

# LUNIGIANA:

Land of Myths and Realities

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## Lunigiana: Land of Myths and Realities

The documentary begins by describing Lunigiana as a land of castles, mysteries, and dark legends, populated by castellans who pursued maidens and spirits that circulated in the villages. It speaks of frightening legends, exorcisms practiced against the evil eye and spirits, and women who possessed ancient



knowledge of medicinal herbs and spells. The narrative continues with fables of fairies that populated the woods, seen as sources of wealth and natural gifts, such as chestnuts and thermal waters.

The popular religiosity of Lunigiana is highlighted, with apparitions, miracles, sanctuaries, churches, and pilgrimages, emphasizing the importance of the Via Francigena as an artery that brought myths and legends from all over Europe, including the myth of the Holy Grail linked to the Holy Face. Lunigiana is presented as a land of folklore, popular festivals, carnival, dances, costumes, songs, and challenges, a place that has welcomed cultures and people, maintaining great charm and unique hospitality.

## Equi Terme Caves: Nature, History, and Adventure



The documentary then moves to the Equi Caves Experience Park in Equi Terme, located within the Apuan Alps Regional Park and part of the UNESCO Global Geoparks network. This place combines nature, history, and adventure.

The Archaeological Museum, housed in a restored old mill and dedicated to former mayor Paolo Grassi, displays a complete cave bear skeleton, fossil bear cubs,

and artifacts that tell the story of ancient life in the caves.

The **Equi Caves**, first explored in the 1700s, are divided into three sections: "La Buca" (open since the 1960s), "The Caves" (the active, water-filled section discovered in 1985), and the **Adventure Trail** (opened to the public in 2018). Inside, you can admire breathtaking karst formations like stalactites, stalagmites, and columns. Various routes are available, from the standard guided tour to the **Proteus route** (50 minutes), up to more adventurous options like "Notola" (90-minute headlamp tour) and "Pipistrello" (2.5-hour adventure).

The **Tecchia di Equi** is an ancient rock shelter used by prehistoric humans, with fossils and tools from both Neanderthals and Homo sapiens, as well as medieval finds and evidence of ancient diseases.

## Malaspina Castle of Fosdinovo: Fortress and Noble Histories

Subsequently, the documentary takes us to the **Malaspina Castle of Fosdinovo**, one of the most imposing in Lunigiana, under the dominion of the Malaspina Marquises of the flowering branch. The first tower dates back to the 12th century. It became predominant from 1340 with Marquis Spinetta Malaspina. Its strategic position dominated the Magra valley, the Via Francigena, and the Lombard road. Expanded over centuries for domination and defense, today the castle also features Neo-Gothic elements, while maintaining a medieval atmosphere inside. It is privately owned by the Malaspina descendants, the Torrigiani Malaspina Marquises of Florence, and offers accommodation in one of its wings during the summer.



The story of the **iron cradle** with a lid and padlock is narrated, used by Marchioness Cristina Pallavicini in 1671 to protect the young heir Carlo Francesco Agostino from kidnapping. The marchioness gave birth in public and kept the child safe, even from the wet nurse, until his recognition as the legitimate heir, an event commemorated by the minting of a coin.

Dante Alighieri's chamber in the ancient eastern tower is another point of interest, where legend has it that Dante was a guest in 1306 after signing peace between the Bishop of Luni and the Malaspinas. The room preserves a 14th-century fresco of Christ's resurrection.

### Historical Memory: The Vinca Massacre

The documentary touches on a moment of deep reflection on historical memory with the account of the Vinca massacre in August 1944. Leonarda Papa, a survivor, shared her testimony of how she hid for three days in chestnut tree trunks to escape the Nazi-Fascist brutality that exterminated over 170 victims. This traumatic event inspired the story "Gli Occhi Nelle Lacrime" (Eyes in the Tears).



### Delights of Lunigiana: Traditional Flavors and Innovation

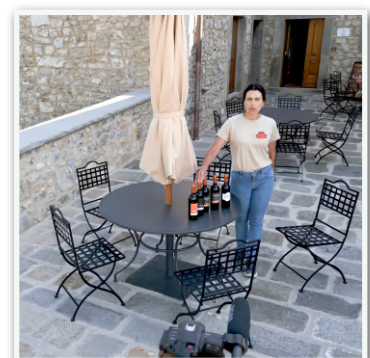


The visit continues in Fivizzano, in Piazza Medicea, at the **Agribottega del Gusto**, a shop offering local specialties, many of which come from "zero-kilometer" farms. The **Testo**, an ancient tool for cooking **Testarolo**, a Slow Food presidium, is presented. Among the excellent

products, chestnut flour, awarded as the best in the Apennines, and hazelnuts, used for gianduaia and gluten-free cookies, are mentioned.

Other local excellences are presented:

- The "Monastero dei Frati Bianchi" winery is committed to safeguarding Lunigiana's ampelographic heritage, cultivating native varieties like Barsagliana and Pollera for wines such as "Barsaré" and "Cenobio."





•The Bongi farm is dedicated to the recovery of the Pontremolese, an indigenous bovine breed facing extinction. Its milk, small in quantity but highly acidic, is processed in the farm dairy to produce fresh, semi-aged, or aged cheeses.

•Elisir di China Clementi is a liqueur produced in Fivizzano for 140 years, based on Cinchona bark and bitter orange, with digestive and tonic properties, suitable for mixology or pairing with desserts and chocolate.



## The Stele Statues of Lunigiana: Mystery and Archaeology

Finally, the documentary concludes at the "Augusto Cesare Ambrosi" Stele Statues Museum in Pontremoli, housed in the Piagnaro Castle. Here lies a collection of Lunigiana stele statues, a European phenomenon with well-defined stylistic characteristics.



These anthropomorphic statues (depicting men and women) date back to the period between 3200 BC and 800 BC (Bronze and Iron Ages). They are worked only on one side and are distinguished by the high number of finds in a small territory and by the particular shape of the head, described as a "gendarme's or carabinieri's hat."

The stele statues are divided into three typological groups:

- Group A (ancient): head attached to the body.
- Group B (intermediate): head separated from the body and shaped like a carabinieri's hat.
- Group C (recent): complete statues also worked on the back.

Ornaments and weapons depicted on the statues (axes, swords, daggers for men; breasts, jewels, necklaces, gorgets for women) allow them to be dated. Their craftsmanship was extremely demanding, done with stone tools. Although most were found in reuse contexts, new archaeological excavations aim to unveil the mysteries about these populations who inhabited Lunigiana, with a common interpretation seeing them as deified ancestors. The stone used is Renaria or sandstone.