

# Liguria, Piedmont & Valle d'Aosta



Cathedral-like mountains, Fiat cars, ritzy Mediterranean resorts and artistic football – Liguria, Piedmont and the Valle d'Aosta are the country in microcosm: three culture-defining northwestern enclaves that also generously provided the nation with its first king (Vittorio Emanuele II) and its first capital (Turin).

But, fresh from kick-starting the Risorgimento (Italian unification), the northwest didn't just turn around and retreat back into its shell. On top of its valuable historical relics, Liguria-Piedmont has also ignited many of Italy's gastronomic traditions. The fertile plains of the Po river valley harvest culinary delicacies that are an intrinsic part of any Italian dinner plate – arborio rice, grapes for Barolo wine, basil for earthy pesto and wheat for aromatic focaccia, while its seas are awash with anchovies, octopuses and prawns.

Through the annals of history, erstwhile northwestern movers and shakers include Christopher Columbus, the Count of Cavour, Giovanni Agnelli and Giuseppe Mazzini. It's an illustrious list which, along with some cerebral museums and fine architecture, puts Piedmont-Liguria at the forefront of Italian culture. Yet it fails to explain why the region consistently plays second fiddle to other limelight-hogging highlights such as Tuscany, Venice and Rome.

The upside is there's more elbow room here, and more serendipity. Who knew that the Aosta Valley has a German-speaking Walser minority, or that Cuneo's main square outsizes San Marco, or that in Turin you're more likely to bump into a Torino supporter than a Juventus fan?

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Have a religious experience at the **Stadio Olimpico di Torino** (p232) in Turin watching Juventus or Torino play football
- Run to the hills with only ibexes for company on the untrammelled trails of the **Maritime Alps** (p237)
- Compare the merits of Barolo over Barbaresco with the wine-quaffers of **Alba** (p238)
- Find simple serendipity at a scenic hostel in **Savona** (p215)
- Work out who's French, Italian and German-speaking Walser in the multicultural **Valle d'Aosta** (p245)
- Ski in the tracks of Olympians through the **Milky Way** (p234)



■ POPULATION: LIGURIA 1.6 MILLION; PIEDMONT 4.4 MILLION; VALLE D'AOSTA 127,000

■ AREA: LIGURIA 5413 SQ KM; PIEDMONT 25,399 SQ KM; VALLE D'AOSTA 3262 SQ KM

# LIGURIA

A sinuous arc of land wedged between Piedmont and the sea, Liguria is where the Alps and Apennines cascade precipitously into the Mediterranean. The result is as striking as it is unique, with ancient settlements clinging precariously to granite cliffs, a spectacle that reaches its apex in Cinque Terre: five quintessential Ligurian fishing villages that dangle like crazily perched medieval colonies above the foaming ocean.

Only 7km wide at its narrowest point, Liguria is dominated by Genoa, Italy's largest port. To the west stretches the Riviera di Ponente, a sun-flecked coastal Shangri La that continues as far as the border with France. To the east is the Riviera di Levante, a swankier, more precipitous holiday strip where busy resorts mingle with plushier palm-fringed retreats such as Portofino and Porto Venere, crammed with expensive yachts and Prada-wearing prima donnas.

Despite its diminutive size, Liguria has played a major role in Italian culture. Genoa was once a powerful independent city-state with possessions as far away as the Middle East, while the ingeniously terraced terrain around Cinque Terre remains a showcase for high-quality local produce.

## GENOA

pop 604,800

Contrasting sharply with the elegance of Turin, Genoa is a gargantuan port with a seedy underbelly; its narrow, twisting streets (*caruggi*) are more reminiscent of a Moroccan medina than a romantic Venetian cityscape. The birthplace of such groundbreaking Italians as Columbus and Mazzini, Genoa has a markedly cosmopolitan air, with remnants of a once-great empire evident in its concealed doorways and arty museums.

Deep in the maze of the gritty old town, beauty and the beast sit side-by-side in streets that glimmer like a film noir movie set. Old men smoke languidly outside noisy bars and prostitutes stand like sentries in dark doorways, while on the periphery the quintessential Italy awaits – a glistening fountain, a piazza packed with pigeons and tourists, and one of the most spectacular cathedrals (San Lorenzo) on the whole peninsula.

The Most Serene Republic of Genoa ruled the Mediterranean waves during the 12th to

the 13th centuries before deferring to the superior power of Piedmont. Its crusading noblemen once established colonies in the Middle East and North Africa, and its emblematic flag, the red cross of St George, was greedily hijacked by the English.

Since hosting Expo 1992 and being championed as 2004's European City of Culture, Genoa has undergone some radical renovations with its once-tatty port area now boasting Italy's largest aquarium and the Biosfera, a dome-shaped greenhouse crammed with contrasting ecosystems.

## History

Genoa's name is thought to come from the Latin *ianua*, meaning 'door'. Founded in the 4th century BC, it was an important Roman port and later occupied by Franks, Saracens and the Milanese. The first ring of Genoa's defensive walls was constructed in the 12th century. (The only remaining section of these walls, Porta Soprana, was built in 1155, although what you see today is a restored version.)

A victory over Venice in 1298 led to a period of growth, but bickering between the Grimaldis, Dorias, Spinolas and other dynasties caused internal chaos. The Grimaldis headed west, establishing the principality of Monaco – hence the similarity of Monaco's language, Monegasque, to the Genoese dialect.

In the 16th century, under the rule of Imperial Admiral Andrea Doria, Genoa benefited from financing Spanish exploration. Its coffers swelled further in the 17th century, which saw an outer ring of walls added as the city expanded, and its newly built palaces filled with art, in turn attracting masters such as Rubens. Celebrated architect Galeazzo Alessi (1512–72) designed many of the city's splendid buildings.

The end of the Age of Exploration came as a blow and as the Mediterranean's mercantile importance declined, so did Genoa's. The city languished for centuries.

Genoa was the first northern city to rise against Nazi occupation and the Italian Fascists during WWII, liberating itself before the arrival of Allied troops. After the war the city developed rapidly along the coast, although, by the 1970s, decline had set in once more as big industries folded.

Christopher Columbus is Genoa's most famous son (if indeed he was – see the

## REGIONAL ITINERARY

### NORTHWESTERN FOOD FORAY

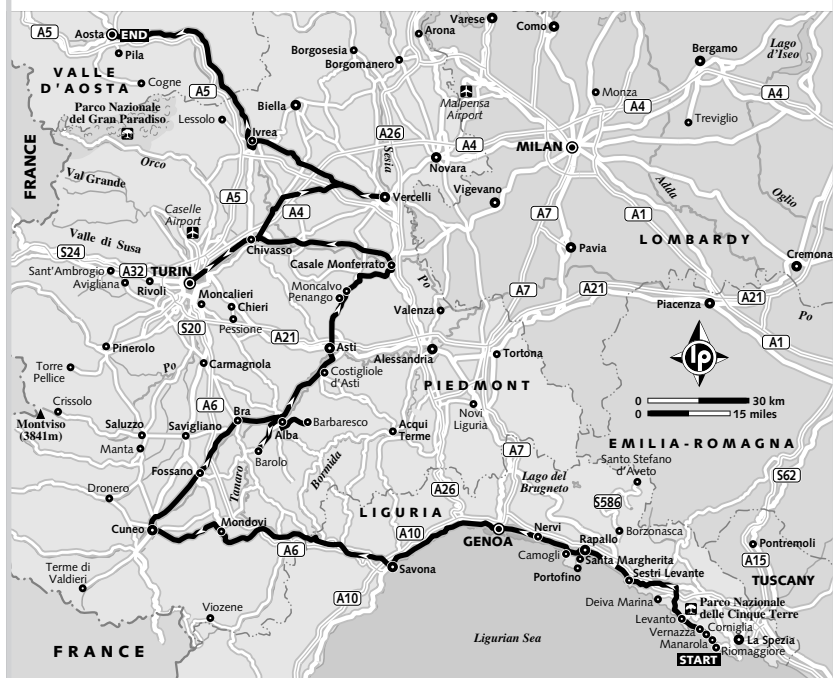
Two Weeks / Riomaggiore / Aosta

While Catholicism is Italy's state religion, the alternative 'faith' of foodism ranks a close second. Never far from the high altar of the national *cucina* (kitchen), the northwest's gastronomic flavours and traditions are globally revered – and there's nothing better than tasting them on their home turf. Start in the Cinque Terre, where fertile clifftops and equally fertile seas have been farmed for centuries. Hit **Riomaggiore** (p210) for its delicious seafood and **Manarola** (p210) for its sweet Sciacchetra wine. Focaccia is kneaded all over Italy, but Liguria proudly claims historical ownership.

You can ply the coast sampling the regional variations, though the crunchy herb bread of **Camogli** (p205) is hard to beat. Go green in **Genoa** (p193), where basil, garlic, cheese, pine nuts and olive oil are blended into a fragrant earthy sauce known as pesto, best served *alla genovese* over *trofie* pasta. *Farinata* is another Ligurian speciality, and you can see the chickpea-flour pancakes being deftly made at the **Vino e Farinata** (p215) in Savona.

Veering inland in time for dessert, you'll fall upon vastly underrated **Cuneo** (p235), famous for its rum-flavoured chocolates. Remember to leave room for **Bra** (p242), birthplace of the Slow Food Movement, before raising a glass to **Barolo** (p240), where robust Nebbiolo grapes are used to concoct the 'king of wines'. **Alba** (p238) is a veritable food heaven plunked in the middle of truffle-land, while **Barbaresco** (p241) is where smoother, younger reds play queen to Barolo's king. **Asti** (p243) holds an annual September food festival, the Delle Sagre, and the area around **Casale Monferrato** (p244) offers a wine-tasting landscape extraordinaire and turreted castles.

Venerated for a Shroud, a football team and one of history's most durable cars, **Turin** (p220) also hosts some of the most evocative coffee bars in the nation. For risotto, head to the rice-growing region of **Vercelli** (p245), before having all your Italian food preconceptions blown out of the water in mountainous **Aosta** (p247), home of polenta, spicy sausages and tangy *fontina* cheese.



### OUR TOP FIVE RESTAURANTS IN LIGURIA, PIEDMONT & VALLE D'AOSTA

- **La Lanterna** – Riomaggiore (p210)
- **Locanda da Peiu** – Cuneo (p236)
- **L'Ostu dij Baloss** – Saluzzo (p238)
- **Ristorante Rabayà** – Barbaresco (p241)
- **Vecchia Aosta** – Aosta (p250)

boxed text, p200). In 1992 the 500th anniversary of his seminal voyage to America transformed Genoa's ancient harbour from a decaying backwater into a showpiece for the city. Renzo Piano orchestrated the overhaul, adding a number of striking permanent attractions. Two years later, Genoa was named a European City of Culture, spurring on further renovations and additions to the cityscape, including several new museums and a much-needed metro system. But for all its sprucing up, Genoa retains a rough-and-tumble charm.

### Orientation

Genoa sprawls along the coast for 30km and is served by an impressive 15 train stations. The city centre stretches between the two main stations, Stazione Principe (to the west) and Stazione Brignole (to the east). Via XX Settembre, the elegant main shopping strip, starts just southwest of Stazione Brignole and spills into the city's focal point, Piazza de Ferrari. The old town winds west of the piazza towards the port and around the waterfront towards Stazione Principe.

### Information

#### BOOKSHOPS

**La Feltrinelli** (☎ 010 54 08 30; Via XX Settembre 231-233r) English-language novels on the 1st floor.

**Libreria Porto Antico** (☎ 010 251 84 22; Palazzina Milo, Porto Antico) Limited selection of English-language novels, tourist books on Genoa, maps and Lonely Planet titles.

#### EMERGENCY

**Police station** (☎ 010 5 36 61; Via Armando Diaz 2)

#### INTERNET ACCESS

There's a handful of small internet cafes in and around Via Balbi near Stazione Principe.

Others regularly pop up (and close down) in the city centre – check with the city's tourist information kiosk for updates. Online access costs around €3 to €5 per hour.

**Internet Cafe** (☎ 011 868 89 79; Via Balbi 110; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 2-8pm Sat) Near Stazione Principe.

#### LAUNDRY

**Ondablu** (Via Antonio Gramsci 181; ☎ 8am-10pm) Self-service laundromat.

#### LEFT LUGGAGE

Expect to pay around €3 for 24 hours at **station offices** (Stazione Brignole; Piazza Giuseppe Verdi; ☎ 7am-9pm; Stazione Principe; Piazza Acquaverde; ☎ 6am-midnight).

#### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Ospedale San Martino** (☎ 010 55 51; Largo Rosanna Benci 10) Hospital.

#### POST

**Post office** Main post office (Via Dante; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Sat); Stazione Principe (☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat)

#### TOURIST INFORMATION

There are tourist offices at the airport, ferry terminal and Stazione Principe. There's also a **kiosk** (Genova Informa; ☎ 010 24 87 11; www.apg.genova.it; Piazza Giacomo Matteotti; ☎ 9.30am-7.45pm) in the city centre adjacent to Piazza de Ferrari.

