

Vantage points in Rome:

Do you know of Monte Ciocci?

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Off the beaten path, Parks, Rome 101, Vatican Area

Unless you're an expat in Rome or have been in the city for a long while, chances are you've never heard of *Monte Ciocci*. That's not unusual, as visitors to Rome usually cover a rather limited area when they're here, and those who like exploring off the beaten path districts and landmarks usually go for southern district neighborhoods rather than more northern ones.

This is why Monte Ciocci and its surroundings are relatively unknown to most foreigners. We say "most" because it's not like the place is deserted: as a matter of fact, thousands of people walk or bike by it every day. This is because Monte Ciocci is the highest point in a popular bike lane we already told you all about in a dedicated post for training enthusiasts, here.

Monte Ciocci also doubles up as one of the highest vantage points in Rome, and one where the sights are not only beautiful, but also surprising. From here you will get to see the entirety (or most part of it) of the north districts in central Rome, as well as a completely unfamiliar view of Vatican City from the back. This can give history buffs more insight on how strategic the building of the Vatican was for military and defense purposes. In spite of this, this hill rarely ends up in lists and guidebooks.

A very short history of the Monte Ciocci area

Whole books could be written about this part of the city and its unique features. For the scope of this blog post, however, suffice to say that this hill and the valley below it (Valle Aurelia) were the homes to several brickworks, which were used to build St. Peter's Basilica. Now only two of them remain, with the others torn apart to build apartment buildings. One of them ("Fornace Veschi") has been embedded in the nearby mall, "Aura".

This is also one of the first areas of Rome where eucalypt trees were planted, in the early 1930s, as an experiment to keep the Monte Ciocci hill from crumbling down in the valley below. Partly because of this, Monte Ciocci is now part of the Parco di Monte Mario and the bike lane, established in 2014, has brought some modernity in a place that was otherwise so wild it has been extensively used as a backdrop to many a movie and tv show.

How to get to Monte Ciocci

Monte Ciocci sits on top of the Valle Aurelia subway stop and the train station by the same name. Make sure you don't climb up to the railway platform though, or you will miss the pathways to the hill entirely. Or better yet, once at the subway station, exit it and look for a flight of steps on Via Anastasio II, on the back of the subway station itself. Other access points are on Via Pietro De Cristofaro, Via Apuleio, Via Domizia Lucilla.

Finding the top of the hill is actually very simple. Look for the parking lot at the base of the station, look North from there... and start climbing: the hill is yours to explore!