

PIEMONTE PANORAMA

an Experiential Adventure

13 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Torino/Turin

Welcome to Piemonte!

Today the group arrives at Torino (Turin) Airport (TRN).

Italy's second-largest region is arguably its most elegant: a purveyor of Slow Food and fine wine, regal palazzi, and an atmosphere that is superficially more Français than Italiano. But dig deeper and you'll discover that Piemonte (aka Piedmont) has 'Made in Italy' stamped all over it. Emerging from the chaos of the Austrian wars, the unification movement first exploded here in the 1850s, when the noble House of Savoy provided the nascent nation with its first prime minister and its dynastic royal family. Today, most conflicts are disagreements over favourite wines and who has the best recipes, in a charming laid back region not unlike nearby Tuscany in look and atmosphere, but without the crowds and high prices!

Overnight in Torino.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Torino: Town Tour - Transfer to Asti Area

This morning we enjoy a tour of Torino with a local guide.

The industrial grey and polluted "car city", as Torino was known until the end of the 1990s, has nowadays given way to an elegant, vibrant, and cosmopolitan metropolis that will pleasantly surprise even the most well-travelled visitor. With two thousand years of history, Torino developed from a Roman military settlement to the capital of the kingdom of the House of Savoy, and in 1861 became the first capital of the newly-unified Italian nation. As a result, the urban grid spread with large tree-lined boulevard, baroque facades, and art-nouveau covered shopping galleries can remind of some corner of Paris even though a unique local character is predominant. In more recent times, Torino hosted the 2006 Winter Olympic Games, an event that changed the face of the city. Among many attractions, we mention the Holy Shroud – an important (and controversial) relic for Christianity – which is displayed periodically and the second largest Egyptian museum in the world. Today Torino is a technology and design centre, as well as a university campus with students from all over the country.

Our walking tour gravitates around the central Piazza Castello with a look at the magnificent Church of Saint Lawrence, a masterpiece of baroque architecture. From the Royal theatre, down to Piazza Carignano and to the XVIII century Piazza San Carlo, our guide reveals hidden private courtyards and leads discussion on the social changes that Torino has faced throughout history.

After a break for lunch and some free time, we'll transfer to our Agriturismo surrounded by vineyards in the Asti Region near Torino (+/- 90 minute drive). For four nights we are based at a 4-star 'agriturismo' south of Asti proper. Typically, an agriturismo is an independently-owned farm that the owners have decided to use partially – although usually only partially – for accommodation purposes. That means that, 90 percent of the time, you can expect that the owners of your "hotel" are, primarily, farmers (or people who have someone else farm for them). It's a relaxing and intimate way to experience rural Italy and, since many of Italy's best food traditions aren't found in swanky restaurants, but in nonna's house in the countryside, there's often no better dining than at an agriturismo.

Overnight and dinner near Asti.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Monferrato Hill District: Vineyard Hike & Wine Tasting

This morning we depart the hotel for some leisurely hiking* through the vineyards with a local guide. Our route takes us over the hills where the very last reaches of the Monferrato District meet the Langhe Hills, and where Barbera grapes give way to Moscato and crops of hazelnuts.

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Here the hills are covered in vineyards, with medieval hill towns and ancient castles perched atop their peaks. The scenery is gorgeous, but what really attracts visitors is the outstanding wine and food—Barolo reds, white truffles, handmade pasta, and many more delicacies. Along with Monferrato and Roero, the Langhe was made a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2014 for its cultural landscapes and wine making traditions that go back hundreds of years.

Our day includes a visit to a rustic family-run winery focused Barbera wine. Here the family prepares a lunch of appetizers with seasonal vegetables, a hot pasta course, and a nice selection of salami and cheese. We then hike back to our hotel (2 hours) and enjoy some free time before dinner. Our 4-course dinner this evening will be at a neighbouring agriturismo (15 min drive).

Our Hikes: Because some hikes can/may be adjusted at the discretion of your Tour Leader depending on things like weather and group interest, the final distances/durations of our hikes as indicated in our itinerary should be taken as guidance only. In the meantime, however, we can advise that, generally-speaking, our walks are leisurely on well-trodden pathways over undulating terrain (some walks are downhill), 2-5 hours in overall duration with plenty of breaks for refreshment, photos, and taking it all in.