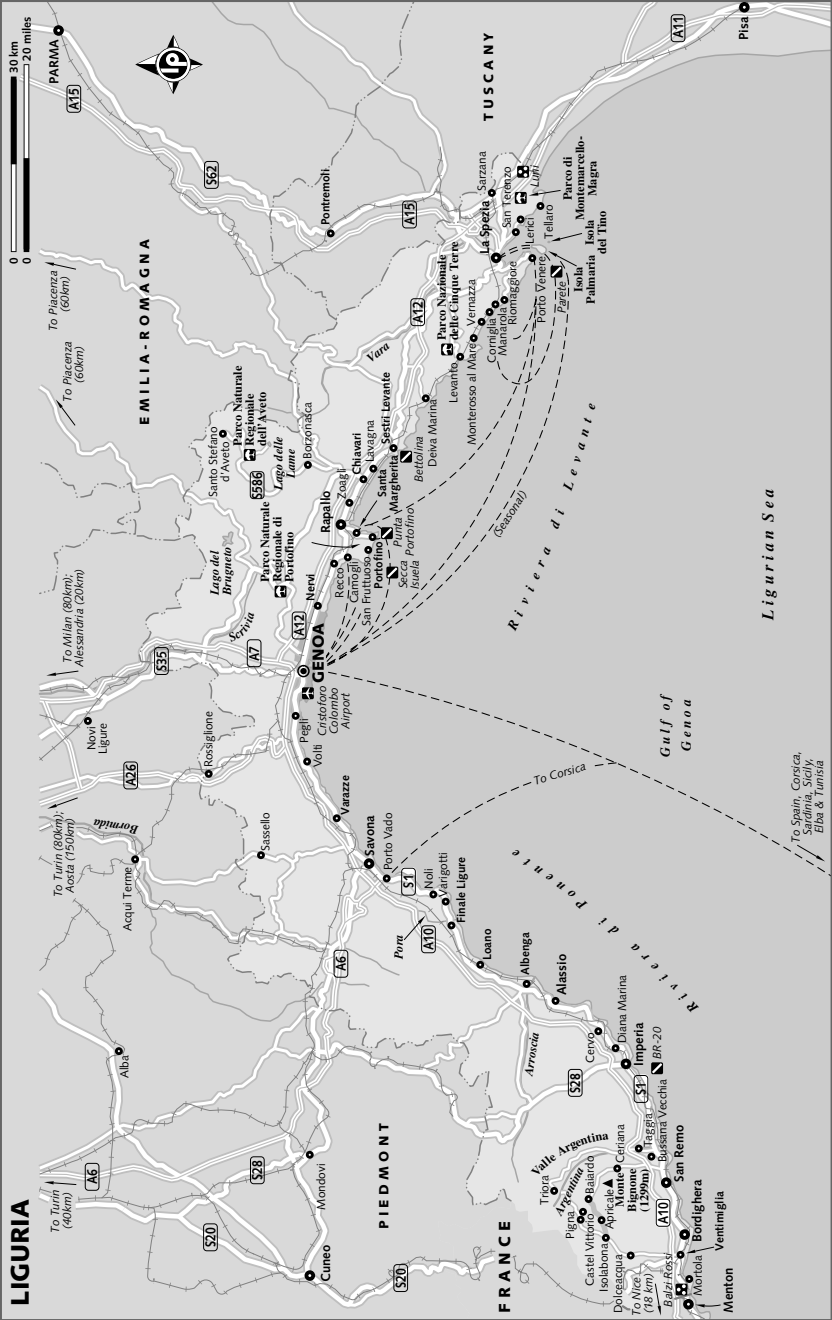
### Sights

Dozens of Genoa's palaces built between 1576 and 1664 were placed on the Unesco World Heritage list in 2006; the website www.irolli.it maps their locations.

#### PIAZZA DE FERRARI

After the asphyxiation of the *caruggi*, this fountain-embellished main piazza ringed by magnificent buildings feels as if you've just come up for air. Showcase architecture includes the art nouveau **Palazzo della Borsa** (closed to the public), which was once the country's stock exchange; and the neoclassical **Teatro Carlo Felice** (p203).

Also on the square is the **Palazzo Ducale** (☎ 010 557 40 00; www.palazzoducale.genova.it; in Italian; Piazza Giacomo Matteotti 9; €5-10; ☎ exhibitions 9am-9pm Tue-Sun), accessed via Piazza Giacomo Matteotti. Once the seat of the city's rulers, it hosts a few small specialist museums and archives, including the **Museo del Jazz** (☎ 010 58 52 41; www.italianjazzinstitute.com, in Italian; admission free;



### MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR EURO

Serial museum-goers should pick up the **Card Musei** (Museum Card; [www.museigenova.it](http://www.museigenova.it); card €16). The card gives free admission to around 20 of Genoa's museums and discounted access to several more over a period of 48 hours. You can buy it at various museums, information booths or online at [www.happyticket.it](http://www.happyticket.it).

☎ 4-7pm Mon-Sat, by reservation), with a collection of original recordings. High-profile temporary art exhibitions are held in the *palazzo*, which also has a bookshop, cafe and restaurants.

### CATTEDRALE DI SAN LORENZO

A stunner even by Italian standards, Genoa's black-and-white-striped **cathedral** (Piazza San Lorenzo; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 3.30-7pm) owes its continued existence to the poor quality of a British WWII bomb that failed to ignite here in 1941. Fronted by twisting columns and crouching lions, it was first consecrated in 1118. The two bell towers and cupola were added in the 16th century.

Inside, above the central doorway, there's a great lunette with a painting of the Last Judgment, the work of an anonymous Byzantine painter of the early 14th century. In the sacristy, the **Museo del Tesoro** (☎ 010 247 18 31; adult/child €5.50/4.50; ☎ tours 9am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Sat) preserves various dubious holy relics, including the medieval Sacro Catino, a glass vessel once thought to be the Holy Grail. Other artefacts include the polished quartz platter upon which Salome is said to have received John the Baptist's head, and a fragment of the True Cross.

### CHIESA DEL GESÙ

The highlight of the **Chiesa del Gesù** (Piazza Giacomo Matteotti; ☎ 4.30-7pm), built in 1597 on the foundations of a medieval church, are two works by Rubens. *Circoncisione* hangs over the main altar, and *Miracoli di San Ignazio* is displayed in a side chapel.

### VIA GARIBALDI & AROUND

Skirting the northern edge of what was once the city limits, pedestrianised Via Garibaldi (formerly called the Strada Nuova; [www.stradanuova.it](http://www.stradanuova.it)) was planned by Galeazzo Alessi in the 16th century. It quickly became

the city's most sought-after quarter, lined with the palaces of Genoa's wealthiest citizens.

The most elaborate facade belongs to the 1563 **Palazzo Lomellino** (☎ 010 595 70 60; [www.palazzolomellino.org](http://www.palazzolomellino.org); Via Garibaldi 7; admission varies depending on exhibit; ☎ vary). The grey blue exterior is festooned with stucco adornments, while the internal courtyard is dominated by an 18th-century *nymphaeum* (monument to the nymphs). Upstairs, the remarkably preserved 17th-century frescoes by Bernardo Strozzi were only uncovered in 2002, after languishing for almost 300 years above a false ceiling. They depict allegories of the New World, in homage to the palace's one-time owners, the Centurione family, who financed Columbus' voyages.

Just east of Via Garibaldi, a path from Piazza Corvetto twists through terraced gardens to the **Museo d'Arte Orientale** (☎ 010 54 22 85; Piazzale Mazzini 1; adult/child €4/2.80; ☎ 9am-1pm Tue-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun). With some 20,000 items, including porcelain, bronzes, costumes and musical instruments, it brings together one of Europe's largest collections of Japanese art. Heading southwest, elegant **Via Roma**, with its art nouveau boutiques, and adjacent glass-covered **Galleria Mazzini**, is Genoa's most exclusive designer-shopping street. It links Piazza Corvetto with Piazza de Ferrari.

### Musei di Strada Nuova

Three of Via Garibaldi's grand palaces, Rosso, Bianco and Doria-Tursi, comprise the **Musei di Strada Nuova** (☎ 010 246 77 86; combined ticket adult/child €8/free; ☎ 9am-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun). Between them, they hold the city's finest collection of old masters.

Tickets must be purchased at the bookshop inside **Palazzo Doria-Tursi** (☎ 010 247 63 51; Via Garibaldi 9). The palace's Sala Paganiniana has a small but absorbing collection of legendary violinist Niccolò Paganini's personal effects. Pride of place goes to his 'Canone' violin, made in Cremona in 1743. One lucky musician gets to play the maestro's violin during October's Paganiniana festival. Other artefacts on show include letters, musical scores and his travelling chess set. The palace has housed Genoa's town hall since 1848.

Lavishly frescoed rooms in **Palazzo Rosso** (☎ 010 247 63 51; [www.museopalazzorosso.it](http://www.museopalazzorosso.it); Via Garibaldi 18) are the backdrop for several portraits by Van Dyck of the local Brignole-Sale family. Other standouts include Guido Reni's



San Sebastiano and Guercino's *La morte di Cleopatra*, as well as works by Veronese, Dürer and Bernardo Strozzi.

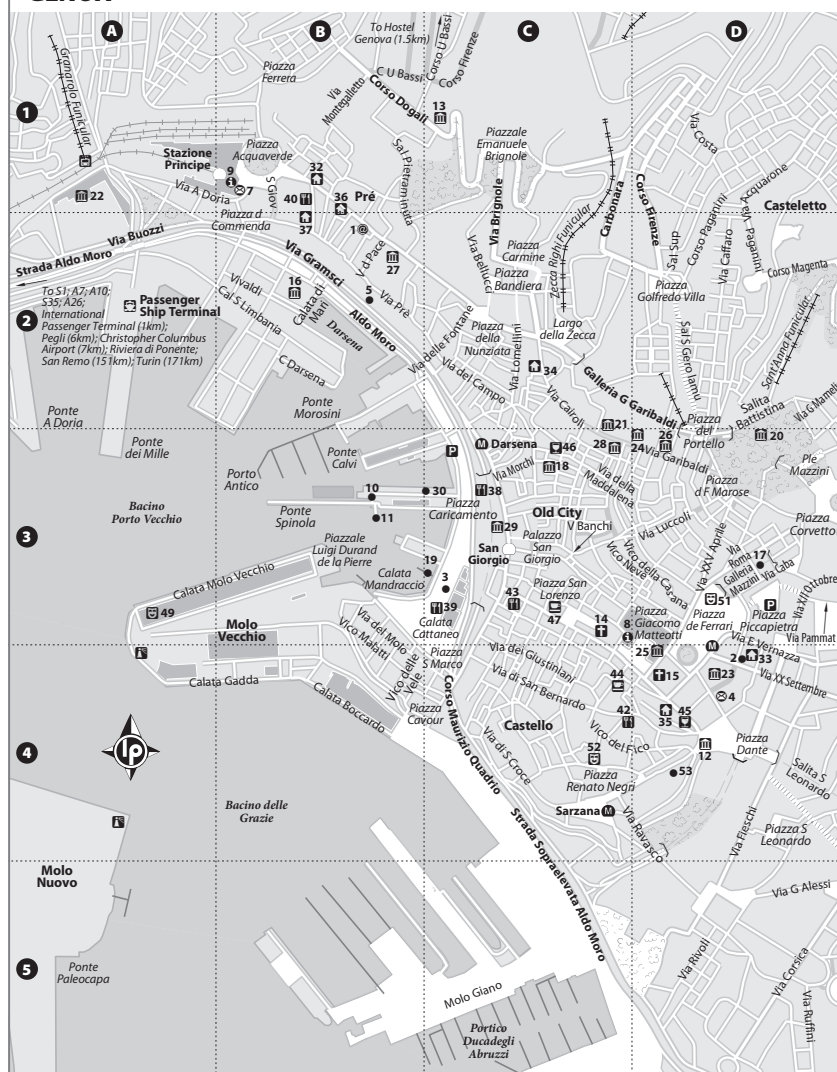
Flemish, Spanish and Italian artists feature at **Palazzo Bianco** (☎ 010 247 63 51; [www.museo.palazzobianco.it](http://www.museo.palazzobianco.it); Via Garibaldi 11). Rubens' *Venere e Marte* and Van Dyck's *Vertumna e Pomona* are among the highlights, which also in-

clude works by Hans Memling, Filippino Lippi and Murillo, as well as 15th-century religious icons.

## OLD CITY

The heart of medieval Genoa – bounded by Porta dei Vacca, the waterfront streets Via Cairoli, Via Garibaldi and Via XXV Aprile,

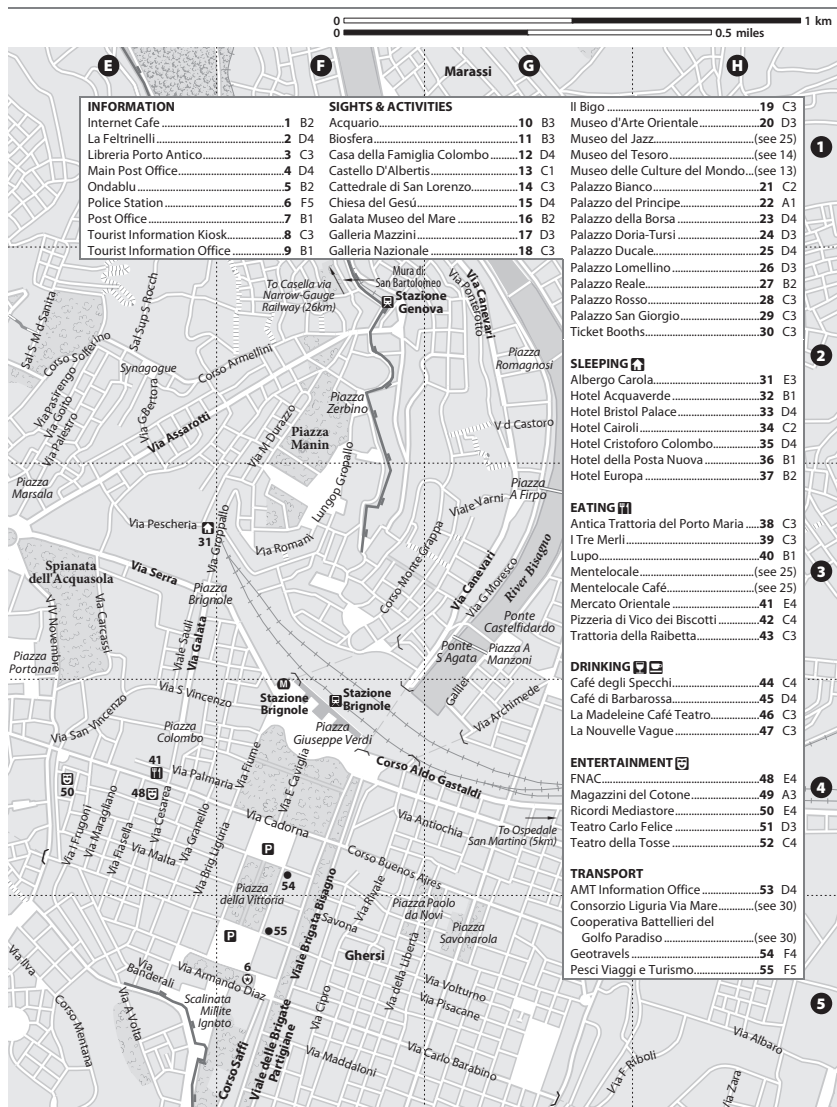
## GENOA



and the Porta Soprana – is its maze of *caruggi*. As evidenced by the washing pegged on lines strung outside the buildings, these dark, almost cavelike laneways and dank, odoriferous blind alleys are largely residential, with a sprinkling of bars, shops and cafes. Particularly after dark, parts of the *caruggi* can feel somewhat unnerving. Although it's not overly danger-

ous (especially compared with a decade ago), take care in the zone west of Via San Luca and south to Piazza Banchi, where most of the old city's lowlife (prostitution, drugs and so on) concentrates. East of the piazza is Via Orefici, where you'll find market stalls.

