



HISTORICAL AND TOURIST GUIDE

between history and hospitality

Atripalda

The Ancient Heart of Irpinia

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Before you set out

There is a point along the course of the river Sabato where the present seems to stop and listen to the past. That is where Atripalda stands, and that is where this journey begins. In the pages that follow, documented history and popular memory are woven together — always carefully kept apart from one another — to tell the story of a town that lets itself be discovered on foot, slowly, with no hurry to arrive.

All that is left is to turn the page. Have a good journey — between history and hospitality.



The river Sabato, along whose banks Atripalda stands.

Introduction and Geographical Setting

To understand a town, you first need to know the ground it stands on.

Lying along the banks of the river Sabato, in a strategic position in western Irpinia, Atripalda is an exemplary case of urban continuity in southern Italy. Closely tied to the provincial capital Avellino, just 3 km away, the town is not a mere urban satellite but a historic centre with an identity a thousand years old, forged by the passage of Samnite and Roman civilisations and by the great feudal dynasties that shaped its commercial fortunes.

The title of city was granted to it by royal decree on 18 July 1867.



A panoramic view of Atripalda from above, with the Sabato valley and the mountains of Irpinia beyond.

Inhabitants	10,805
Province	Avellino (AV)
Elevation	294 m a.s.l.
Area	8.59 km ²
Main river	Sabato
Distance from Avellino	3 km
City title	since 18 July 1867 (royal decree)
Bordering municipalities	Aiello del Sabato, Avellino, Cesinali, Manocalzati, San Potito Ultra, Santo Stefano del Sole, Sorbo Serpico
Access	A16 motorway, Avellino Est and Avellino Ovest exits

The origin of the name

The most widely accepted hypothesis derives the place name from the Lombard king Troppualdo (or Truppoaldo), a nobleman who owned vast agricultural estates in the Sabato valley and who, around 1060, had a castle bearing his name built along the river banks — giving rise to Tripualda and, later, to Atripalda.

Local sources also record an alternative etymology, less widespread but worth noting: the name would come from *trepalium*, the Latin term for the place where the condemned were executed — a hypothesis that some local scholars connect with the municipal coat of arms, an arm armed with a scourge.

2. The Origins: Between Myth and Documented History

Where myth ends and history begins, nobody knows for certain.

The legend of Sabatio

The most evocative tradition attributes the founding of the first settlement to Sabatio, a great-grandson of Noah, who is said to have chosen these fertile lands to found Sabathia, giving his own name both to the community and to the river Sabato.

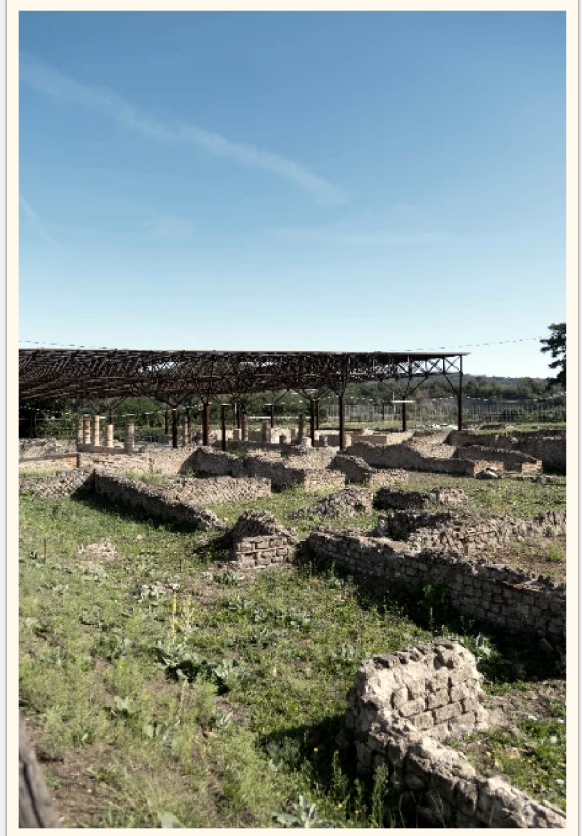
It is a tale that belongs to legendary historiography — so described by the local sources themselves — but one that bears witness to the ancestral bond between the community and its primary water resource.