*Today's hike is the most ambitious of the trip, with three hills to cross on a well-trodden/maintained trail. Our one-way distance is about 6 km (4 mi); a return journey by bus to our hotel is also available (talk to your leader on tour).

Overnight near Asti.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 4 Cooking Class & Acqui Terme Touring

This morning we travel to a farmhouse set in the hills that surround the town of Canelli. We get to enjoy a full hands-on cooking class focused on traditional recipes that will be taught by the Chef and owner of the farmhouse's restaurant. The group will be divided into smaller teams and everyone will have the chance to experience all recipes. Our resulting lunch will then be paired with a glass of wine.

After lunch we proceed to a tour of Acqui Terme with a local guide.

Acquae Statiellae, founded in the second century AD by the Romans, enjoyed an economic and social bloom in its day, many vestiges of which are still visible in the ruins of the thermal spas and aqueduct. The elegant city center blends the modern section with the medieval area called "Pisterna", where the Cathedral dedicated to the Assumption and the Castle of the Paleolithic Dynasty are located. Piazza della Bollente is home to the eclectic temple where visitors can drink the sulphur water naturally emerging from the bowels of the earth at a temperature of 75 degrees Celsius.

You'll have some free time for exploring, shopping and dinner (on your own this evening) after which we return to our hotel.

Overnight near Asti.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 5 Asti Area Touring

We will begin our day by driving to Castiglione Tinella, a small town within the province of Cuneo that overlooks the Langhe hills and the Moscato wine region. It is here that we will begin today's hike. Following a naturalistic trail, our hike will take us through rolling countryside covered in Moscato vineyards, our destination being one of the local wineries.

This afternoon, after our hike, we will transfer to Canelli where we will have a small break for lunch, before exploring the underground cellars of Bosca (where Italian sparkling wine was first produced).

Back at the hotel, we'll have some leisure time before re-grouping for dinner.

Overnight near Asti.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Asti - Rice Mill Tour - Barolo

Today we check-out of our agriturismo and travel by road to Asti. On arrival we will get the chance to explore the food market as well as the main squares of this beautiful Italian town.

We then continue to the Plains of the Po River (an area renowned for the production of Italian rice), where will visit a historic Rice Mill Mulino San Giovanni. Here we'll have the opportunity to learn all about the history and evolution of rice production from a local guide. Stories of the harsh life of yesterday's farmers and employees are combined with the tour of the modern production.

Our visit to the rice region will also include a lunch at a historic restaurant in a rustic setting with excellent locally-inspired food, followed by a tour of Tenuta Colombara (next to the restaurant) where we can see the old farmhouse (a museum) and the modern production of Acquerello, one of the top quality rice brands on the market.

We continue by road to the Barolo area. For a break from the group dynamic (and due to the hearty nature of our lunch today), dinner will be on your own in this charming town.

Overnight in Barolo OR nearby Cherasco.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 7 Hiking in the Barolo Wine Region

This morning we meet our local guide and begin our hike in the area of production of the Barolo wine, over the Langhe Hills. Our trek begins from the main square of the town of Barolo, where the precious wine was first produced. Our route takes us through vineyards and quiet countryside roads off-the-beaten-track, all the way to a different municipality for a total of about 10km/6 mi round-trip.

During the day we will make a stop in the small village of Monforte before then hiking back to our hotel. There will be some leisure time this evening before dinner.

Overnight in Barolo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Truffle Hunting & Wine Tasting

This morning we go on a truffle hunt with a local guide and local dog.

Regardless of the type of truffles (black or white) available in the season when the hunt takes place, the aim of this activity is to show how truffles are found and taken out from the ground. Truffle hunting can be considered a "guided tour" in the woods, where you get a complete presentation on the environment needed for truffles to grow, trees involved, soil characteristics and bits of the hunter's family-story. All aspects of truffles are explained, including the sensory and technical analysis -- essential to understand the quality of the product -- and how truffles are best-preserved and eaten.

We will continue by bus to the town of Alba where we will have some to explore and also take a break for lunch.

This afternoon we will then visit a traditional wine cellar and relax with a tasting of 4 wines.

Overnight in Barolo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Barolo - Mondovi - Walk to Santuario di Vicoforte - Cuneo

Today we check-out of our Barolo hotel and transfer to Mondovi where we have a tour with a local guide.

