

Gran Sasso and Monte della Laga

Gran Sasso literally means 'the big stone', due to its most striking point: *Corno Grande* (2.912 metres), by far the highest peak in the entire Apennines. The national park *del Gran Sasso e Monte della Laga* is located just across the border of Le Marche in the Abruzzan. The Gran Sasso has the most southern gletsjer of Europe since the one on the Spanish Nevada melted: the *Calderone* gletsjer at 2.700 metres. Once some 9 kilometres long, the gletsjer has reduced to several hundred metres. Around the Corno Grande are two great upland plains. The *Campo Percoli* on the north side and the even larger *Campo Imperatore* on the south side at an altitude of 2.130 metres. In late spring both plains turn into an ocean of flowers.

History

The Gran Sasso and the Monte della Laga both belong to the Apennines, the central mountain ridge of Italy. The Laga are formed of sedimentary clay layers and sand stone. This explains for the numerous streams and waterfalls, because the water does not drain through the soil easily. The Gran Sasso existed from compressed and pushed up coral reef from an old inland sea which converted into limestone and dolomite through the pressure. As the soil is permeable, the tops are bare and the valleys deep with wells, caves and subterranean rivers. This part of the Apennines is geologically turbulent. Not long ago, a heavy earthquake occurred destroying a large part of the city of l'Aquila and made much of its population roofless.

Mountain walking

The national park has been established in 1991 and has a surface area of over 2,000 km². Hikers' paradise! The mountain refuges (refugio's) are open from mid-April until mid-October. In late spring and early summer, the plains and mountain slopes are covered in flowers. The summer months is the best period for climbing. In September and October the weather is often very stable and panorama's unforgettable. And, last but not least, the winter walks in the snow are amazing!

How to get there

To visit the national park del Gran Sasso e Monte della Laga from Sopra e Sotto, you either take the coastal motorway (160 kilometres, almost 2.5 hours) or you take the inland route which is shorter (130 kilometres), but takes longer (3 hours).