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THE TINY RIVERSIDE HAMLET OF BORGO A MOZZANO, ITS DEVIL'S BRIDGE AND HALLOWEEN CELEBRATION

Very well known for its fascinating medieval stone bridge and Halloween celebration, the village of Borgo a Mozzano is located about half an hour from Lucca and represents a nice stop on the way to the Garfagnana, the Lunigiana and the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines. Is its bridge truly a diabolic construction as legend has it?

Situated between the **Garfagnana** and the **Lucchesia** - approximately half an hour's drive from Lucca - is the tiny riverside village of **Borgo a Mozzano**, very well known for its fascinating stone bridge,

which resembles the back of a donkey. Also known as *Ponte della Maddalena* (Mary Magdalene's Bridge), the **Devil's Bridge** of Borgo a Mozzano climbs steeply up and over the **Serchio River** and since it seems to challenge the force of gravity, it falls into the **Devil's Bridge category**, which contains dozens of European and non-European bridges. Most of these bridges were constructed in the Middle Ages and were considered beyond human capabilities of mortal engineering of time. For this reason, each of them has a corresponding **Devil-related myth**.

A little bit of history

Probably built in the 11th-12th centuries under **Matilda of Canossa**, this four-arch asymmetric bridge was a vital river crossing on the *Via Francigena*, a popular medieval pilgrimage route. Renovated in 1300 under **Castruccio Castracani**, it was mentioned in a 14th-century *novella* (short story) by **Giovanni Sercambi** and later named *Ponte della Maddalena* after an oratory devoted to **Mary Magdalene**, whose statue stood at the bridge's eastern entrance. The Devil's Bridge is basically the only worthy attraction of the village, however, the village itself is a nice stop on the way to the **Garfagnana**, the Lunigiana and the **Tuscan-Emilian Apennines**. The village has also more recently become the meeting point to celebrate the best **Halloween** in Tuscany.

The devilish legend behind the bridge

A long long time ago, so the story goes, an esteemed and clever **Master builder** was asked to build this bridge. The man buckled down to work immediately, but he soon realized that things were not going ahead as quickly as he had promised. Since he was used to honour his commitments, the man fell into deep despair. The Master builder started working around the clock, but it turned out to be useless anyway: the days went by faster and faster while difficulties proliferated.

One evening, the man was sitting alone on the riverbank and as he was thinking of the shame he would suffer for not having completed the bridge on time, the **Devil** appeared to him, dressed up as a respectable businessman. The Devil told the Master builder that he could finish the bridge in just one night if the man would promise him the soul of the first creature who crossed the bridge once it was completed. The Master builder accepted and the next day the bridge was finished. The villagers were overjoyed and went towards the man to thank him for his work; as soon as he could talk, he warned them not to cross the bridge until sunset and set off on horseback for Lucca to speak with the **Bishop** . The Bishop told the Master builder not to worry and to let the Devil have the soul of the first to walk over the bridge: the first to walk over the bridge was to be a pig. So, a pig was forced to pass over the bridge and the Devil, furious at having been tricked, jumped into the waters and disappeared for good. Of course, this is only a legend but if you walk over this bridge, especially on misty nights, you will realize **there is something about this place that is really unsettling**.

The Halloween celebration

The Garfagnana area around Lucca has always been considered a bewitched land, no wonder that a village with such a bridge has become one of the best destinations to celebrate Halloween in Italy. In

the beginning, celebrations were attended only by some youths from Lucca, Pisa and **Livorno**; however, over the years, the party around the Devil's Bridge has become more and more popular. Although the official website has not been translated into English yet, you can have a look at www.halloweencelebration.it and get a sense of the celebration. Another interesting Halloween party is held at the Malaspina Castle in Fosdinovo, province of **Massa-Carrara**; however, that's another story...

Interested in visiting Borgo a Mozzano and perhaps meeting the Devil? Then book your favourite Florence car rent and take a devilish picture if you can!