Terraced gardens surround **Palazzo Reale** (☎ 010 27 1 01; [www.palazzorealegenova.it](http://www.palazzorealegenova.it), in Italian;





## HOME OF COLUMBUS?

Genoa is heralded as the birthplace of Christopher Columbus (1451–1506), but some believe he may have actually been born in Calvi, on the island of Corsica (then under Genoese rule and now part of France), which is a ferry ride to Genoa's south.

So the theory goes, when Columbus went looking for underwriting at the Spanish court, he could not very well admit to being of Calvian origin because the Calvians had massacred a Spanish garrison, putting an end to Spanish ambitions there. Certainly numerous Calvians figured in his crews and there's a plaque marking the house in Calvi's citadel where the navigator was supposedly born.

You can make up your own mind during a visit to his alleged Genoa birthplace, **Casa della Famiglia Colombo** (☎ 010 246 53 46; Piazza Dante; admission free; ☎ 9am–noon & 2–6pm Sat & Sun).

Via Balbi 10; adult/child €5/3; ☎ 9am–7pm Thu–Sun, to 1.30pm Tue & Wed), which has a fine collection of Renaissance works. A combined ticket costing €7 also covers admission to the **Galleria Nazionale** (☎ 010 270 53 00; www.palazzospinola.it; Piazza Superiore di Pellicceria 1; adult/child €5/3; ☎ 9am–8pm Tue–Sat, 2–8pm Sun). The latter, a 16th-century mansion, was owned by the Spinolas, one of the Republic's most formidable dynasties. Their ancestral home displays Italian and Flemish Renaissance art, but is also worth visiting to gaze at the awesome architecture.

Towering over the western end of town, **Castello D'Albertis** houses the eclectic **Museo delle Culture del Mondo** (Museum of World Cultures; ☎ 010 272 38 20; www.castellodalbertisgenova.it; Corso Dogali 18; adult/child €6/4.50; ☎ 10am–5pm Oct–Mar, to 6pm Apr–Sep). The neo-Gothic edifice was built in 1892 on the ruins of a much older castle for the globetrotting Capitano Enrico D'Albertis, who hauled back all manner of 'curiosities' from his extensive sea voyages. Where else could you find a stuffed platypus, a fragment of the Great Wall of China and a handful of sand from San Salvador (Columbus' first disembarkation point) in the same cabinet? If you don't fancy the climb up to Corso Dogali, there's a lift from Via Balbi (€0.70) to the castle gates.

Further west, on the waterfront, is the beautiful **Palazzo del Principe** (☎ 010 25 55 09; www.palazzodelprincipe.it; Via Adua 6; adult/child €9/6.50; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sun), once home of the 16th-century admiral Andrea Doria. The sumptuous Renaissance interiors, with frescoes, tapestries, furniture and paintings, have been painstakingly restored, and the formal gardens provide a calm respite from the frenetic city.

## PORTO ANTICO

Since its recent facelift, Genoa's **historic port** (www.portoantico.it) gets packed with locals and

visitors enjoying a *passeggiata* (stroll). The city centre information kiosk (see p195) has details about all of the old port's attractions and events, including various activities here for kids.

Uttering out over the water, Genoa's bright blue **Acquario** (Aquarium; ☎ 010 234 56 78; www.acquario digenova.it; Ponte Spinola; adult/child €17/11; ☎ 9.30am–7.30pm Mon–Wed & Fri, to 10pm Thu, to 8.30pm Sat & Sun Sep–Jun, to 11pm Jul & Aug) has more than 5000 sea creatures, including sharks, swimming in six million litres of water. The adjoining floating barge takes visitors on a voyage through the Age of Discovery and into a Madagascan rainforest. The aquarium has disabled access.

Two of Renzo Piano's most distinctive new additions to the port are the **Biosfera** (Biosphere; ☎ 335 599 01 87; Ponte Spinola; adult/child €5/3.50; ☎ 10am–sunset Tue–Sun), a giant glass ball housing a humid mini-ecosystem with tropical plants, butterflies and birds; and a panoramic lift, **Il Bigo** (Calata Cattaneo; adult/child €4/3; ☎ 2–6pm Mon, 10am–6pm Tue–Sun), which hoists a cylindrical viewing cabin 200m into the air. The lift has access for disabled visitors.

The best place to gain an appreciation for Genoa's relationship with the sea is the excellent **Galata Museo del Mare** (☎ 010 234 56 55; www.galatomuseodelmare.it, in Italian; Calata di Mari 1; adult/child €10/5; ☎ 10am–7.30pm Mar–Jul, Sep & Oct, 10am–7.30pm Sat–Thu, to 10pm Fri Aug, 10am–6pm Tue–Sun Nov–Feb), which traces the history of seafaring from earliest times through the ages of sail and steam to the present via high-tech exhibits.

Marco Polo was once an inmate of the frescoed **Palazzo San Giorgio** (Piazza Caricamento). Built in 1260, it became a prison in 1298; Polo worked on *Il Milione* here. These days it hosts occasional exhibitions; the city centre info kiosk has information.

## GENOA-CASELLA RAILWAY

Spectacular views of Genoa's forts can be seen from the 1929 narrow-gauge railway, which snakes 25km north from the **Stazione Genova** (☎ 010 83 73 21; [www.ferroviagenovacasella.it](http://www.ferroviagenovacasella.it), in Italian; Via alla Stazione per Casella 15) to the village of **Casella** (one-way/return €2/3.20, one hour, eight to 12 daily) in the Scrivia Valley.

## Tours

Information and tickets for boat trips around the port and destinations further afield are available from the **ticket booths** (☎ 010 25 67 75; Ponte Spinola; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Sep-Jun, 9am-8pm Jul & Aug) beside the aquarium at Porto Antico.

Five-hour springtime **whale-watching expeditions** (☎ 010 2657 12; [www.whalewatchliguria.it](http://www.whalewatchliguria.it); adult/child €32/15; ☎ depart 1pm Sat Apr-Oct), run in consultation with the World Wide Fund for Nature, include fascinating background on the world's largest mammals provided by an onboard biologist.

**Genova Tours** (☎ 010 275 93 18, 010 59 16 25; adult/child €10/7) runs three or four open-topped bus tours daily, with headphone commentary in five languages. It's best to confirm the departure point for your specific trip; tourist offices can provide departure details. Tickets are sold on the bus.

## Festivals & Events

**Slow Fish** ([www.slowfish.it](http://www.slowfish.it)) Every odd-numbered year in early May, Genoa hosts the Slow Food Movement-affiliated festival, celebrating seafood with a fish market and tastings. It also runs free workshops focusing on climate change, water pollution, good fishing practices, protected marine areas, and aquaculture, and fills in fish shoppers and diners on how to help look after fishy environments through better-informed consumer practices.

**Palio delle Quattro Antiche Repubbliche Marinare** In June, Genoa is one of four historical maritime cities (along with Pisa, Amalfi and Venice) that race in this regatta. The next event in Genoa is in 2012.

**Premio Paganini** In homage to Genoese violinist Niccolò Paganini (1782-1849), this is an international violin competition held in September.

**Paganiniana** More musical events take place during this October festival. Exact dates and venues change each year.

## Sleeping

Dozens of hotels are spread around town. The greatest concentration is near Stazione Principe on and around Via Balbi.

## BUDGET

**Hostel Genova** (☎ 010 242 24 57; [hostelge@iol.it](mailto:hostelge@iol.it); Via G Costanzi 120; dm/s/d incl breakfast from €16/23.50/44;

☎ reception 9am-3.30pm & midnight-7am Feb-mid-Dec; ☎) A steep 2km north of the centre, Genoa's only hostel has rules that won't endear it to free-spirited backpackers: its eight-bed dorms are single-sex, there's a lockout from 9am to 3.30pm, a 1am curfew, and Hostelling International (HI) cards are mandatory. Catch bus 40 from Stazione Brignole to the end of the line. Has access for disabled guests.

**Albergo Carola** (☎ 010 839 13 40; Via Gropallo 4; s/d from €28/50, with bathroom from €35/60) Albergo Carola's well-kept rooms can be found on the 3rd floor of a lovely old building near Stazione Brignole. Staff is charming, though if you don't speak Italian you may want to have your phrasebook handy.

**Hotel Acquaverde** (☎ 010 26 54 27; [www.hotelacquaverde.it](http://www.hotelacquaverde.it); Via Balbi 29; s/d from €30/50, with bathroom from €40/70; ☎) On the top three floors of a restored 17th-century town house (accessed by a lift), the Acquaverde's rooms are simple but comfortable. If you're self-catering, four rooms have their own kitchen facilities. Ask about the hotel's parking arrangements nearby when booking. Has access for disabled travellers.

**Hotel Della Posta Nuova** (☎ 010 25 29 29; Via Balbi 24; s/d from €70/100; ☎) No real surprises at this journeyman hotel 150m from Stazione Principe, though it's clean, safe and relatively friendly for such a transient quarter. Rooms are smallish and simple but admit plenty of natural light. The ones on the top floor have a terrace overlooking Via Balbi.

## MIDRANGE

**Our pick: Hotel Cairolì** (☎ 010 246 14 54; [www.hotelcairoligenova.com](http://www.hotelcairoligenova.com); Via Cairolì 14/4; s €65-90, d €85-105; ☎ ☎) Mondrian lurks three flights up in this Genoa *palazzo*. Themed around various modern artists, the rooms at the funky Cairolì all exhibit different colourful personalities. Then there's the communal library, chill-out area, internet room, fully equipped gym, free newspapers, terrace and informative maps on the wall. The whole package is centrally located and a snip at the price.

**Hotel Cristoforo Colombo** (☎ 010 251 36 43; [www.hotelcolombo.it](http://www.hotelcolombo.it); Via di Porta Soprana 27; s €55-90, d €85-110) Recently overhauled (with bathrooms for all 16 rooms), this charming family-run hotel is ideally situated in the old town. On balmy nights, take in the twinkling city lights from the rooftop terrace.

**Hotel Europa** (☎ 010 25 69 55; [www.hoteleuropa-genova.com](http://www.hoteleuropa-genova.com); Via delle Monachette 8; s €60-118, d €80-185;

**(P) (X) (Q) (S)** Tucked down a little laneway a few footsteps from Stazione Principe, Hotel Europa's rooms aren't large but they come with elegant peach-toned decor and amenities such as flat-screen satellite TV and mini-bar. Wi-fi costs €10 per 24 hours.

## TOP END

**Hotel Bristol Palace** (☎ 010 59 25 41; www.hotelbristolpalace.com; Via XX Settembre 35; s €130-300, d €160-420;

**(P) (X) (Q) (S)**) Under the huge portales of Via XX Settembre lies one of Genoa's fanciest pads, a belle époque masterpiece exhibiting atmospheric, airy rooms with geometric parquet flooring and original antiques (as well as mod cons). Enter the domain via a sweeping staircase with an ornamental glass roof visible at the top.

## Eating

It's practically impossible to leave town without tasting *pesto genovese* (the famous sauce that appears on menus everywhere). Other local specialities are focaccia (especially topped with cheese), *farinata* (a thin pancake made from chickpea flour), *torta pasqualina* (spinach, ricotta cheese and egg tart), *pansotti* (spinach-filled ravioli with a thick, creamy hazelnut sauce) and freshly caught seafood.

There are numerous cheap eateries around the Old Port area.

**Pizzeria di Vico dei Biscotti** (☎ 010 251 89 90; Vico dei Biscotti 4; pizzas €6-8; **(X)**) This cavernous place with marine blue decor and mezzanine seating fills to the brim with locals tucking into a *quattro stagione* (four seasons) pizza and a beer or two.

**Antica Trattoria del Porto Maria** (☎ 010 246 18 45; Piazza Caricamento 22; meals €20-30; **(X)** lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Fri & Sat) Classic Genoese cuisine such as seafood risotto, scampi in brandy, and pasta of all shapes and sizes doused with pesto is dished up at this atmospheric little old-port trattoria. Its green-and-white-checked tables are down a flight of steps in an old storeroom with low, vaulted ceilings.

**Mentelocale** (☎ 010 595 96 48; Palazzo Ducale, Piazza de Ferrari; meals €20-26; **(X)** restaurant lunch & dinner, cafe 8am-10pm Mon-Thu, to 1am Fri, 10am-1am Sat & Sun; **(X)**) Tuna with sesame and lime, tempura prawns and red chicken curry with apples feature at this fusion restaurant inside the Palazzo Ducale. Mentelocale's salads easily constitute a meal and come in a creative range of combinations

using fresh local produce. The adjacent cafe, with funky designer furnishings, is a chic spot for a drink.

**Trattoria delle Raibetta** (☎ 010 246 88 77; Vico Caprettari 10-12; meals €20-30; **(X)** lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Family-run, authentic Genoese joint in the warren of streets near the cathedral. The food here is unfussy and fish-biased. Try the seafood with *riso venere* (a local black rice) or the signature homemade *trofiette al pesto*. The octopus salad makes a good overture while the wine is a toss-up between 200 different vintages.

**I Tre Merli** (☎ 010 246 44 16; Palazzina Millo, Porto Antico; snacks €7-12, meals €20-25) Grandier than some of its portside counterparts, this well-positioned restaurant is flanked by towering black-and-white-striped columns. Excellent Ligurian cuisine includes salted cod fritters, and veal stuffed with porcini mushrooms and potatoes. Otherwise, you can just have a glass of wine with wood-fired snacks such as *focaccia col formaggio* (Liguria's answer to cheese-on-toast).

**our pick Lupo** (☎ 010 26 70 36; Via delle Monachette 20; meals €25-30; **(X)** 12.30-3pm & 7.30pm-midnight) Inviting aromas of home cooking – cuttlefish in tomato sauce, ravioli in walnut sauce and homemade desserts – greet you at the door, as do owners who welcome you like they've known you forever. Lupo's wine list is outstanding, and its antiques and *objets d'art*, such as cast-iron candelabras, a grandfather clock and black-and-white photographs suspended on wire strings create a refined yet relaxed ambience.

## Drinking

The revamped Porto Antico buzzes with bars. You'll also find sophisticated new drinking spots intermingled with old-time favourites throughout the city, particularly in the streets just northwest of Piazza de Ferrari. Piazza della Erbe is clad with cafe terraces where you can linger over a coffee or something stronger.

**La Nouvelle Vague** (☎ 010 25 62 72; Vico de Gradi 4r; **(X)** to 1am Sun-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat) A bohemian crowd hangs out in this subterranean bookshop and bar. You can sip Italian wine while leafing through a book, or just savour the surroundings over a cocktail.

**La Madeleine Café Teatro** (☎ 010 246 53 12; Via della Maddalena 103) Live bands blast their stuff from 10pm most nights at this energetic cafe-theatre-music bar.

