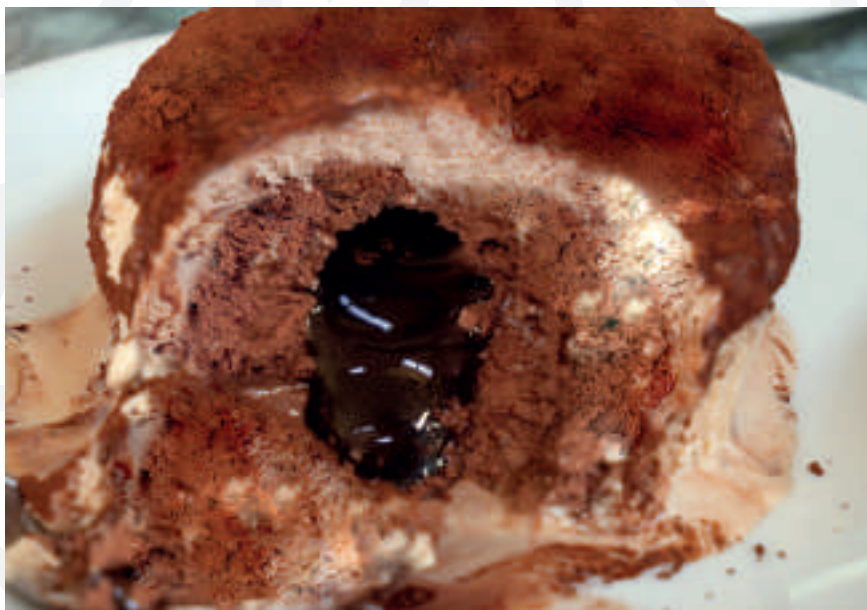
## TRADITIONAL CAKES AND DAILY BREAD

The typically Calabrian cakes and biscuits are often linked to traditions and special occasions, like patron saints' and national festivals or fairs, each with its own particular type of cake that must at all costs be eaten. And bread in Calabria is much more than a food habit, it's a real tradition. There must always be bread at table for Calabrians and their guests, preferably just made and still hot, fragrant and scented. Thus, the 'Great Bread Festival' of Alto-monte rightly celebrates the taste and benefits, dwelling on the value of sharing that this food represents so well.

.....  
Traditional bread

In this case, the PDO and PGI products in Calabria are **Liquorice**, typical of the Corigliano-Rossano area. Find out everything about it by going to the **Liquorice Museum** in Rossano, and **Nougat from Bagnara**, a traditional, mainly Christmas, sweet made of honey, sugar, almonds and natural flavourings, widespread throughout the Piana di Gioia Tauro to a Taurianova, where the '**Festival del torrone**' (Nougat Festival) has been celebrated for some years.

There are many other Calabrian cake and biscuit specialities like the **Tartufo di Pizzo**, an ice-cream invented in Pizzo Calabro which has become one of its best-liked features, and the **Mostaccioli di Soriano Calabro**, honey-based biscuits of Greek origin which normally have particular, artistic shapes, enriched by multi-coloured decorations made with baking foil. **Bread** made using craftsman methods is still very widespread throughout the whole region. The bread of **Cerchiara** is a typical product of the Pollino National Park, notable for the shape which gives it a sort of 'hunch'. However, it gains all its fragrance and taste from slow cooking, while the oven cools off.



Pizzo Calabro, Tartufo di Pizzo



Traditional cakes and biscuits  
Corigliano Rossano, Liquorice









## WINE AND THE NECTAR OF THE GODS

As Homer told us, Ulysses used wine to firstly flatter Polyphemus and then get the better of him, who was holding him and his companions prisoner in a terrible cave. In both legend and reality, wine is an important element in the diet of Mediterranean peoples. This is true for ancient peoples, and perhaps for the gods for whom it was probably the legendary nectar, and now for modern ones.

There is evidence in all the **Archaeological Museums of Calabria**, which always have the amphoras used to transport and conserve wine or the decorations depicting the myth of Bacchus, the Roman god of wine and the grape harvest. Thus, the **old palmenti** (wide, shallow

Vineyards overlooking the Ionian Sea

trenches for the fermentation of the *must*) dug out of the rock at a time when vine-growing and wine production were obviously already flourishing, can be discovered in an archaeological area of Locri. You can find out more by visiting the **Museum of Wine and Peasant Civilisation** at Cirò, known as the 'wine town' and considered the ideal 'capital' of an area particularly well suited for oenology. There is also the **Wine Museum** at Bianco, a centre with very old origins whose development was due to the cultivation of vines and the production of wine.