Samnite and Roman Abellinum

The archaeological record points to a different reality: on the plateau of the Civita stood a settlement of the Samnite tribe of the Hirpini, the Abellinates, used as a sacred precinct and defended by an archaic circuit of walls. In 82 BC, by the will of Sulla and following the agrarian reforms of the Gracchi, the area was turned into a Roman colony under the name of Abellinum: the *milites lassi* (retired veterans) drove out the first inhabitants, the so-called "Sabatini", who were nevertheless gradually absorbed into the social fabric and became the true cultural ancestors of today's population. Between AD 220 and 230 the community was further enriched by the arrival of veterans of the emperor Alexander Severus, coming from Asia Minor.

The Lombard age and the birth of the name

The decisive step towards administrative autonomy came under Lombard rule: around the 11th century king Troppualdo inherited the eastern part of the county on the right bank of the river and had a fortified castle built there, obtaining formal separation from neighbouring Avellino. Between the 11th and the 14th centuries Atripalda grew rapidly, favoured by the religious prestige of the Collegiate Church of Sant'Ippolisto, by its fortunate position along the trade routes, and by the waters of the Sabato, which powered mills and ironworks.



The Civita archaeological area: historical stratification from the Samnite settlement to Lombard fortification.

3. The Middle Ages and the Feudal Dynasties

Before the Caracciolo, other families held the keys to Atripalda, and each of them left something behind.

In the 13th century Atripalda was the setting for an episode that local tradition — as handed down by the Pro Loco Atripaldese itself — regards as "the oldest act of gallantry in Italy". The year 1254 marks a high point in the Swabian diaspora across the south: the young King Manfred of Swabia, pressed by papal troops in what the narrative tradition calls a "strategic withdrawal" during his retreat from Naples towards the Principality of Taranto, found refuge in the castle of Truppoaldo, then in the hands of the Capece family. The Capece brothers, unafraid of papal reprisals, opened the gates of the keep to the fugitive king and welcomed him as the last bulwark of the liberties of the Kingdom.

The act of gallantry,
according to Nicolò Jamsilla

The most authoritative account of the episode is found in the *Historia* of Nicolò Jamsilla, a fourteenth-century chronicler close to Manfred's court. In his telling, court custom of the time

required sovereigns to dine alone, women being strictly excluded from the royal table. It was precisely at Atripalda that Manfred decided to break with that custom, declaring that he wished to "shatter" such barbarity from that day onward, and that the castle of Tripaldo would keep the memory of it.

Local narrative tradition recounts that the gesture took place during a banquet offered by the Capece brothers, at which Manfred — faithful to the precepts of *fin'amor* and the chivalric code — is said to have paid the ladies of the local nobility attentions of refined courtesy and given them gifts of high symbolic value. For one night the fortress of Truppoaldo became an ephemeral but dazzling court, in an elegance that local tradition calls exquisitely Frederician.

A document of 1272, promulgated by Charles of Anjou, confirms the economic importance of the town, regulating the great market established to settle relations of debt and credit between merchants and the farmers of the area.

The succession of feudal lords

In the Middle Ages the fief of Atripalda also included, as hamlets, Aiello del Sabato, Tavernola San Felice (today part of Aiello) and Cesinali. After Troppualdo and his descendants, the fief passed to Ruggero de Lauro, then to the Capece, to Bernardo Scillato (1285) and to the Montfort (1293), before reaching the Orsini, who held it for a long time: among the lords of that house were Orso Orsini (died 1479), Giovanni Paolo Orsini (1486) and Camillo Orsini (1492–1559). On 19 June 1501 Atripalda was the scene of a clash between Angevins and Aragonese, settled in favour of the Spanish: the fief was then assigned to Queen Joanna, niece of Ferdinand the Catholic.

On 13 September 1512 Alfonso Branai Castriota bought the land for 25,000 ducats, and the following year was granted the title of first Marquis of Atripalda; his son Antonio succeeded him. In 1559 the Genoese financier Giacomo Pallavicini Basadonna took over the fief for 60,200 ducats, impressing on the town the mercantile and industrial vocation that would mark the centuries to come, and strengthening the ancient "art of trading" along the river.

c. 1060	Castle of Troppualdo
1285	Bernardo Scillato
1293	Montfort family
1479–1559	Orsini dynasty
1501	Fief to Queen Joanna
1513	Alfonso Branai Castriota, marquis
1559	Giacomo Pallavicini Basadonna
1564	Passage to the Caracciolo

4. The Golden Age of the Caracciolo (1564–1806)

For two and a half centuries the fate of the town was bound up with that of a single family.