## TO MARKET, TO MARKET...

Shop for everything from fresh fruit and vegetables to cheese, meat and a plentiful assortment of fish at Genoa's ornate **Mercato Orientale** (covered market; entrances at Via XX Settembre 75r & Via Galata; ☎ 8am-noon & 3-7pm Mon-Sat). Flower stalls are grouped in front of the market hall on Via XX Settembre.

In the old town, fruit and veg stalls are set up on Piazza Banchi and Via degli Orefici, immediately east of the Mercato Orientale.

Works by local artists and second-hand books can be picked up from the open-air stalls beneath the arcades on Piazza Colombo, a pretty square at the southern foot of Via Galata. On the first Saturday and Sunday of the month from October to July, an antique market fills the interior courtyards of Palazzo Ducale.

**our pick** **Café degli Specchi** (☎ 010 246 81 93; Via Salita Pollaiuoli 43r; mains €7-10; ☎ Mon-Sat) A bit of Turin disconnected and relocated 150km to the south, this roaring-'20s, tiled art deco showpiece was (is) a favourite hang-out of the literati. You can sink your espresso at street level or disappear upstairs amid the velvet seats and mirrors for coffee, cake and an *aperitivo* (happy hour) buffet.

**Café di Barbarossa** (☎ 010 246 50 97; Piano di Sant'Andrea 21-3r; mains €10; ☎ 7am-4pm Mon, to 2.30am Tue-Fri, 5pm-2.30am Sat & Sun) A life-size statue of Elvis rocking out on his guitar greets you at the entrance of this good-time bar set in a medieval red-brick cellar below the towering 12th-century Porta Soprana. Outside there's a leafy deck.

## Entertainment

At the western end of the Porto Antico, the Magazzini del Cotone, one-time cotton warehouses, have been converted into an entertainment area with a multiplex cinema, games arcade and shops.

Tickets for cultural and sporting events are sold at box offices inside **Ricordi Mediadstore** (☎ 010 54 33 31; Via alla Porta degli Archi 88-94) and **FNAC** (☎ 010 29 01 11; Via XX Settembre 58).

Take in a play or opera at **Teatro Carlo Felice** (☎ 010 5 38 11; www.carlofelice.it, in Italian; Passo Eugenio Montale 4), Genoa's stunning four-stage opera house. Casanova trod the boards of **Teatro della Tosse** (☎ 010 247 07 93; www.teatrodellatosse.it, in Italian; Piazza Renato Negri 4), the city's oldest theatre, which dates from 1702.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Regular domestic and international services, including Ryanair flights, use **Christopher Columbus airport** (Aeroporto Internazionale di Cristoforo

Colombo; GOA; ☎ 010 601 54 10; www.airport.genova.it), 6km west of the city, in Sestri Ponente.

### BOAT

Ferries sail to/from Spain, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica and Tunisia from the **international passenger terminal** (terminal traghetto; ☎ 24hr information 166 15239393; www.porto.genova.it; Via Milano 51). Only cruise ships use the 1930s passenger ship terminal on Ponte dei Mille.

Fares listed following are for one-way, low-/high-season deck-class tickets. Ferry operators based at the international passenger terminal include the following:

**Grandi Navi Veloci** (☎ 800 466510, 010 2 54 65; www.gnv.it) Ferries to/from Sardinia (Porto Torres year-round €34/75, Olbia June to September €38/77) and year-round to/from Sicily (Palermo €70/110).

**Moby Lines** (☎ 010 254 15 13; www.mobylines.it) Ferries year-round to/from Corsica (Bastia €17/32) and Sardinia (Olbia €35/65).

**Tirrenia** (☎ 800 824079; www.tirrenia.it) Ferries and high-speed boats year-round to/from Sardinia (Porto Torres €25/50, Olbia €28/38, Cagliari July to September €45), with connections to Sicily.

From June to September, **Cooperativa Battellieri del Golfo Paradiso** (☎ 018 577 20 91; www.golfoparadiso.it) operates boats from the Porto Antico to Camogli (one-way/return €10/15), Portofino (€10/15), and the Cinque Terre/Porto Venere (€20/30).

**Consorzio Liguria Via Mare** (☎ 010 26 57 12; www.liguriaviamare.it) runs a range of seasonal trips from here to Camogli, San Fruttuoso and Portofino, Monterosso in the Cinque Terre, and Porto Venere.

### BUS

Buses to international cities depart from Piazza della Vittoria, as do buses to/from

Milan's Malpensa airport (€16, two hours, twice daily at 6am and 3pm) and other inter-regional services. Tickets are sold at **Geotravels** (☎ 010 59 28 37; [geotravels@statcasale.com](mailto:geotravels@statcasale.com); Piazza della Vittoria 30r) and **Pesci Viaggi e Turismo** (☎ 010 56 49 36; [pesciros@tin.it](mailto:pesciros@tin.it); Piazza della Vittoria 94r).

## TRAIN

Genoa's Stazione Principe and Stazione Brignole are linked by train to Turin (€15, 1¼ hours, seven to 10 daily), Milan (€15.50, 1½ hours, up to eight daily), Pisa (€15, two hours, up to eight daily) and Rome (€36.50, 5¼ hours, six daily). Stazione Principe tends to have more trains, particularly going west to San Remo (€13, two hours, five daily) and Ventimiglia (€15, 2¼ hours, six daily).

## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

**AMT** (☎ 010 5582414) line 100 runs between Stazione Principe and the airport at least every hour from 5.30am to 11pm (€4, 30 minutes). Tickets can be bought from the driver.

A taxi to or from the airport will cost around €15.

### PUBLIC TRANSPORT

**AMT** (☎ 800 08 53 52, 010 599 74 14; [www.amt.genova.it](http://www.amt.genova.it), in Italian) operates buses throughout the city and there is an **AMT information office** (Via d'Annunzio; ☎ 7.15am-6pm Mon-Fri, 7am-7pm Sat & Sun) at the bus terminal. Bus line 383 links Stazione Brignole with Piazza de Ferrari and Stazione Principe. A ticket valid for 90 minutes costs €1.20 (single ride €0.70) and an all-day ticket costs €3.50. Tickets can be used on main-line trains within the city limits, as well as on the new wheelchair-accessible **metro** ([www.genovametro.com](http://www.genovametro.com)), which has numerous stations across the city.

## AROUND GENOA

### Nervi

A former fishing village engulfed by Genoa's urban sprawl, modern Nervi classifies itself as a 'resort'. Though, with plenty of ritzier Riviera competition, it's rarely top of anyone's vacation list. Its saving graces are its bounty of museums – four in total – and its 2km cliffside promenade, the Passeggiata Anita Garibaldi.

The most celebrated museum is the **Galleria d'Arte Moderna** (☎ 010 372 60 25; Via Capolungo 3; adult/child €6/5; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sun), displaying works by 19th- and 20th-century artists

such as Filippo De Pisis, Arturo Martini and Rubaldo Merello.

More 19th- and early-20th-century Italian art, including Eduardo Rubino's sensual marble nude, *Il Risveglio*, is displayed at the **Raccolte Frugone** (☎ 010 32 23 96; Via Capolungo 9; adult/child €4/2.80; ☎ 9am-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun), which is housed in the Villa Grimaldi Fassio, overlooking the leafy, squirrel-filled Parchi di Nervi.

Some 18,000 items of a similar period are displayed at the **Wolfsoniana** (☎ 010 323 13 29; [www.wolfsoniana.it](http://www.wolfsoniana.it); Via Serra Gropallo 4; adult/child €5/2.80; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sun). On show are items documenting this turbulent time in Italy's history, including advertising and propaganda posters, along with architectural drawings, paintings and furnishings.

Going back earlier in time, the **Museo Giannettino Luxoro** (☎ 010 32 26 73; Via Mafalda di Savoia 3; adult/child €4/2.80; ☎ 9am-1pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) has a rich collection of 18th-century clocks, silverware, ceramics and furniture, displayed in a splendidly restored villa.

All four museums can be accessed in a combined ticket (€10) or they're included on the Genoa Museum Card (see the boxed text, p197).

On the seafront, live music is often performed at the **Chandra Bar** (☎ 010 860 36 40; Passeggiata Garibaldi 26r; meals €18-25; ☎ 3pm-2am Tue-Sat, 11.30am-2am Sun), which serves up pasta and daily specials of freshly caught fish, and occasionally spices things up with Thai and Brazilian dishes.

Nervi is 7km east of Genoa and best reached by frequent trains from Stazione Brignole and Stazione Principe (€1.20, 20 to 25 minutes).

### Pegli

Flower-filled parks make Pegli a peaceful spot to retreat from Genoa's urban tumult. Like Nervi, this former seafront village now lies within the city boundaries of Genoa; it is roughly 9km west of the centre. And, like Nervi, it has yet more museums. A combined ticket for all of the following sights costs €8.

The **Museo di Archeologia Ligure** (☎ 010 698 10 48; [www.museoarcheologicogenova.it](http://www.museoarcheologicogenova.it); Via Pallavicini 11; adult/child €4/2.80; ☎ 9am-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun), in the striking Villa Pallavicini, holds displays of locally excavated artefacts from the prehistoric through to the Roman period, as well as a collection of Egyptian antiquities.



Maritime matters are covered in the **Museo Navale** (☎ 010 696 98 85; www.museonavale.it; Villa Doria, Piazza Bonavino 7; adult/child €4/2.80; ☹ 9am-1pm Tue-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun), with an exhibition of models, photographs and other reminders of the days of sail.

Also worth a wander is the **Parco Villa Pallavicini** (☎ 010 66 68 64; Via Pallavicini; admission €3.50; ☹ 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar), with its formal lawns, lakes and glasshouse, and the neighbouring **Giardino Botanico** (☎ 010 66 68 64; admission €3.50; ☹ 9am-12.30pm Tue-Sun), home to a small collection of exotic plants.

Frequent trains from Genoa's Stazione Brignole and Stazione Principe (€1.20, 20 to 25 minutes) travel to Pegli.

## RIVIERA DI LEVANTE

Running claustrophobically from Genoa's eastern sprawl, you're quickly apprehended by the deep blue waters of the Mediterranean fringed by some of Italy's most elite resorts, including jet-set favourite Portofino. Anything but off the beaten track, this glittering stretch of coast is hugely popular, but never tacky. Heading further east, swanky resorts battle bravely with increasingly precipitous topography. You can drop the martinis and escape the crowds on some exhilarating walks on the Portofino promontory or along the cliffs of the Unesco-protected Cinque Terre.

### Camogli pop 5750

This still-colourful fishing village, located 25km east of Genoa, has trompe l'œil decorating the alleys and cobbled streets, beneath a canopy of umbrella pines and voluptuous olive groves.

Camogli's name means 'house of wives', hailing from the days when the women ran the village while their husbands were at sea. Fishing traditions continue here, especially during the second weekend in May when fishermen celebrate the **Sagra del Pesce** (Fish Festival) with a big fry-up – hundreds of fish are cooked in 3m-wide pans along the busy waterfront.

From the main esplanade, Via Garibaldi, boats sail to the **Punta Chiappa**, a rocky outcrop on the Portofino promontory where you can swim and sunbathe. The **tourist office** (☎ 0185 77 10 66; www.camogli.it, in Italian; Via XX Settembre 33; ☹ 9am-12.30pm & 3.30-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) has a list of diving schools and boat-rental operators.

If you'd like to stay overnight, the 16th-century villa **Hotel Cenobio dei Dogi** (☎ 0185 72 41; www.cenobio.com; Via Cuneo 34; s €111-155, d €153-208; ☎ ☹ ☹) has more than 100 refined rooms yet still manages to feel intimate.

Delve down the lanes away from the water to escape the lunchtime crowd and search for some of the town's extra-crunchy focaccia.

**ATP Tigullio** (☎ 0185 28 88 34) runs buses to/from Rapallo and Santa Margherita at least every hour, leaving from the bus stop just past the tourist office on Via XX Settembre.

Camogli (€2.40, 40 minutes, hourly) is on the Genoa-La Spezia train line.

The Cooperativa Battellieri del Golfo Paradiso (p203) runs boats year-round to and from Punta Chiappa (one-way/return €5/7.50) and San Fruttuoso (€7/10); and boats between June and September to Genoa's Porto Antico (€10/15), Portofino (€9/15), and the Cinque Terre and Porto Venere (€18/25).

## San Fruttuoso

The yin to Portofino's yang, San Fruttuoso is a slice of ancient tranquillity preserved amid some of Italy's ritziest coastal resorts. There are no roads here – thank heavens! Access is either by boat or on foot.

The hamlet's extraordinary Benedictine **abbey** (Abbazia di San Fruttuoso di Capodimonte; ☎ 0185 77 27 03; adult/child €4/2.50; ☹ 10am-6pm May-Sep, to 4pm Mar, Apr & Oct, also to 4pm public holidays & day prior to public holidays only Dec-Feb) was built as a final resting place for Bishop St Fructuosus of Tarragona (martyred in Spain in AD 259). It was rebuilt in the mid-13th century with the assistance of the Doria family. The abbey fell into decay with the decline of the religious community, and in the 19th century it was divided into small living quarters by local fishermen.

In 1954 a bronze **statue** of Christ was lowered 15m to the seabed, offshore from the abbey, to bless the waters. Dive to see it or view it from a boat if the waters are calm – the Cooperativa Battellieri del Golfo Paradiso, p203, can provide details. Replicas were lowered in St George's harbour, Grenada, in 1961, and off Key Largo in Florida in 1966.

San Fruttuoso's isolation is maintained by its lack of road access. You can walk in on foot from Camogli (a tricky, rocky hike with metal hand supports) or Portofino, a steep but easier 5km-long cliffside walk. Both hikes take about 2½ hours one-way. Alternatively

you can catch a boat from Camogli or Punta Chiappa (one-way/return €5/6.50).

## Portofino

pop 550

A byword for refined luxury, stately Portofino is beyond the wallet-stretching capabilities of most budget-minded travellers. That's not to say you can't linger over an expensive cappuccino next to its yacht-filled harbour logging the ubiquity of Gucci handbags and Prada sunglasses.

Backed by shapely cypress trees and characterised by an extravagant array of pastel-shaded villas, Portofino sits on a small promontory of protected land that juts out into the azure Mediterranean. Unbeknownst to the plethora of soft-top-sports-car drivers who zoom in via the sinuous road from Santa Margherita, the promontory is criss-crossed with copious trails, many of them surprisingly remote and all of them refreshingly free.

## INFORMATION

Portofino's **tourist office** (☎ 0185 26 90 24; www.apptigullio.liguria.it; Via Roma 35; ☹ 10am-1pm & 1.30-4.30pm Tue-Sun) has free trail maps for the Parco Naturale Regionale di Portofino (opposite) and information on mountain-bike rental, as well as seasonal sail and motorboat rental.