From the lower part of the modern city built along the Ellero stream, we'll climb via modern funicular to Mondovi Piazza, founded in 1198 by the populations of the villages of Vico, Vasco, and Carassone who rebelled against the bishop of Asti and took refuge in Montereale. The central square on two levels is embellished with fresco-ed façades of houses, palaces, and churches, among which the "Mission" stands out as a high example of Jesuit architecture where Andrea Pozzo practiced his prospective art.

After a break for lunch we'll walk on a secondary countryside road to Vicoforte (+/- 8km/5 mi, 1.5-2 hours). This road is known for a number of chapels representing the stations of the Cross and is a panoramic route. We'll then have a guided tour of Santuario di Vicoforte, featuring the world's second largest elliptical cupola. The dome was built by architect Francesco Gallo on a structure designed about two centuries earlier by Vitozzi on commission of Carlo Emanuele I of Savoy.

We continue by road (40 minutes) to the town of Cuneo for dinner and overnight. Sitting on a promontory of land between two rivers, Cuneo provides excellent alpine views framed by the high pyramid-shaped peak of Monte Viso in the Cottian Alps. There is a raft of reasons why one should visit stately Cuneo, not least being the food, the hiking possibilities nearby, and, last but certainly not least, the city's signature rum-filled chocolates.

Overnight in Cuneo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Hike from Monterosso Grana - Pradleves

This morning we drive to the lower part of Valle Grana. Here we will meet our mountain guide and set off on our hike that takes us from Monterosso Grana to Pradleves. This walk is around 5km in length and will take us through chestnut woods and past countryside chapels.

Later in the morning we then continue to a cheese farm where the famous local Castelmagno cheese is aged in natural grottoes. Castelmagno cheese has ancient origins. It is said it was first produced in the eleventh century, although the first documents referring to it date back to the thirteenth century. Since then, the local cheese factories have been producing it following the ancient traditions, despite a period of low production due to the World Wars. After learning the production process, we enjoy lunch with a cheese selection (5 types), a plate of potato gnocchi with cheese fondue and a glass of wine.

We then drive to the upper part of Valle Grana. True to the meaning of its name ('foot of the mountain'), Piemonte is a land of mountains. It is surrounded on three sides by the Alps, with the highest peaks and largest glaciers in Italy. This afternoon we will complete an easy hike with our local guide to admire the magnificent views of the Alps.

Overnight in Cuneo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 11 The Italian Riviera

This morning we shift gears a bit with a visit to the Italian Riviera. Once we leave behind the Ligurian Alps, you'll be amazed by the quick change of atmosphere, surrounded by lavish Mediterranean vegetation, palm trees, and colourful small towns once fishing villages, built along the coast.

We'll stop in the walled town of Finalborgo, where we can explore the quaint medieval town built in the valley overlooking the sea, boasting monasteries and century-old architecture. We then take a short transfer to a small family-run olive oil mill and sample some bruschetta and olive spread.

Then, we will continue to the town of Noli where we will stop for a traditional lunch in a beachfront restaurant. After lunch there will be some time for us to explore Noli before then transferring to Varigotti for a waterfront walk of around 5km.

Return to Cuneo with dinner on your own this evening.

Overnight in Cuneo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 12 Cuneo - Abbey of Saint Michael - Torino

Today we travel by road to Torino with a stop at the Abbey of Saint Michael en route.

An iconic monument of the Piemonte region, the Abbey of San Michele is undoubtedly one of the most striking architectural highlights of the province of Torino, and is shrouded in legend, mystery, and macabre details. Founded on the rocky spur of Mount Pirchiriano in the Val di Susa (Susa Valley) between 983 and 987, the Sacra is one of the sites dedicated to the Archangel Michael. Intriguingly, the Sacra di San Michele lies in perfect geographic alignment with three other Saint Michael monasteries, on a straight line from Skellig Michael (Ireland), over Saint Michael's Mount (Cornwall, England), to the Monastery of Saint Michael (Symi island, Greece), before coming to an end in Jerusalem at Mount Carmel.

We continue to Torino and our centrally-located hotel with some time at leisure to enjoy Torino before our farewell dinner.

Overnight in Torino.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Departure

Departure from Torino.

ARRIVIDERCI!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast