

## » WHERE ELSE: Subiaco

### Masterpieces hidden in the hills

by Tiffany Parks

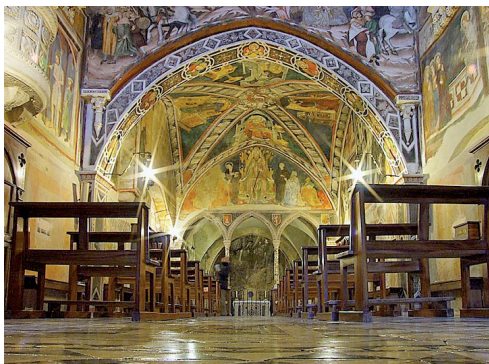
Dotting the hills east of Rome lie artistic treasures worthy of any capital city, but instead they're nestled in tiny towns with names you've never heard of. These wonders of medieval and Renaissance art would attract droves of tourists, were they in any other part of the world. But eclipsed by the daunting artistic patrimony that is Rome, these towns remain in the shadows, unexplored by the vast majority of tourists. All the better for the intrepid traveller who yearns to leap off the well-worn tour bus route and search for less obvious –and more rewarding– treasure, often with nary another visitor in sight.

One such town is Subiaco, a medieval village, little more than a speck on the map. It was here that 6th-century monk St. Benedict lived as a hermit in a cave later known as the **Sacro Speco**. He went on to found the Benedictine religious order, building 13 monasteries along the valley of the Anio River. **St. Scholastica**, his first and only surviving monastery, is one of the town's brightest gems, located just south of the medieval center. Also the site of Italy's first printing press, here Cicero's *De Oratore* became the first book printed in Italy, in 1465. Don't miss the crumbling frescoes in the harmonious 12th-century Cosmatesque cloister and the overgrown 14th-century Gothic cloister with its ancient well. Piazzale S. Scolastica, 1. Open daily, 9am-12:30pm and 3:30-6:30pm. Obligatory guided tour, donation requested. [www.benedettini-subiaco.it](http://www.benedettini-subiaco.it)



Not far away, **St. Benedict's Monastery**, built upon the **Sacro Speco** cave, is a masterpiece of medieval art and more than worth the pilgrimage from Rome, be it religious or artistic. The 13th-century monastery juts dramatically over the edge of a cliff: an evocative setting for the frescoes within. Highlights include the magnificently frescoed Holy Staircase and Upper Church, St. Gregory's Chapel with its portrait of St. Francis of Assisi painted during his lifetime, and the 9th-century Byzantine frescoes in the oldest parts of the monastery. Via dei Monasteri. Open daily, 9am-12:30pm and 3-6pm. Free. [www.benedettini-subiaco.it](http://www.benedettini-subiaco.it)

*How to get there: Just 27km east of Rome, Subiaco makes a convenient day trip and is easily reachable on public transport. Take the Metro B line to Ponte Mammolo, and from there grab a Blue Cotral bus. If you have your own wheels, take the A24 autostrada, then switch to the SS5 Tiburtina-Valeria until Arsoli. From there, take the scenic Via Sublacense, an ancient street laid by Emperor Nero.*



### Info

#### WHERE TO EAT:

##### Il Cantuccio

A cozy and romantic spot to indulge in some fine regional cuisine in the heart of the old town. Via Fabio Filzi, 38.

##### La Rusticana

A casual and welcoming eatery with hearty dishes like its specialty, barbecued meat. Via Giovanni XXIII, 66.

##### Fra' Diavolo

For a relaxing meal after a long day of sightseeing, a pizza might just hit the spot. Contrada Colle Perino, 15.

#### WANT TO STAY THE NIGHT?

For an authentic Subiaco experience, stay in a section of the **St. Scholastica Monastery** that has been turned into an elegant hotel with all the modern comforts. La Foresteria del Monastero di Santa Scolastica. Via dei Monasteri. Tel 077485569.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Subiaco is the birthplace of one of the Renaissance's most infamous personalities: Lucrezia Borgia, the adored daughter of 'Evil Pope' Alexander VI. She was born in the Rocca Abbaziale, an 11th-century fortress that dominates the medieval village. Her long, blond hair and incomparable beauty were legendary – as were her unusually close relationship with her father and her supposed talent for poisoning.