## SIGHTS

From the sublime harbour, a flight of stairs signposted 'Salita San Giorgio' leads past the **Chiesa di San Giorgio to Castello Brown** (☎ 0185 26 71 01; www.portofinoevents.com; Via alla Penisola 13a; adult/child €3.50/free; ☹ vary), a 10-minute walk altogether (confirm the opening times with the tourist office prior to setting out, as the castle often hosts private events). The Genoese-built castle saw action against the Venetians, Savoyards, Sardinians and Austrians and later fell to Napoleon. In 1867 it was transformed by the British diplomat Montague Yeats Brown into a private mansion. The fabulous tiled staircase is one of the showpieces of the neo-Gothic interior, while there are great views from the garden. For a better outlook continue for another 300m or so along the same track to the **lighthouse**.

Heading 2km north along the coastal road is the **Abbazia della Cervara** (Abbazia di San Girolamo; ☎ 800 652110; www.cervara.it; Lungomare Rossetti, Via Cervara 10; ☹ guided tours by reservation), built in 1361 and surrounded by formal gardens. Over the

centuries, the abbey has hosted Benedictine monks, three popes and a saint (Catherine of Siena), and the French king, François I, who spent a less convivial time here as a prisoner after the 1525 Battle of Pavia. Tours take in the gardens, 15th-century chapterhouse, 16th-century cloister and the Saracen Tower.

## SLEEPING & EATING

Portofino favours Serie A footballers and lottery winners, though the average traveller can usually rustle up sufficient cash (€5) for a harbourside cappuccino. The least expensive accommodation options include **Eden** (☎ 0185 26 90 91; www.hoteledenportofino.com; Vico Dritto 18; d €140-270; ☹ ☹), on a quiet cobbled side street not far from the harbour front; and **Hotel Argentina** (☎ 0185 28 67 08; www.argentinaportofino.it; Via Paraggi a Monte 56; d from €160; ☹ ☹) on the coast road towards Santa Margherita. Both are intrinsically posh without being too pretentious. If you're intent on blowing your life's savings, check into **Hotel Splendido** (www.splendido.orient-express.com; Salita Baratta 16) and follow in the footsteps of the Duke of Windsor, Frank Sinatra and countless other zillionaires.

Fashionable eateries overlook the port; **Magazin** (☎ 0185 26 91 78; Calata Marconi 34; meals €28-35; ☹ Fri-Wed), decked out like the cabin of a boat, serves authentic Ligurian luxuries. **Caffè Excelsior** (☎ 0185 26 90 05; Piazza Martiri dell'Olivetta 54; meals €30) is another good perch with romantic outdoor booths – where Greta Garbo used to hide behind dark glasses – serving up octopuses and prawns.

## GETTING THERE & AROUND

Regular buses run between Portofino and Santa Margherita (see opposite for details) but by far the best way is to walk. A designated path tracks the gorgeous coastline for 3km.

From April to October, Servizio Marittimo del Tigullio (opposite) runs daily ferries from Portofino to/from San Fruttuoso (€7.50/10.50), Rapallo (€7/10.50) and Santa Margherita (€5.50/8.50).

Motorists must park at the village entrance with obligatory parking fees starting from €4.50 per hour (cash only).

## Santa Margherita

pop 10,600

Elegant hotels with Liberty facades overlook million-dollar yachts in this fishing-village-turned-wealthy-retirement-spot that looks

like a museum to art nouveau. The good news is you don't have to be a millionaire to stay here.

## INFORMATION

The **tourist office** (☎ 0185 28 74 85; www.apptigullio.liguria.it; Via XXV Aprile 2b; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat) has a raft of information about water sports along the gulf.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Santa Margherita's idyllic position in a sheltered bay on the turquoise Golfo di Tigullio makes it a good base for **sailing**, **water-skiing** and **scuba diving**. Those feeling less active can simply stretch out on its popular **beach**.

Pop into the headquarters of the **Parco Naturale Regionale di Portofino** (☎ 0185 28 94 79; www.parks.it/parco.portofino; Viale Rainusso 1) to pick up maps and information on **walking**. Alternatively, you can take an aromatic stroll among lemon trees, hydrangea and camellia hedges, and other flora typical of Santa Margherita's hot climate, in the lavish gardens surrounding the 17th-century **Villa Durazzo** (☎ 0185 29 31 35; entrances at Piazzale San Giacomo 3, Via San Francesco d'Assisi 3 & Via Principe Centurione; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Mar-Oct, 9.40am-4.30pm Nov-Feb), a favourite wedding spot.

## SLEEPING

**Fasce** (☎ 0185 28 64 35; www.hotelfasce.it; Via Luigi Bozzo 3; s/d €98/108; ☎ ☑) This is one of Santa Margherita's cheaper options, with a rooftop sun deck, 16 decent-size rooms (though bathrooms are teensy) and a limited breakfast. Parking costs an extra €18.

**Lido Palace Hotel** (☎ 0185 28 58 21; www.lidopalacehotel.com; Via Doria 3; s €105-187, d €130-210; ☎ ☑) Right on the waterfront in the centre of town, this Liberty-style grande dame offers the quintessential Santa Margherita experience. Rooms are generously proportioned, the breakfast buffet is bountiful. The restaurant has an outdoor terrace with elevated views and there are half- and full-board options.

## EATING & DRINKING

**Trattoria dei Pescatori** (☎ 0185 28 67 47; Via Bottaro 43-44; meals around €35; ☎ Wed-Mon Sep-Jun, daily Jul & Aug) *Moscardini affogati* (spicy stewed baby octopus) is the summertime speciality of Santa Margherita's first-ever restaurant, opened in 1910. Autumn brings wild mushrooms to the table, while year-round Pescatori serves a deli-

cious regional fish soup, oven-baked fish with olives and pine nuts, and handmade pastas in all shapes and sizes.

**our pick Bar Colombo** (☎ 0185 28 70 58; Via Pescino 13; ☎ until late Tue-Sun) A celebration of art nouveau, this resplendent coffee bar-restaurant on the seafront is the former hang-out of silver-screen stars such as Burton and Taylor.

## GETTING THERE & AROUND

**ATP Tigullio Trasporti** (☎ 0185 28 88 34; www.tigulliotrasporti.it, in Italian) runs buses to/from Portofino (every 20 minutes) and Camogli (every 30 minutes).

By train, there are hourly services to/from Genoa (€2.40, 35 minutes) and La Spezia (€4.40, 1½ hours).

**Servizio Marittimo del Tigullio** (☎ 0185 28 46 70; www.traghettiportofino.it; Via Palestro 8/1b) runs seasonal ferries to/from Cinque Terre (one-way/return €17/24.50), Porto Venere (€21/32), San Fruttuoso (€9.50/14.50), Portofino (€5.50/8.50) and Rapallo (€3.50/4.50).

## Rapallo pop 30,300

WB Yeats, Max Beerbohm and Ezra Pound all garnered inspiration in Rapallo and it's not difficult to see why. With its bright blue changing cabins, palm-fringed beach and diminutive 16th-century castle perched above the sea (hosting temporary art exhibitions), the town has a refined and nostalgic air. That's not to say it isn't friendly. Rapallo's compactness gives it a less elite atmosphere than its jet-set neighbours. It's at its busiest on Thursdays, when colourful market stalls fill central Piazza Cile.

Since 1934 a **cable car** (☎ 0185 5 23 41; Piazzale Solari 2; one-way/return €5.50/7.75; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-6pm) has threaded its way up to **Santuario Basilica di Montalegre** (612m), a sanctuary built on the spot where, on 2 July 1557, the Virgin Mary was reportedly sighted. Walkers and mountain bikers can follow an old mule track (5km, 1½ hours) to the hilltop site. The **tourist office** (☎ 0185 23 03 46; www.apptigullio.liguria.it; Lungo Vittorio Veneto 7; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat) has details of other walks in the area and stocks walking maps.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Hotel Miro** (☎ 0185 23 41 00; www.hotelmiro.net; Lungomare Vittorio Veneto 32; s €70-125, d €90-145; ☎ ☑) Right on the seafront, this charming boutique

hotel is ensconced in a 19th-century town house, and has retained much of its historical character, with canopied beds and floral-print wallpaper. Ask about horse-riding lessons and boat rental, which can be booked through the hotel.

**Hotel L'Approdo** (☎ 0185 23 45 45; www.approdo.hotel.it; Via San Michele di Pagana 160; d €98-156; ♿) Set on the hillside, L'Approdo has some great sea views, but if you're willing to forego them and look out onto the garden instead you can negotiate a lower rate. Rooms are shiny and modern, and some are wheelchair accessible. Parking (€10 per day) needs to be booked ahead.

Behind rows of parked scooters, the waterfront has plenty of places to eat, drink and snack.

Handmade pastas at **Antica Cucina Genovese** (☎ 0185 20 60 36; Via Santa Maria del Campo 133; meals €18-30; ☺ Tue-Sun; ♿) include a huge variety of designated vegetarian options such as chestnut ravioli with pesto, as well as vegan fare such as potato and mushroom stew. The open kitchen also prepares meat and fish dishes, and there's a great range of Ligurian wines.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Trains run along the coast to Genoa (€2.40, 40 minutes) and La Spezia (€4.40, one hour).

Servizio Marittimo del Tigullio (p207) runs boats to/from Santa Margherita (one-way/return €3.50/4.50), Portofino (€7/10.50), San Fruttuoso (€10/15.50), Genoa (€13.50/19), the Cinque Terre (€17/24.50) and Porto Venere (€21/32). Not all operate daily, and many are seasonal – the website posts updated schedules.

## Chiavari to Levante

The stretch of coast between the Portofino promontory and the Cinque Terre has some of the Riviera di Levante's best beaches, but the area's rash of resorts gets jam-packed in summer.

Inland from Chiavari (which is located 12km east of Santa Margherita) you can lose the crowds and breathe fresh mountain air in the **Parco Naturale Regionale dell'Aveto** (☎ park office 0185 34 03 11; www.parks.it/parco.aveto; Via Marrè 75a, Borzonasca; ☹ 2.30-5.30pm Thu & Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm Sat & Sun), a nature reserve at the northern end of the **Val d'Aveto**. The tranquil valley starts 12km north of the coast in **Borzonasca**.

Heading north, **Santo Stefano d'Aveto** (population 1280) is a small cross-country skiing centre and the main village in the valley. Between the two is **Lago delle Lame**, a glacial lake whose shallow waters have preserved fir-tree stumps from 2500 years ago.

## Cinque Terre

A film director aiming to shoot an authentic period drama set in 17th-century Italy need look no further than Cinque Terre. Bar an overabundance of ogling tourists and a busy 19th-century railway line that burrows through a series of coastal tunnels, barely anything about these five crazily constructed Ligurian villages has changed in over three centuries. Even cars – those most ubiquitous of modern interferences – are missing, thanks to a 1997 Unesco ban.

Rooted in antiquity, Cinque Terre's five towns date from the early medieval period. Monterosso, the oldest, was founded in AD 643 when beleaguered hill dwellers moved down to the coast to escape from invading barbarians. Riomaggiore, the next oldest, was purportedly established in the 8th century by Greek settlers fleeing persecution in Byzantium. Much of what remains in the towns today dates from the late Middle Ages, including several castles and a quintet of architecturally eclectic parish churches.

Buildings aside, Cinque Terre's most unique historical feature is the steeply terraced cliffs bisected by a complicated system of fields and gardens that has been hacked, chiselled, shaped and layered over the course of nearly two millennia. So marked are these man-made contours that some scholars have compared the extensive *muretti* (low stone walls), to the Great Wall of China in their grandeur and scope.

Inseparable from the sea, the history of Cinque Terre is also intrinsically linked to the story of the Italian kitchen. Aside from the ubiquitous prawns, octopuses and anchovies, numerous land-reared products are also nurtured on these lovingly farmed cliff terraces. Notable gastronomic gifts that have originated in Cinque Terre include focaccia bread, pesto sauce and the celebrated Sciacchetrà white dessert wine.

Hugging the coast, the 12km Sentiero Azzurro (Blue Trail) consists of a one-time mule path that linked all five oceanside villages by foot. Today's protected trail dates back to the early days of the Republic of Genoa

in the 12th and 13th centuries and, until the opening of the railway line in 1874, it was the most practical means of getting from village to village. For thousands of visitors, it still is.

## INFORMATION

Online information is available at [www.cinque Terre.it](http://www.cinque Terre.it) and [www.cinque Terre.com](http://www.cinque Terre.com).

**Parco Nazionale offices** ([www.parconazionale5terre.it](http://www.parconazionale5terre.it), in Italian; Corniglia ☎ 0187 81 25 23; ☎ 7am-8pm; La Spezia ☎ 0187 74 35 00; internet access per 10min €0.80; ☎ 7am-8pm; Manarola ☎ 0187 76 05 11; ☎ 7am-8pm; Monterosso ☎ 0187 81 70 59; ☎ 7am-8pm; Riomaggiore ☎ 0187 92 06 33; ☎ Piazza Rio Finale 26; internet access per 10min €0.80; ☎ 6.30am-8pm Oct-May, to 10pm Jun-Sep; Vernazza ☎ 0187 81 25 33; ☎ 7am-8pm) The Riomaggiore office is the main office for the park, located outside Riomaggiore train station.

## MONTEROSSO

pop 1580

The most accessible village by car and the only Cinque Terre settlement to sport a tourist **beach**, Monterosso is the furthest west and least quintessential of the quintet (it was briefly ditched from the group in the 1940s). Noted for its lemon trees, the village's old and new quarters are linked by an underground tunnel.

Footsteps from the sea, **Carla** (☎ 0187 82 90 39; Via IV Novembre 75; d €60-70) has charming *affittacamere* (rooms for rent). Monterosso also has a handful of hotels, including good value for money at the four-star **Hotel Palme** (☎ 0187 82 90 13; [www.hotelpalme.it](http://www.hotelpalme.it); Via IV Novembre 18; d from €140; ☎ Apr-Oct; P ☎), where you can laze in the palm-filled gardens.

## MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR EURO

Easily the best way to get around the Cinque Terre is with a **Cinque Terre card**.

Two versions of the card are available: with or without train travel. Both include unlimited use of walking paths (which otherwise cost €5) and electric village buses, as well as the elevator in Riomaggiore and cultural exhibitions. Without train travel, a basic one-two-/three-/seven-day card for everyone over the age of four costs €5/8/10/20. A card that also includes unlimited train trips between the towns costs €8.50/14.70/19.50/36.50.

Both versions of the card are sold at all Cinque Terre park information offices.

Along the seafront, restaurants dish up local anchovies straight out of the sea, served fried, raw with lemon juice, pickled in brine or in a *tian* (baked with potatoes and tomatoes). To wash them down, stop in at one of several wine bars throughout the village.