Very good DOC wines are produced in Calabria. The reds are mainly from the processing of grapes from a typically Calabrian vine - the **Gaglioppo**, found particularly in the **Cirò** area, whose wine products are very well-known internationally. The **Greco di Bianco**, a dessert wine produced in the municipalities of Bianco and Casignana, is also very well-known. This has an amber colour and a rounded taste; it comes from grapes dried in the sun. Wine-producing areas can be found throughout the region - from the Pollino to the Valli del Crati and del Savuto, from the Cirò area to the plain of Lamezia Terme and from the Serre to Aspromonte.



Cirò Marina, Vineyard



Donnici, grapes

Ferruzzano, grapes







Bagnara Calabro, Vineyard

## DOC AND IGT WINES

There are a lot of **DOC** (*PDO - Protected Designation of Origin*) **wines**, they are well-liked and, in some cases, very well-known outside Calabria:

- **Bivongi**, produced in the province of Reggio Calabria and Catanzaro, in *Bianco*, *Rosato* and *Rosso* (normal, *Novello* and *Riserva*).
- **Cirò**, produced in Cirò and Cirò Marina and part of the area of Melissa and Crucoli in *Bianco*, *Bianco Classico*, *Rosato*, *Rosso*, *Rosso Superiore*, *Rosso Superiore Riserva*, *Rosso Classico*, *Rosso Classico Superiore* and *Rosso Classico Superiore Riserva*.
- **Terre di Cosenza**, produced in Condoleo, Donnici, Esaro, Pollino, San Vito di Luzzi, Colline del Crati and Verbicaro.
- **Condoleo**, produced in the province of Cosenza in *Rosato* (normal and *Novello*) and *Rosso* (normal and *Novello*).
- **Donnici**, produced in the province of Cosenza in *Bianco*, *Rosato* and *Rosso* (normal, *Novello* and *Riserva*).



- **Pollino**, produced in the province of Cosenza in *Rosso* (normal and Superiore).
- **San Vito di Luzzi**, produced in the province of Cosenza in *Bianco*, *Rosato* and *Rosso*.
- **Colline del Crati**, produced in the province of Cosenza.
- **Verbicaro**, produced in the province of Cosenza in *Bianco*, *Rosato* and *Rosso* (normal and Riserva).
- **Greco di Bianco**, produced in the province of Reggio Calabria in *Bianco*.
- **Lamezia**, produced in the province of Catanzaro in *Bianco*, *Rosato* and *Rosso* (normal, Novello and Riserva) and *Bianco* with the indication of the vine: Greco.
- **Melissa** produced in the province of Crotona in *Bianco* and *Rosso* (normal and Riserva).



Colline dei Crati, Vineyard

- **Sant'Anna di Isola Capo Rizzuto**, produced in the provinces of Crotone and Catanzaro in *Rosso* and *Rosato*.
- **Savuto**, produced in the provinces of Cosenza and Catanzaro in *Rosato* and *Rosso* (normal and Superiore).
- **Scavigna**, produced in the province of Catanzaro in *Bianco*, *Rosato* and *Rosso*.

Equally varied, respected and widespread throughout Calabria are the excellent **IGT Wines** (PGI – Protected Geographical Indication):

- **Arghillà**, produced in the province of Reggio Calabria in *Rosato* (normal and Novello) and *Rosso* (normal and Novello).
- **Calabria**, produced throughout the region in *Bianco* (normal, sparkling and Passito), *Rosato* and *Rosso* (normal, sparkling, Passito and Novello).
- **Costa Viola**, produced in the province of Reggio Calabria in *Bianco*, *Rosato* (normal and Novello) and *Rosso* (normal and Novello).
- **Esaro**, produced in the province of Cosenza in *Bianco*, *Rosato* (normal and Novello) and *Rosso* (normal and Novello).





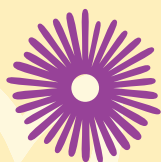
- **Lipuda**, produced in the province of Crotona in *Bianco* (normal and sparkling), *Rosato* (normal and sparkling), *Rosso* (normal, sparkling and Novello).
- **Locride**, produced in the province of Reggio Calabria in *Bianco*, *Rosato* and *Rosso* (normal and Novello).
- **Palizzi**, produced in the province of Reggio Calabria in *Rosato* and *Rosso* (normal and Novello).
- **Pellaro**, produced in the province of Reggio Calabria in *Rosato* and *Rosso* (normal and Novello).
- **Scilla**, produced in the province of Reggio Calabria in *Rosato* and *Rosso* (normal and Novello).
- **Val di Neto**, produced in the province of Crotona in *Bianco* (normal, sparkling and Passito), *Rosato* (normal and sparkling) and *Rosso* (normal, sparkling and Passito).
- **Valdamato**, produced in the province of Catanzaro in *Bianco* (normal, sparkling and Passito), *Rosato* (normal and sparkling) and *Rosso* (normal, sparkling, Passito and Novello).

Locride, Vineyard









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