In 1564, with the exchange of the fief between Basadonna and Domizio Caracciolo, Atripalda entered a period of splendour unmatched in southern Italy, lasting until the abolition of feudalism in 1806. The family's management was genuinely innovative: the fief became an advanced industrial and commercial district, thanks to the intelligent use of the motive power of the river Sabato for silk mills, ironworks, copper working and paper mills. The standard of living surpassed that of the provincial capital itself, to the point that chronicles of the time record no poor citizens among the population. This prosperity also translated into cultural patronage, with the birth of the Accademia degli Incerti, an intellectual circle hosted in the halls of the family palace.

Palazzo Caracciolo: history and architecture

In the heart of the old town stands Palazzo Caracciolo, for centuries the residence of the ducal family of that name. The late-Renaissance building was begun in 1564, near the medieval castle of Troppualdo. After Masaniello's revolt of 1647, in the eighteenth century the Caracciolo conceived an even more imposing residence, turning the old medieval kitchen garden into a decorative garden that is protected today by the heritage authority. Restored in 1787, the palace was sacked in 1799 during the uprisings of the Parthenopean Revolution; sold in 1806, it was declared a National Monument in 1912. The earthquake of 1980 inflicted further damage: today, almost entirely municipal property but burdened by a complex inheritance involving more than forty heirs, it is the subject of projects for conversion into a museum, library and auditorium.



Palazzo Caracciolo and its monumental gardens.

5. The Archaeological Park of Ancient Abellinum

Beneath the grass of the Civita an entire Roman town lies sleeping.

On the heights of the Civita extends an archaeological park of some 25 hectares, a vivid testimony to an urban stratigraphy running from the Samnite walls to the Roman colony. The visitor can admire the circuit of walls, 2 km long, the urban layout organised around the forum and the bath complex – where the tubular tiles on which the so-called "Torre degli Orefici" stands can still be recognised in the *calidarium* – as well as the remains of the amphitheatre and the link with the monumental Roman aqueduct of Serino.

The jewel of the park is the Domus of Marcus Vipsanius Primigenius, a sumptuous Hellenistic-Pompeian residence of about 2,500 m², which belonged to a freedman of Agrippa, son-in-law of Augustus. The excavations have also yielded evidence of daily life in the colony, including erotic coins (*spintriae*) connected with a brothel. Not far away, the early Christian basilica of Capo la Torre preserves a necropolis of more than 500 tombs, among them the rare tombstone of the deaconess Palumba. Many finds are kept today at the Antiquarium of the Dogana dei Grani.



The excavations on the Civita plateau: the rooms of the Roman domus.

A SITE STILL AT WORK

Since 2019 the project "Abellinum. A plan for knowledge, protection and enhancement" (Soprintendenza ABAP Salerno-Avellino, University of Salerno and the Municipality of Atripalda) has been carrying out periodic excavation campaigns, which have brought to light new wall structures and Roman coins.

6. The Specus Martyrum and the Mother Church

Beneath the high altar, a crypt keeps seventeen centuries of unbroken faith.

The beating heart of faith in Irpinia is the Mother Church of Sant'Ippolisto and San Sabino, first documented in a Norman deed of donation of 1098; raised to collegiate status in 1598, its present nineteenth-century appearance is the result of the restoration of 1852. Inside it lies hidden the Specus Martyrum, one of the most significant monuments of Christian archaeology in southern Italy: the early Christian crypt preserves the relics of the martyrs buried in the wake of the persecutions of Diocletian (AD 303–311), among them Sant'Ippolisto and San Sabino, the historic patron of Atripalda.