To pack an authentic Ligurian beach picnic, head to **Focacceria Enoteca Antonia** (☎ 0187 82 90 39; Via Fegina 124; focaccia per slice around €2.20; ☎ 9am-8pm Fri-Wed Mar-Oct) where Paola and her husband Giuseppe make 15 kinds of piping-hot focaccia from scratch and also stock well-priced local wines.

## VERNAZZA

pop 1100

Guarding the only secure landing point on the Cinque Terre coast, Vernazza is the quaintest of the five villages. Its tiny harbour is framed by the 1318-built **Chiesa di Santa Margherita**, while the ruins of an 11th-century castle look out to sea.

Lined with little cafes, Vernazza's main cobble street, Via Roma, links seaside Piazza Marconi with the train station.

To spend a romantic night here try **L'Eremo sul Mare** (☎ 339 268 56 17; Via Gerai; d €90; ☎ mid-Mar-mid-Oct; ☎), a charming cliffside villa with just three rooms and a lovely sun terrace, a 10-minute hike up the hillside.

Traditional Cinque Terre seafood is served up at **Trattoria Gianni Franzì** (☎ 0187 82 10 03; Piazza Matteotti 5; meals €22-30; ☎ mid-Mar-early Jan); and in the cosy stone-and-wood dining rooms of **Trattoria da Sandro** (☎ 0187 81 22 23; Via Roma 69; meals €20), whose specialities include baked stuffed mussels, and swordfish with tomatoes, capers, olives and pine nuts.

## CORNIGLIA

pop 600

Corniglia, the middle village, sits atop a rocky promontory surrounded by vineyards and is the only Cinque Terre settlement with no direct sea access. Narrow alleys and colourfully painted four-storey houses characterise the ancient core, a timeless streetscape that was namechecked in Boccaccio's *Decameron*.

The best panoramas unfold from **La Torre**, a medieval lookout reached by narrow lanes and stairways. From Corniglia's central square, Via Fieschi leads through the village heart to **Belvedere Santa Maria**, another lookout with sweeping sea views.



If you're stopping for the night, **Dai Fera'** (☎ 0187 81 23 23; Via alla Marina 39; d €60-80) offers clean and simple rooms close to the seafront.

As elsewhere in the Cinque Terre, fish is the mainstay of Corniglia's restaurants – you can't go wrong by asking for whatever's fresh.

## MANAROLA

pop 850

Bequeathed with more grapevines than any other Cinque Terre village, Manarola is famous for its Sclachettrà wine and awash with priceless medieval relics supporting claims that it is the oldest of the five. Despite its proximity to Riomaggiore, the village remains unhurried and distinct, with locals speaking a local dialect known as Manarolese.

At the northern end of Via Discovolo, you'll come upon **Piazzale Papa Innocenzo IV**, dominated by a bell tower used as a defensive lookout. Opposite, the **Chiesa di San Lorenzo** dates from 1338 and houses a 15th-century polyptych. If you're geared up for a steep walk, from nearby Via Rollandi you can follow a path that leads through vineyards to the top of the mountain.

The Cinque Terre's only hostel, **Ostello 5 Terre** (☎ 0187 92 02 15; www.cinqueterre.net/ostello; Via Riccobaldi 21; dm €20-23, d €55-65; ☎ reception 7am-1pm, 4pm-midnight Feb-Jun & Sep-Nov, 7am-1pm & 5pm-1am Jun-Aug, hostel open Mar-Dec; ☎ ), rents out mountain bikes, kayaks, Nordic walking poles and snorkelling gear. Its single-sex, six-bed dorms come with their own bathrooms, and there's English-language satellite TV, Playstation and a book exchange. Lockout times are 10am to 4pm, or 5pm (June to August).

A shoal of fish dishes and the house speciality *zuppa di datteri* (date soup) are served up at **Marina Piccola** (☎ 0187 92 01 03; www.hotelmarinapiccola.com; Via Lo Scalo 16; s/d from €87/115, meals €22-30) along with sea views. If you want to stay, the 'little marina' has good deals for half- and full-board.

## RIOMAGGIORE

pop 1800

Cinque Terre's easternmost village, Riomaggiore, is the largest of the five, and acts as its unofficial HQ (the main park office is based here). Its peeling pastel buildings tumble like faded chocolate boxes down a steep ravine to a tiny harbour – the region's favourite postcard view – and glow romantically at sunset. The famous Sentiero Azzurro coastal path starts here.

Outside the train station near the water's edge, **murals** depict the backbreaking work of Cinque Terre farmers who, over the centuries, built the Cinque Terre with their bare hands.

Bird life and local flora can be seen from the **Torre Guardiola** (☎ 0187 76 00 52; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm Aug, 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Feb-Jul, Sep & Oct), a nature observation and bird-watching centre located on **Fossola Beach**, immediately south-east of Riomaggiore marina. From the centre a botanical walking trail leads along the coast. To dive or snorkel in the translucent waters, contact **Cooperative Sub 5 Terre** (☎ 0187 92 05 96; Via San Giacomo; ☎ vary seasonally), which also rents canoes and kayaks.

B&Bs and a handful of hotels are situated in the village, as well as room and apartment rental agencies such as **Edi** (☎ 0187 92 03 25; Via Colombo 111) and **La Dolce Vita** (☎ 0187 76 00 44; Via Colombo 120). Some of the cheapest harbour-side rooms are with **La Casa di Venere** (☎ 349 075 31 40; www.lacasadivenere.com; Via Sant'Antonio 114; s without bathroom €30-50, d without bathroom €40-60, d with bathroom €50-70), just off the upper stretch of the main street.

Places to eat and drink line arterial Via Colombo including **Bar Centrale** (☎ 0187 76 00 75; Via Colombo 144; snacks from €5; ☎ 7.30am-midnight), the liveliest late-night and early-morning spot, and **La Lampara** (☎ 0187 92 01 20; Via Malborghetto 2; meals €25; ☎ 7am-midnight), with pizza and pasta *al pesto*.

**La Lanterna** (☎ 0187 92 05 89; Via San Giacomo, Loc Marina; meals €25-33) is perched within pebble-l obbing distance of Riomaggiore's snug harbour that's crammed with fishing nets and overturned boats. You can sit on the charming terrace and choose from recently caught fish chalked up on a blackboard. Leave room for a dessert, such as *babà al limoncello* (bricche drenched in sweet lemon-scented liqueur). Across the laneway, local wine is served by the glass at **Dau Cila** (☎ 0187 76 00 32; Via San Giacomo, Loc Marina; wine & snacks €10; ☎ 8am-2am Mar-Oct), accompanied by cold plates such as smoked tuna with apples and lemon or lemon-marinaded anchovies with pears and parmesan. To reach the harbour, follow the flight of steps leading down from the south end of Via Colombo.

## GETTING THERE & AROUND

### Boat

In summer Cooperativa Battellieri del Golfo Paradiso (p203) runs boats to the Cinque Terre from Genoa.

## CINQUE TERRE WALKS

There's a reason why the **Sentiero Azzurro** is one of Italy's most crowded trails, and one of the few you have to pay to enter. Arguably the most drop-dead-gorgeous coastal hike in the country, the route follows an ancient network of walking paths that has linked the five Cinque Terre villages for over a millennium. Studded with panoramic vistas, it traverses windswept olive groves and seemingly impregnable vineyards, dipping serendipitously into each of the flavourful maritime villages where a bundle of historical distractions can quickly turn this moderate 12km hike into an elongated all-day marathon.

Far from flat, the Azzurro is a narrow, precipitous hike, though people of all shapes and sizes complete it every day. The most popular direction of traffic is east-west, beginning in Riomaggiore and finishing in Monterosso, starting on the famed Via dell'Amore. If you're not up to going the full distance, try hiking as far as the middle village, Corniglia, and getting a train back.

Just a few kilometres shy of a full-blown marathon, the 38km **Sentiero Rosso** – which runs from Porto Venere to Levanto – dangles a tempting challenge to energetic hikers who aim to complete it in nine to 12 hours. It's an accomplishment you won't forget, especially when you hit the swanky beach resort of Levanto and settle down for that long-dreamt-about gelato and/or glass of cold beer.

The other benefit is (relative) solitude. For every 100 people you see on the Sentiero Azzurro, there are less than a dozen up here plying their way along a route that is mainly flat, tree-covered and punctuated with plenty of shortcuts. An early start is assured by an efficient train and bus connection to Porto Venere (via La Spezia), while refreshments en route are possible in a liberal smattering of welcoming bars and restaurants.

Labelled as Trail No 1 on maps, the Sentiero Rosso is well signposted throughout, making it difficult to get lost.

Seasonal boat services to/from Santa Margherita (one-way/return €14/24.50) are handled by Servizio Marittimo del Tigullio (p207).

From late March to October, La Spezia-based Consorzio Marittimo Turistico Cinque Terre Golfo dei Poeti (p213) runs daily shuttle boats between all of the Cinque Terre villages, except Corniglia, costing €16 one-way including all stops, €21 return on weekdays and €23 on weekends.

## Car & Motorcycle

Private vehicles are not allowed beyond village entrances. If you're arriving by car or motorcycle, you'll need to pay to park in designated car parks (€2.30 per hour or €19 per 24 hours). Getting from the car parks to the villages involves a steep hike of 1km or more, although in some villages, minibus shuttles depart from the car parks (one-way/return €1.50/2.50) – park offices have seasonal schedules.

## Train

Between 6.30am and 10pm, one to three trains an hour trundle along the coast between Genoa and La Spezia, stopping at each of the Cinque Terre's villages. Unlimited 2nd-class

rail travel between Levanto and La Spezia is covered by the Cinque Terre Treno Card (see the boxed text, p209).

## La Spezia

pop 94,200

To nonresidents, the hardworking port town of La Spezia is little more than a gateway to Cinque Terre. But, though not as attractive as its famous Unesco-honoured neighbour, Italy's largest naval base has its architectural merits. Echoes of Genoa ring through the narrow winding streets of the Old Town capped by the medieval Castello di San Giorgio and demarcated by pedestrianised Via Prione. In keeping with lip-smacking northwestern gastronomy, there's a handful of slow-food restaurants scattered around the main drag along with a small network of cosy trattorias showcasing the standard Ligurian delicacies of wine, bread and pesto sauce.

La Spezia's bustle peaks on 19 March, the **feast day** of the city's patron saint, San Giuseppe (St Joseph). Celebrations see a giant market fill the port and surrounding streets, and the naval base (off-limits the rest of the year) opens to the public for the day.

## INFORMATION

**Cinque Terre Park Office** (☎ 0187 74 35 00; internet access per 10min €0.80; ☎ 7am-8pm) Inside La Spezia's train station. See p209 for other park offices.

**Police station** (☎ 0187 56 71; Viale Italia 497) East of the centre.

**Post office** (☎ 0187 79 61; Piazza Giuseppe Verdi; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Sat)

**Tourist office** (☎ 0187 25 43 11; www.aptcinqueterre.sp.it; Viale Giuseppe Mazzini 47; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun)

## SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES

La Spezia's star attraction is the **Museo Amedeo Lia** (☎ 0187 73 11 00; www.castagna.it/mal; Via Prione 234; adult/child €6/3; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), a fine-arts museum in a restored 17th-century fri-

ary. The collection covers the 13th to 18th centuries and includes paintings by masters such as Tintoretto, Montagna, Titian and Pietro Lorenzetti. Also on show are Roman bronzes and ecclesiastical treasures such as Limoges crucifixes and illuminated musical manuscripts. Next door, pop into the **Museo del Sigillo** (☎ 0187 77 85 44; Via Prione 236; admission €3; ☎ 4-7pm Tue, 10am-noon & 4-7pm Wed-Sun) to see some 1500 seals dating from the 4th millennium BC to the present day.

Other highlights on La Spezia's museum circuit include an assortment of local archaeological artefacts from prehistoric to medieval times at the **Castello di San Giorgio** (☎ 0187 75 11 42; www.castagna.it/sangiorgio; Via XXVII Marzo; adult/child €5/4; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Wed-Mon May & Sep-

## LA SPEZIA



Oct, 9.30am-12.30pm & 5-8pm Wed-Mon Jun-Aug, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Nov-Apr), and model ships and *polene* (statuettes that graced the prows of vessels) at the 1870-founded naval museum, **Museo Tecnico Navale** (Naval Museum; ☎ 0187 78 30 16; Viale Amendola 1; admission €1.55; ☎ 8am-6.45pm Mon-Sat, to 1pm Sun).

Contact La Spezia-based dive organisation **CNA** (☎ 347 490 90 66; [www.consorzioliguriadiving.it](http://www.consorzioliguriadiving.it), in Italian) for a list of dive operators in the gulf.

## SLEEPING & EATING

There are a number of cheap hotels around the train station, but many tend to be scruffy. The waterfront has plenty of relaxed places to wine and dine.

**Albergo Birillo** (☎ 0187 73 26 66; Via Dei Mille 11/13; s €30-50, d €55-75) A homey haven where rather tight-fitting rooms are made up for by the ultrafriendly owners who'll fill you in on the town's hidden attractions and even offer you a lift to the station. Situated a few blocks from Via Prione and near plenty of good eateries, it makes an economical alternative to digs in Cinque Terre.

**Hotel Firenze e Continentale** (☎ 0187 71 32 00; [www.hotelfirenzecontinentale.it](http://www.hotelfirenzecontinentale.it); Via Paleocapa 7; s €50-94, d €68-134; ☎) Retaining some of its early-1900s atmosphere, with high ceilings, heavy drapes and wall-mounted lamps in many rooms, the three-star Florence is one of the best options near the train station.

**Le Ville Relais** (☎ 0187 73 52 99; [www.levillerelais.it](http://www.levillerelais.it); Salita al Piano 18/19; s €80-100, d €100-120; ☎) In a rarefied hillside location 3km from the city centre, this chic new villa has sublime views over the Gulf of Poets, with eye-level views from the swimming pool. Light, airy rooms have sophisticated beachy furnishings and free broadband. In addition to the homemade cakes served at breakfast, a new on-site restaurant is due to open by the time you're reading this.

**Vicolo Intherno** (☎ 0187 2 39 98; Via della Canonica 22; meals around €20; ☎ Tue-Sat) Take a seat around chunky wooden tables beneath beamed ceilings at this Slow Fish-affiliated restaurant and wash down the *torte di verdure* (Ligurian vegetable pie) or stockfish with local vintages.

