

# Cugnoli opens its medieval stone cellars for Christmas

Posted on November 13, 2026 by Alina Trabattoni

CUGNOLI, Abruzzo — Cugnoli, a hill village of 1,324 people in Abruzzo's Pescara province, will open its medieval stone storerooms on November 28 and 29 for the third edition of Natale al Borgo (Christmas in the Village), a market whose organisers expect 10,000 visitors.

"For this third edition we wanted to raise the bar even further on craftsmanship and on what we offer visitors," said Valentina Giacomelli, president of Borgo in Movimento, the nonprofit association behind the event. "Natale al Borgo is not just a market, but an experience that brings out the beauty of our historic centre."

"When it comes to promoting responsible and regenerative tourism, culturally connective and immersive experiences like the 'Natale al Borgo' event in Cugnoli provide both economic and social opportunities for the community," said Sara Braun, a researcher in small cities and urban regeneration at the Politecnico di Torino (Turin Polytechnic University). "If executed with residents' needs in mind for services and visitor management, this holiday festival becomes a moment of collective community participation and the promotion and preservation of local artisan traditions."

#### Inside the fondaci

Instead of rows of wooden huts, the stalls fill the *fondaci* (stone storerooms), which stay shut for the rest of the year. Last year more than 55 artisans took part, and organisers put attendance at 5,000.

"When we watch a sculptor choose a stone, use their tools and create something, we feel involved,

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like we are part of the creation we have witnessed," said Dr Tracy King, a clinical psychologist and travel advisor.

"If I were planning tourism for the event, I would suggest offering bookable artisan visits all year," said Andrés Serra, head of operations at Optimise Travel.

The headline exhibitor is Luigi D'Alimonte, a sculptor born in Pescara and based in Cugnoli who works only in Majella stone, the pale stone quarried from the nearby mountain massif. In 2023 he carved a contemporary version of the Warrior of Capestrano, an ancient statue that has become a symbol of Abruzzo.



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Various, Cugnoli (*Credits: Giacomelli*)

Carving runs deep in these hills. Nearby Lettomanoppello was once nicknamed Little Carrara, after the Tuscan marble town, for its stonecutters.

“The weekend should be treated as the beginning of the relationship, not the product,” said Liam Lafferty, founder of Zentive.

He will be joined by ceramists and glassblowers, while food comes from Caseificio Del Mastro, a family cheesemaker from Sant’Eufemia a Maiella, and the producers of Assaporando l’Abruzzo. Children get Father Christmas, giant soap bubbles, and readings under Nati per Leggere (Born to Read), a national programme promoting reading aloud to young children since 1999.

#### A wider bet

Cugnoli is following a well trodden path. The village of Govone in Piedmont has turned its Christmas village into an attraction that drew half a million visitors in 2025, while the living nativity in Rivisondoli, in Abruzzo, pulled more than 5,000 people in January 2026 despite a very rainy month.

For Cugnoli the stakes are local. On October 9, 2026, it opened a school complex built after the 2009 earthquake, and in Santo Stefano di Sessanio, another Abruzzo village, restoration has been used to fight decline.

For two days, a village that has spent years losing residents will be counting visitors instead.

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