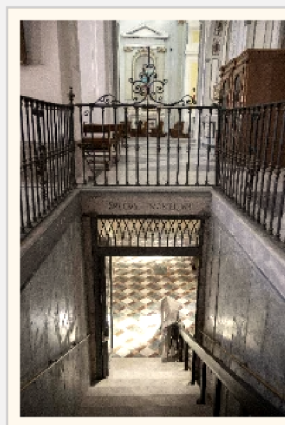
The façade, nineteenth-century in design, has a two-tone Romanesque character in stone and black piperno tuff. The interior, marked by the post-earthquake restoration of 1980 by the architect Riccardo Dalisi, remains the object of conflicting judgement among devotees of traditional town planning.



The Specus Martyrum: the early Christian crypt beneath the high altar.



The reliquary bust of San Sabino.



The descent to the crypt.

San Sabino, the patron bishop

San Sabino was bishop of Abellinum between the 5th and the 6th centuries, assisted by the young deacon Romolo, who stayed with him until his death on 9 February of an unspecified year at the beginning of the 6th century. Buried in the Specus Martyrum, his relics were translated from the high altar of the Collegiate Church to the Specus on 16 September 1612 – a date which, together with 9 February, is still one of the two annual feasts dedicated to the patron saint.

The tradition of the Holy Manna

On 1 May 1558, during a canonical inspection of the body of San Sabino, the faithful found the remains covered by a clear, pure liquid, described as "four fingers of water". According to tradition, part of that liquid was applied to the foot of a lame man of Atripalda, Sabino Farese, who is said to have been suddenly healed. Since then, every 9 February at the end of Holy Mass, the priests trace the sign of the cross on the foreheads of the faithful with a feather dipped in the "Holy Manna".



The interior of the Mother Church: the nave towards the high altar, beneath the decorated vaults.

7. An Itinerary of Churches and Convents

Every quarter of Atripalda has its church, and every church a story worth the stop.

San Pasquale (San Giovanni Battista)

Founded in 1585 on Roman remains, famous for the five Chapels of the Way of the Cross (1821), once decorated with majolica ceramic mosaics, partly lost after the earthquake of 1980. The hill is still called the "Golgotha" of Atripalda. The convent was entrusted to the Discalced Friars Minor in 1670.

Santa Maria delle Grazie

The private chapel and pantheon of the Caracciolo family from 1564. The adjoining Dominican convent, once a prison, today houses municipal offices.

Santa Maria del Carmelo

Seat of the seventeenth-century lay confraternity, restored after the damage of 1980. It preserves a fine statue of the Virgin, along with stuccoes and valuable marbles.

San Nicola da Tolentino

Built on the ruins of a pagan temple, today largely occupied by the "Edmondo De Amicis" school, and reopened in 2010. It remains tied to the tradition of the Good Friday trumpet.

San Lorenzo

Already mentioned in a document of 1197, it stands out for its distinctive open bell gable and preserves two historic niches at the entrance.



The bell tower of San Lorenzo, with its characteristic open gable profile.

8. Civic Architecture and Urban Symbols

A grain market turned museum, a war memorial, a rebuilt bridge.

The Palazzo della Dogana dei Grani and its museum

Built in 1883 in what was then called Largo Mercato, the Dogana dei Grani (grain customs house) marked the shift of the town's centre of gravity to the left bank of the Sabato. Distinctive for its wide pavilion hall and pyramidal roof, it long housed the grain trade; in 1900 the square was renamed Piazza Umberto I. Since 1993 the building has housed the Museum of the Dogana dei Grani, with finds from the necropolis of Capo la Torre and from Abellinum, and the permanent exhibition "The Customs House within the Customs House".



The Palazzo della Dogana dei Grani on Piazza Umberto I.

The war memorial

In Piazza Umberto I rises the bronze statuary group dedicated to the unknown soldier: a standing soldier aiming his weapon at the enemy while shielding a wounded comrade.

The Ponte delle Filande

Over the river Fenestrelle, it connects the centre of Atripalda with the industrial area of Pianodardine and with Avellino. Rebuilt and reopened to traffic in October 2024, it takes its name from the old silk mills of the area.



The war memorial to the unknown soldier.

9. The Market and a Vocation for Trade

In Atripalda, Thursday has never been a day like any other.