**Zanzibar Cafe** (☎ 334 804 59 41; Via Prione 289; snacks €5-10; ☎ 6.30am-8.30pm Tue-Thu, till 1am Fri & Sat) Via Prione is full of cafes and eateries. Toss a coin and you might end up at the rarely empty Zanzibar, where zebra-striped seats and mood lighting suggest delusions of trendiness. Wear

your best sunglasses and sit down for frappé, antipasti, *panini* and desserts.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses run by **Azienda Trasporti Consortile** (ATC; ☎ 800 322322; [www.atcdaspezia.it](http://www.atcdaspezia.it), in Italian) are the only way to reach nearby towns, including Porto Venere (€1.45, approximately every 30 minutes) from Via Domenico Chiodo, Lerici (€1.45, approximately every 15 minutes) and Sarzana (€1.60, two or three daily), both from the train station. Fewer buses operate on Sunday.

La Spezia is on the Genoa-Rome railway line and is also connected to Milan (€21, three hours, four daily), Turin (€24, three hours, several daily) and Pisa (€5, 50 minutes, almost hourly). The Cinque Terre and other coastal towns are easily accessible by train – see p211.

**Consorzio Maritimo Turistico Cinque Terre Golfo dei Poeti** (☎ 0187 96 76 76; [www.navigazionegolfodeipoeti.it](http://www.navigazionegolfodeipoeti.it); Passeggiata Constantino Morin) runs boat services to Genoa and Lerici, as well as coastal towns including all Cinque Terre towns except Camogli.

## Porto Venere pop 4000

Perched on the Gulf of Poets' western promontory, Porto Venere has a riddle of little lanes and staircases, a petite harbour and no small amount of history. The Romans built *Portus Veneris* as a base en route from Gaul to Spain, and in later years, Byzantines, Lombards, the Genovese and Napoleon all passed through here. Cinque Terre's marathon-length Red Trail to Levanto starts here, just behind the castle. Hikers, take a deep breath...

The **tourist office** (☎ 0187 79 06 91; [www.portovenere.it](http://www.portovenere.it); Piazza Bastrieri 7; ☎ 10am-noon & 3-6pm Thu-Tue Sep-May, 10am-noon & 3-8pm daily Jun-Aug) sells a couple of useful maps and walking guides in English. Outside the hectic summer season, Porto Venere is something of a ghost town.

## SIGHTS

From the waterfront, narrow steps and cobbled paths lead uphill to the **Chiesa di San Lorenzo**, built in 1130. In the church's shadow is the 16th-century **Castello Doria** (adult/child €2.20/1.20; ☎ 10.30am-1.30pm & 2.30-6pm daily Apr-Aug, 10.30am-1.30pm & 2.30-6pm Sat & Sun Sep-Mar), a formidable example of the Genoese military architecture offering magnificent views from its ornate terraced gardens.

At the end of the quay a Cinque Terre panorama unfolds from the rocky terraces of **Grotta Arpaia**, a former haunt of Byron, who once swam across the gulf from Porto Venere to Lerici to visit his mate, Shelley. Traces of a pagan temple have been uncovered on the quay, inside the black-and-white-marble **Chiesa di San Pietro**, which was built in 1277. Just off the promontory lie the tiny islands of **Palmaria**, **Tino** and **Tinetto**.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Albergo Genio** (☎ 0187 79 06 11; www.hotelgenioportovenere.com; Piazza Bastrieri 8; s €75-90, d €95-120; ☎ mid-Feb–mid-Jan; P ☎) From Piazza Bastrieri, scale the spiral stairs in the round tower to reach this charming seven-room hotel. In summer breakfast is served alfresco beneath the vines, and some rooms are equipped with air-conditioning.

**La Lanterna** (☎ 0187 79 22 91; www.lalanterna-portovenere.it; Via Capellini 109; d €75-85; ☎) Down by Porto Venere's picturesque harbourfront, this little guesthouse has just two airy rooms (there's also an option of a four-person apartment on request). Breakfast isn't included, but can be arranged; otherwise stroll to a nearby cafe.

**Locanda Lorena** (☎ 0187 79 23 70; Via Cavour 4) Situated on the island of Palmaria, this place has a delightful restaurant and rooms – call for more information, and for them to send their boat over.

A half-dozen or so restaurants line Calata Doria, by the sea. A block inland, Porto Venere's main old-town street, Via Cappellini, has several tasty choices.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Porto Venere is served by daily buses from La Spezia – see p213.

From late March to October, La Spezia-based Consorzio Marittimo Turistico Cinque Terre Golfo dei Poeti (p213) sails from Porto Venere to/from the Cinque Terre (one-way with all stops €15, return €20 to €22) and runs boat excursions to the islands of Palmaria, Tino and Tinetto (€9), as well as services to La Spezia and Lerici (call for seasonal information).

## Lerici & Around

pop 11,200

Magnolia, yew and cedar trees grow in the 1930s public **gardens** at Lerici, an exclusive

retreat of pool-equipped villas clinging to the cliffs along its beach.

For outstanding views make your way on foot or by public lift to the 12th-century **Castello di Lerici** (Piazza San Giorgio 1). Lerici's **tourist office** (☎ 0187 96 73 46; info@apptcinqueterre.sp.it; Via Biaggini 6; ☎ 9am–1pm & 2.30–5.30pm Mon–Sat, 9am–1pm Sun) can advise on walking and cycling in the area, as well as accommodation.

From Lerici a scenic 3km coastal stroll leads north to **San Terenzo**, a seaside village with a sandy beach and Genoese castle. The Shelleys stayed at the waterfront Villa Magni (closed to visitors) in the early 1820s and Percy drowned here when his boat sank off the coast in 1822 on a return trip from Livorno.

Another coastal stroll, 4km south, takes you past magnificent little bays to **Tellaro**, a fishing hamlet with pink-and-orange houses cluttered about narrow lanes and tiny squares. Sit on the rocks at the **Chiesa San Giorgio** and imagine an octopus ringing the church bells – which, according to legend, it did to warn the villagers of a Saracen attack. Tellaro is home to the gourmards' hideaway, **Locanda Miranda** (☎ 0187 96 40 12; www.locandamiranda.com; Via Fiascherina 92; d €120, d with half-board €180, set menus €40–60, mains €20; P), an exquisite seven-room inn with art- and antiques-decorated rooms, and a Michelin-starred restaurant specialising exclusively in seafood (not for vegetarians or carnivores!).

## Val di Magra

On the Tuscan border, the Magra Valley's main town, **Sarzana** (population 20,120), was an important outpost of the Genoese republic. In its **cathedral** you can see the world's oldest crucifix painted on wood. Before embarking on nature walks in this pretty region's protected park, the **Parco di Montemarcello-Magra**, pop into its **information centre** (☎ 0187 69 10 71; www.parcomagra.it, in Italian; Via Paci 2) in Sarzana.

The centre also has information on the Val di Magra's archaeological sites, including **Luni** (☎ 0187 6 68 11; adult/child €2/free; ☎ 8.30am–7.30pm Tue–Sun), 6km southeast of Sarzana. Established as a Roman colony in 177 BC, it thrived as a wealthy trading centre until the Middle Ages, when the port began to silt up, making it a breeding ground for malaria. The town was abandoned in 1204. Today you can see remains of an amphitheatre, forum, temples and houses, along with some remarkable mosaic floors and frescoes.



## RIVIERA DI PONENTE

Curving west from Genoa to the French border, the Ponente stretch of the Ligurian coast is flatter and more down-to-earth than the flashy Riviera di Levante. As a result it shelters some unlikely escape-hatches, particularly along the stretch of coast from Noli to Finale Ligure.

The coast's chalky cliffs draw free climbers from far and wide; above the cliffs, the mountains hide a warren of hilltop villages.

### Savona

pop 62,000

Behind Savona's sprawling port facilities, the city's unexpectedly graceful medieval centre is well worth getting off the train for. Among the old-town treasures to survive destruction by Genoese forces in the 16th century are the baroque **Cattedrale di Nostra Signora Assunta** (Piazza Cattedrale) and the lumbering **Fortezza del Priamar** (Piazza Priamar). This imposing fortress guards a couple of sculpture museums and the **Civico Museo Storico Archeologico** (☎ 019 82 27 08; Piazza Priamar; adult/child €2.50/1.50; ☹ 10am-noon & 3-5pm Tue-Sat, 3-5pm Sun Jun-Sep, 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 3-5pm Sat, 3-5pm Sun Oct-May), which displays archaeological finds.

Art aficionados won't want to miss the **Pinacoteca Civica Savona** (☎ 019 81 15 20; Piazza Chabrol 1/2; adult/child €4/2; ☹ 8.30am-1pm & 2-7pm Mon, Tue & Thu, 2-9pm Wed & Fri, 8.30am-1pm & 8-11pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug, 8.30am-1pm & 2-7pm Mon, Tue & Thu, 2-9pm Wed & Fri, 8.30am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Sep-Jun), which has an important collection of religious paintings, including a Madonna and child by Taddeo

di Bartolo, dating from the 14th to 15th centuries, and two Picassos.

The **tourist office** (☎ 019 840 23 21; [iatsavona@infocomm.it](mailto:iatsavona@infocomm.it); Corso Italia 157r; ☹ 9am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-12.30pm Sun Apr-Sep, 9am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sat Jan-Mar, Oct & Nov) is a short stroll from Savona's sandy beach.

Six- to seven-hour **whale-watching trips** (☎ 010 26 57 12; [www.whalewatchliguria.it](http://www.whalewatchliguria.it); adult/child €35/23) depart Savona at 10am from July to September.

### SLEEPING & EATING

The tourist office can help book accommodation, both in the city and the coastal towns to the west. Savona also has one of Liguria's few hostels, **Villa de' Franceschini** (☎ 019 26 32 22; [www.ostellionline.org](http://www.ostellionline.org); Via alla Strà 'Conca Verde' 29; dm/d €13/32; ☹ mid-Mar-Oct; (P) ☹), situated 3km from the train station in a sprawling park. Another cheap sleep is **Albergo Savona** (☎ 019 82 18 20; Piazza del Popolo 53; s €30-40, d €45-62), a no-frills affair wedged between the train station and the old town.

To enter **Vino e Farinata** (Via Pia 15; meals €17-20; ☹ Tue-Sat) in the cobbled centre, you'll have to walk past the two ancient chefs: one shovelling fish into a wood-fired oven and the other mixing up batter in a barrel-sized whisking machine. The result: Ligurian *farinata*, the menu staple in this very local restaurant that also hordes some excellent wines.

### GETTING THERE & AROUND

**SAR** (☎ 0182 215 44) and **ACTS** (☎ 019 220 11) buses, departing from Piazza del Popolo and the

### LIGURIA'S TOP FIVE DIVE SITES

Protected marine reserves, wrecks and underwater caves and crevices offer scuba divers of all levels of experience fascinating underwater explorations. Dive operators are listed in the Sights & Activities sections of this chapter.

- **BR-20** This Italian Fiat BR-20 fighter bomber crashed in 1940 near Ventimiglia, but wasn't damaged on impact and remains structurally intact. Difficult.
- **Secca Isuela** In a protected conservation area, this rocky peak rising from the seabed near Camogli sees a frenzy of fish feeding on a blizzard of anchovies. Average level.
- **Parete** On the western side of the tiny island of Tino, near Porto Venere, the fissured Parete rock face shelters scorpion fish and conger eels. Easy.
- **Punta Portofino** Boulders big enough to hide groupers lie just off Portofino, but currents here can be treacherous. Difficult.
- **Bettolina** A 10-minute boat ride from Sestri Levante, this upright WWII German barge has rare jewel anemones on its stern ladder. Average level.

train station, are the best options for reaching points inland. Bus 2 links the train station and the fortress. On foot, Via Collodi and Via Don Minzoni lead from the station across the Letimbro river towards Piazza del Popolo, from where Via Paleocapa runs to the marina.

Trains run along the coast to Genoa's Stazione Brignole (€3.30, 45 minutes, almost hourly) and San Remo (€5.70, 1¼ hours, eight daily).

**Corsica Ferries** (☎ 019 21 55 11; www.corsicaferries.com) runs up to three boats daily between Savona's Porto Vado and Corsica.

## Noli

pop 3000

West of Savona, Noli is one of Liguria's coastal jewels and a welcome lifeline for beleaguered tourist-phobes. From its historic centre, an astonishingly intact medieval battlement zigzags up **Monte Ursino** (120m); it is topped by a ruined 11th-century castle. Following the wall to the castle gives you a spectacular panorama of the village's eight remaining **Genoese towers**.

The existing Romanesque form of Noli's most historic church, **San Paragorio**, was built in AD 1000, and the original structure has long been thought to date back to AD 800. However, in late 2006 new archaeological finds suggested that the church may in fact be much older – watch this space.

Fishing boats sell their unloaded catches to villagers each morning on Noli's pretty **beach**, from where views extend to Tuscany.

Noli's little **tourist office** (☎ 019 749 90 03; Corso Italia 8; ☎ 9am–noon & 2.30–6pm Mon–Sat, 9am–noon Sun Apr–mid-Sep, 9am–noon & 2.30–6pm Mon–Sat mid-Sep–Mar) has information about sleeping and eating options, as well as water sports including **windsurfing**.

**SAR** (☎ 0182 2 15 44) buses travel every 30 minutes along the coast to/from Savona (€2.20, 30 minutes), continuing to Finale Ligure and Finalborgo (€1.30, 20 minutes).

## Finale Ligure

pop 12,300

Set amid lush Mediterranean vegetation, this township actually comprises several districts. **Finale Ligure** has a wide, fine-sand beach; the walled medieval centre, known as **Finalborgo**, is a knot of twisting alleys set 1km back from the coast on the Pora river. **Finale Marina** sits

on the waterfront, while the more residential **Finale Pia** runs along the Sciusa river in the direction of Genoa.

Each year in March, Finalborgo's cloisters are home to the **Salone dell'Agroalimentare Ligure**, where local farmers and artisan producers display delicacies and vintages.

**our pick Hotel Florenz** (☎ 019 69 56 67; www.florenz.it; Via Celestia 1; s €52–75, d €74–120; ☎ closed Nov & Feb; ☐ ☐ ☐), a rambling 18th-century former convent just outside Finalborgo's village walls (800m from the sea), is one of the most atmospheric spots to sleep. Offering stiff competition is **Castello Vuillermin** (☎ 019 69 05 15; Via Generale Caviglia 46; dm/d €15.50/44), a youth hostel in a castle, no less, with stunning views from its terrace. It's 1km from the station and up 300-plus steps. It accepts nonmembers for a small supplement.

Delicious Ligurian cuisine is cooked up at the rustic **Osteria ai Cuatru Canti** (☎ 019 68 05 40; set menus €20; ☎ Tue–Sun) in Finalborgo's historic centre.