The bond between Atripalda and trade is rooted in the very history of the town. The place name Largo Mercato, by which today's Piazza Umberto I was known for centuries, bears witness to the weekly Thursday market. A document of 1272 issued by King Charles of Anjou already regulated the great market of Atripalda, established above all to settle relations of debt and credit between farmers and merchants. Alongside the weekly market, the town hosted periodic fairs coinciding with religious feasts: San Marco, Santa Maria delle Grazie, San Lorenzo, San Sabino and San Martino.

In feudal times the Caracciolo imposed on grain in transit charges beyond the simple "sweepings": the so-called *giummella*, corresponding roughly to the quantity of grain left when gathering it with

two cupped hands. Further income came from the milling of grain in the water mills, largely owned by the ducal family.

The Thursday market today

For generations the weekly market has remained one of the most keenly felt commercial occasions in the province. For decades, every Thursday morning, thousands of people came to Atripalda from Mercogliano, Serino, Solofra, Montefredane, Manocalzati, Montoro, Aiello del Sabato and the smaller villages — not only to shop, but to meet and take part in a genuine collective ritual, a "social network" avant la lettre. Even today the market remains a meeting place able to draw visitors from across the hinterland of Avellino.

10. Traditions and Popular Culture

There are two days in the year when Atripalda recognises itself best: when the bonfires are lit, and when the Madonna goes out in procession.

San Sabino: the Focaroni and the Holy Manna

Every year, on the evening of 8 February, the town lights up with the *Focaroni*: great devotional bonfires set up in many quarters, in addition to the main one in Piazza Umberto I. The event, organised by the Pro Loco Atripaldese with the municipality and the parish of Sant'Ippolito Martire, involves the whole community with *tammuriate*, folk music and traditional dishes such as sausages, potatoes and red wine. The tradition is recognised as intangible cultural heritage of the Campania Region.

Maria Santissima del Carmelo

The most deeply felt moment of the whole calendar is the feast of the principal patroness, celebrated around 16 July with a novena beginning on 7 July. Masses follow one another, along with the mayor's floral homage, the concelebration presided over by the Bishop of Avellino and the evening procession with the statue of the Madonna, accompanied by the band of San Potito Ultra. In 2026 the community celebrates the centenary of the Coronation (1926–2026).

Holy Week

On Good Friday, at the church of San Nicola, a trumpeter sounds three blasts every quarter of an hour, a sound that tradition associates with the lament for the death of Christ. On the rise of San Pasquale the re-enactment of the Passion in period costume is renewed every year.

CICCI DI SANTA LUCIA

A devotional culinary tradition based on pulses and grains, prepared for the feast of Santa Lucia on 13 December.

II. Flavours of Irpinia

People eat and drink here as they always have: with what the land and the river have been able to give.



Turnip tops and potatoes, cured meats and Caciocavallo Silano PDO — pillars of the local table.

Rape e patate — turnip tops with potatoes, the iconic dish of Irpinia's cooking of poverty. *Caciocavallo Silano PDO* — a pillar of local cheesemaking, often enjoyed "hanged" and melted over the fire.

Salt cod, a tradition taken seriously

Local tradition holds that the first cargo reached Irpinia thanks to a ship's captain from Chiusano San Domenico, for the Christmas holidays: ever since, salt cod — left to soak in the houses of Atripalda before Christmas — has been an indispensable December dish. For generations the Thursday market has hosted a stall devoted exclusively to selling it.

The DOCG wines of Irpinia

Fiano di Avellino DOCG — an elegant, long-lived white with notes of dried fruit and minerality. *Greco di Tufo DOCG* — savouriness from the volcanic soils of Tufo. *Taurasi DOCG* — from Aglianico grapes, the "Barolo of the South".

TYPICAL PRODUCTS OF THE SURROUNDINGS

Chestnut of Montella PGI · Black truffle of Bagnoli Irpino · Irpinian nougat · Hazelnut of Avellino · Extra virgin olive oil PDO Irpinia-Colline dell'Ufita.

TERMOPOLIO

At the end of June, three days of street food, tastings and music in the old town, with special free opening of the Archaeological Park of Abellinum.

12. The Calendar of Events

So you don't arrive on the wrong weekend – or better still, so you can choose the right one on purpose.

8–9 February	Focaroni of San Sabino and the Holy Manna: devotional bonfires, Holy Mass and the distribution of the Holy Manna in honour of the patron.
Easter	Re-enactment of the Passion: a procession in period costume on the rise of San Pasquale.
May	European Night of Museums: special evening opening of the Dogana dei Grani and the Park of Abellinum.
June	Termopolio: three days of street food, local wine and music, with special opening of Abellinum.
7–16 July	Feast of Maria SS. del Carmelo: novena, religious celebrations and civic events, culminating in the procession of 16 July.
July	I luoghi della musica: international chamber music festival in Irpinia.
Summer	Abellinum Events: a season of cinema, concerts and night visits to the archaeological park.
August	Segnali: a music festival for young audiences.
16 September	Anniversary of the translation of the relics of San Sabino to the Specus Martyrum (1612).

13. A Short Step from Atripalda

Not a stop, but a base: from here the best of Campania is close at hand.

Staying in Atripalda rather than in Naples or on the Amalfi Coast buys you the quiet of a real historic centre, a rhythm not dictated by mass tourism, and fairer prices. Thanks to the nearby A16 motorway, every destination — from the vineyards of Taurasi to the beaches of Amalfi, from the Bay of Naples to the Sanctuary of Montevergine — remains within reach for a day trip.

The Irpinia of wine

Atripalda lies within the area of Fiano di Avellino DOCG. Half an hour's drive away: Tufo, with cellars dug into the tuff, and Taurasi (35 km), heart of the "Barolo of the South" and home to a Lombard marquisal castle. Along the same route lies Lapio, a classic stop for e-bike wine tourism.

The Sanctuary of Montevergine

At Mercogliano, at 1,270 metres, the most important Marian place of worship in southern Italy, with the icon of the "Mamma Schiavona". The funicular from Mercogliano takes 7 minutes.

The sea and Naples

Salerno (half an hour by car) opens onto the Amalfi Coast, with ferries to Amalfi, Positano and Capri. Naples, from Molo Beverello, reaches Capri, Ischia, Procida and the Sorrento peninsula. The airports of Naples-Capodichino and Salerno-Costa d'Amalfi are also close by.



The Sanctuary of Montevergine and, in the distance, the Amalfi Coast.

14. Appendix — Folk Tales and Legends

Not everything that is told actually happened, but all of it belongs to the town.

Alongside documented history, Atripalda preserves a heritage of tales and oral traditions handed down from one generation to the next. These are narratives without documentary support: we gather them here, kept apart from the historical body of the guide, as a living part of the town's culture and identity.

The ghost of Palazzo Caracciolo

The best-known legend tells of a mysterious presence said to haunt the building. In February 2014 a photograph showing a figure at one of the palace windows circulated online, causing a great stir. Checks established that it was a montage (a Carnival prank), but the episode entered the popular imagination, fed by the building's state of abandonment after the earthquake of 1980.

A note on the legend of "Pasquone"

Among the local tales, a figure known as "Pasquone", connected with Palazzo Caracciolo, is sometimes mentioned. It has not been possible to find any text setting down the story in written form: in all likelihood it is a purely oral tradition. Anyone who knows the tale as handed down in the town is invited to send it to the Pro Loco or the municipality so that it can be collected and officially recorded.

15. Practical Information and Accessibility

The last page — the one you actually keep to hand.

Atripalda is fully integrated into the urban area of Avellino and makes an ideal base for exploring western Irpinia. There are no active railway stations in the municipality: travelling by car or by bus is recommended.

By air	Naples-Capodichino airport (61 km) or Salerno-Costa d'Amalfi airport
By car	A16 motorway, exits Avellino Est (SS7) or Avellino Ovest (Mercogliano)
City buses	Lines 1, 2 and 4 (Atripalda–Avellino–Mercogliano); Line 9 (Alvanite district)
Regional buses	Via Appia stop for services from Salerno, Fisciano, Baronissi, Lancusi, Solofra and Serino

Useful contacts

Municipality of Atripalda	Piazza Municipio, 1 — tel. +39 0825 615300 — www.comune.atripalda.av.it
Pro Loco Atripaldese	Via Roma, 151-152 — tel. +39 0825 756412 — www.prolocoatripalda.it
Official tourist portal	www.visitatripalda.eu



This guide tells the story of Atripalda between history and tradition, but the best way to experience it is to let yourself be led, step by step.

WWW.VISITATRIPALDA.EU