From the train station on Piazza Vittorio Veneto, at Finale Marina's western end, walk down Via Saccone to the sea and the **tourist office** (☎ 019 68 10 19; finaleligure@inforiviera.it; Via San Pietro 14; ☎ 9am–12.30pm & 3–6.30pm Mon–Sat & 9am–noon Sun Jul & Aug). The promenade along Via San Pietro and Via Concezione is crammed with eateries.

**SAR** (☎ 0182 2 15 44) buses yo-yo every 30 minutes to/from Finale Ligure and Savona (€2.20, 50 minutes), stopping en route in Finalborgo (€1, five minutes) and Noli (€1.30, 20 minutes).

## Albenga to Imperia

Some of Liguria's only flat land stretches out along this section of coastline, making it ripe for growing fruit, vegetables and garden plants. The area is well served by trains and SAR buses (€3.40 to Savona).

**Albenga** (population 22,760) is the most interesting stop. Settled as far back as the 5th century BC, Albenga grew from its Roman roots to become an independent maritime republic during the Middle Ages, and retains a preserved medieval centre today. Albenga's **tourist office** (☎ 0182 55 84 44; albenga@inforiviera.it; Lungocenta Croce Bianca 12; ☎ 9am–12.30pm & 3–6.30pm Tue–Sat) has plenty of useful information on the town's sights. Highlights include the **Museo Diocesano di Arte Sacra** (Via Episcopio 5; adult/child €3/1; ☎ 10am–noon & 3–6pm Tue–Sun), featuring a painting

by Caravaggio. It is located near a 5th-century **baptistry** and Romanesque **cathedral**. A collection of 1st-century amphorae, recovered in 1950 from the wreck of a Roman cargo vessel 4km offshore, is at the **Museo Navale Romano** (Roman Naval Museum; ☎ 0182 5 12 15; Piazza San Michele 12; adult/child €3/1; ☎ 9.30am–12.30pm & 3.30–7.30pm Tue–Sun Jul & Aug, 10am–12.30pm & 2.30–6pm Tue–Sun Sep–Jun).

More touristy (and more expensive) is **Alassio** (population 11,365). The town's 3km of white, sandy beaches have made it a long-time favourite with visiting luminaries such as Hemingway, who have left their mark on its autograph-engraved **Muretto di Alassio**. This wall of fame runs between the sea and the art nouveau train station. While in town, be sure to try Alassio's version of Baci – two biscuit whirls sandwiched together with chocolate cream.

Busy **Imperia** (population 39,518) was created in 1923 by Mussolini when he bridged the Impero river and unified the towns of Oneglia (east) and Porto Maurizio (west). The latter is dominated by a large neoclassical cathedral and merits an afternoon stroll.

Savona's tourist office (p215) can provide information about the area.

## San Remo

pop 50,900

Fifty kilometres east of Europe's premier gambling capital lies San Remo, Italy's wannabe Monte Carlo, a sun-dappled Mediterranean resort with a casino, a clutch of ostentatious villas, and lashings of Riviera-style grandeur. Known colloquially as the City of Flowers for its colourful summer blooms, San Remo also stages an annual music festival (the supposed inspiration for the Eurovision Song Contest) and the world's longest professional one-day cycling race, the 298km Milan–Sanremo Classic.

During the mid-19th century the city became a magnet for regal European exiles such as Empress Elizabeth of Austria and Czar Nicola of Russia, who favoured the town's balmy winters. Swedish inventor Alfred Nobel maintained a villa here and an onion-domed Russian Orthodox church reminiscent of Moscow's St Basil's Cathedral still turns heads down by the seafront.

Beyond the manicured lawns and belle époque hotels, San Remo hides a little-visited old town, a labyrinth of twisting lanes

that cascade down the Ligurian hillside. Curling around the base is a new 25km bike and walking path that tracks the coast as far as Imperia, following the course of a former railway line and passing through the town's two character-filled harbours.

## INFORMATION

Pick up a copy of *Rivieri dei Fiori News*, a free monthly newspaper available at the tourist office. For more information about the area, check out [www.sanremoguide.com](http://www.sanremoguide.com), [www.sanremonet.com](http://www.sanremonet.com) and [www.sanremomani.festazioni.it](http://www.sanremomani.festazioni.it) (in Italian).

**Hospital** (☎ 0184 53 61; Via Giovanni Borea 56)

**Police station** (☎ 0184 5 23 71; Corso Felice Cavallotti 16)

**Post office** (Via Roma 156; ☎ 8am–6pm Mon–Sat)

**Tourist office** (☎ 0184 5 90 59; [www.rivieradeifiori.org](http://www.rivieradeifiori.org); Largo Nuvoloni 1; ☎ 8am–7pm Mon–Sat, 9am–1pm Sun)

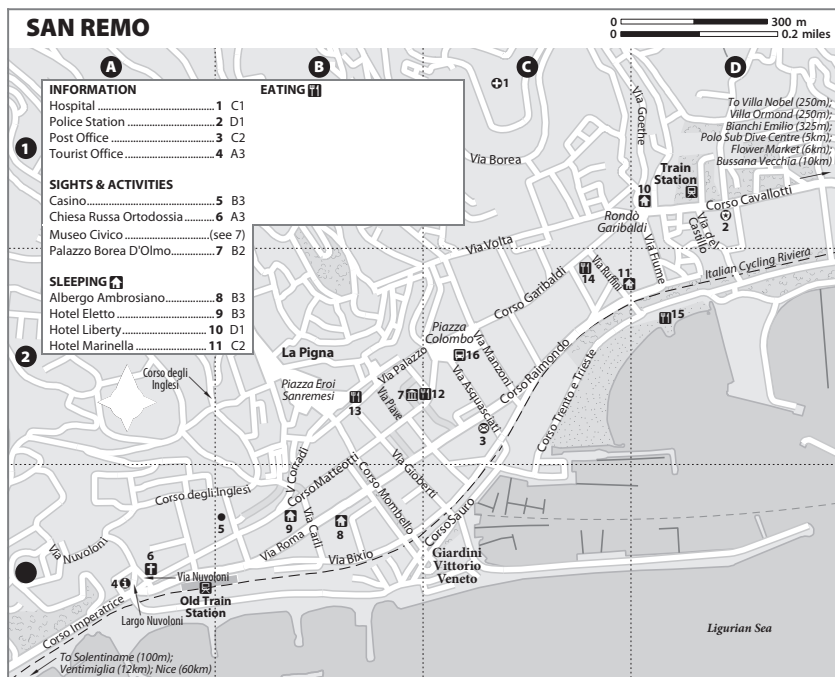
## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Close to the tourist office, the multicoloured **Chiesa Russa Ortodossia** (☎ 0184 53 18 07; Via Nuvoloni 2; admission €1; ☎ 9.30am–noon & 3–6pm) was built for the Russian community that followed Tsarina Maria to San Remo. The Russian Orthodox church – with its onion domes and pale blue interior – was designed in 1906 by Alexei Shchusev, who later planned Lenin's mausoleum in Moscow. These days it's used as an exhibition space for Russian icons. Nearby is the famous **casino** (Corso degli Inglesi), built in 1905 and still a winner with punters.

On shop-lined Corso Matteotti, the sumptuous **Palazzo Borea d'Olmo** was built during the 15th century and today houses the **Museo Civico** (☎ 0184 53 19 42; Corso Matteotti 143; admission free; ☎ 9am–noon & 3–6pm Tue–Sat). Several rooms, some with fine frescoed ceilings, display local prehistoric and Roman archaeological finds, paintings and temporary exhibitions. Highlights include Maurizio Carrega's *Gloria di San Napoleone*, painted in 1808 as a sycophantic homage to the Corsican despot of the same name, and bronze statues by Franco Baggigia.

A short stroll east of town, elegant villas include the Moorish **Villa Nobel** (Corso Felice Cavallotti 112; admission free; ☎ 11am–12.30pm Tue–Fri), housing a museum dedicated to Swedish inventor Alfred Nobel, who established the Nobel Prize while living here; and the peaceful Japanese gardens of **Villa Ormond** (☎ 0184 50 57 62; Corso Felice Cavallotti 51; admission free; ☎ gardens 8am–7pm).

## SAN REMO



You can watch the frenetic bidding at Italy's principal **flower market** (Via Frantoi Canaii; ☑ 6-8am Oct-Jun), 6km east of town.

About 10km northeast of San Remo is the intriguing artist colony **Bussana Vecchia**. On Ash Wednesday 1887, an earthquake destroyed the village, and survivors were eventually forced to abandon it. It remained a ghost town until the 1960s, when artists moved in and began rebuilding the ruins using the original stones from the rubble. After successfully standing up to authorities who wanted to remove them, a thriving community of international artists remains in residence today.

In a spirit befitting a city that hosts professional cycling's greatest Spring Classic, San Remo is in the process of building a 25km walking and cycling path known as the **Italian Cycling Riviera**. Much of the path – which runs along the route of a former railway line – is now open and offers bike hire en route. Inquire at the tourist office (p217). **Polo Sub Dive Centre** (☎ 0184 53 53 35; Via Lungomare, Arma di Taggia) offers diving for €35 per immersion from the Darsena Porto in Taggia, 5km to the east.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

**Corso Fiorito** (Flower Parade) This colourful parade, held over the last weekend in January, kicks off the town's annual festivities.

**Festival di San Remo** ([www.festivaldisanremo.com](http://www.festivaldisanremo.com), in Italian) Celebrating Italian music, this has been going since 1951, and attracts top Italian and international talent each March.

**Rally Storico** In April, San Remo's famous car rallies ([www.sanremorally.it](http://www.sanremorally.it)) rev up for cars made between 1931 and 1981.

## Rally Classic Follows in May.

**Rally e San Remo** The big one; first held in 1926, it's run every September.

## SLEEPING

San Remo has no shortage of hotels, although summer and festival times can be busy and a few places shut from September until just before Christmas.

**Albergo Ambrosiano** (☎ 0184 57 71 89; [www.hotelambrosiano.it](http://www.hotelambrosiano.it); Via Roma 36; d €60-100; 🚶) This friendly hotel has eight immaculate rooms with plenty of space to stretch out, although those with lots of luggage may find the miniature lift a challenge.

**Hotel Eletto** (☎ 0184 53 15 48; www.elettohotel.it; Via G Matteotti 44; s €50-95, d €60-125; P ☼) Get lured in by the Parisian art nouveau entrance canopy to a friendly reception desk where they'll direct you upstairs to clean, refurbished sound-proofed rooms in a central location.

**Hotel Liberty** (Rondò Garibaldi 2; s €45-55, d €70-90) Equipped with new, young owners and a new name, this 10-room hotel is set in a Liberty-style villa off a small traffic circle about 100m from the train station. The small but clean rooms are quiet and infused with faded elegance, while most sights of note are only footsteps away.

**Hotel Marinella** (☎ 0184 50 59 00; www.hotelmarinella.it, in Italian; Via Ruffini 21; s €55-72, d €70-105; ☼) Across the road from the waterfront, most of Marinella's sun-splashed, tiled rooms have balconies, and all are spotless and spacious. The hotel's attached glass restaurant (mains around €15) is a bit like dining in a goldfish bowl, but the sea views are worth it.

## EATING & DRINKING

Cheap trattorias fill the old-town alleys around Piazza Eroi Sanremesi and open-air snack bars stud the length of Corso Nazario Sauro, the promenade overlooking the old port.

**Our pick Cantine Sanremesi** (☎ 0184 57 20 63; Via Palazzo 7; mains €7-12; ☼ Tue-Sun) Meet the locals at this time-worn tavern over *trofie al pesto* or a delicious *stoccafisso alla sanremesa* (stockfish with tomato and potatoes).

**Cuvea** (☎ 0184 50 34 98; Corso Giuseppe Garibaldi 110; set menus €15-20, mains €8-9; ☼ lunch Mon-Sat & dinner daily Jul & Aug, lunch daily & dinner Mon-Sat Sep-Jun) This cosy, brightly lit place lined with wine bottles overflows with locals tucking into its homemade traditional dishes such as pesto-doused pasta.

**Victory Morgana Bay** (☎ 0184 59 16 20; Corso Trento e Trieste 16; mains €8-16; ☼ 11am-3pm Tue, to 2am Wed-Mon) Situated right on the waterfront as if it's about to set sail, this sophisticated yachting cafe-restaurant serves up a varied menu of salads, fish and grilled meats, with occasional live music.

**Caffè Ducale** (☎ 0184 195 52 02; Via Matteotti 145; lunch menus €18-22; ☼ 7:30am-midnight) Italian panache with an added dash of San Remo swankiness make this elegant cafe-*enoteca-salon de the* one of the most refined joints east of the Côte d'Azur. Enjoy a few *aperitivi* under the weighty chandeliers before heading off to the casino to blow what's left of your holiday budget.

**Solentiname** (☎ 0184 66 44 77; Lungomare Vittorio Emanuele 9; ☼ 7pm-late Tue-Sun) DJ sets and live music draw crowds to this fun pizzeria-pub; you can also have lunch here in July and August.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

**Riviera Trasporti** (☎ 0184 59 27 06; Piazza Colombo 42) buses leave regularly from the bus station for the French border, east along the coast and inland destinations.

From San Remo's underground train station there are trains to/from Genoa (€8.10, three hours, hourly), Ventimiglia (€1.90, 15 minutes, hourly) and stations in between.

## Ventimiglia

pop 26,800

Long before the French-Italian border bore any significance, Ventimiglia harboured a stoic Roman town known as Albintimilium that survived until the 5th century AD when it was besieged by the Goths.

Sandwiched between the road and the railway line on the eastern edge of town, the **Area Archeologica** (Roman ruins; admission free; ☼ 3-5.30pm Sat & Sun) bears testimony to Ventimiglia's Roman romance and includes the remains of an amphitheatre and baths dating from the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.

These days Ventimiglia is better known as a border with a huge Friday **market** (☼ 8am-3pm or 4pm), when hundreds of stalls sell food, clothes, homewares, baskets and everything else under the sun. The market concentrates around Piazza della Libertà, near the river, and is popular with French day-trippers.

Corso Genova is the main eastern exit from the city; its continuation to the west is Via Cavour. The **tourist office** (☎ 0184 35 11 83; Via T Hanbury 3a; ☼ 9am-12.30pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 9am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun) is just steps from the train station.

On a hill on the western bank of the Roia river, Ventimiglia's medieval town is crowned with a 12th-century **cathedral** (Via del Capo). The town itself is largely residential.

Flora from five continents flourishes at the **Giardini Botanici Hanbury** (☎ 0184 22 95 07; Corso Montecarlo 43, La Mortola; adult/child €7.50/4; ☼ 9.30am-6pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, to 5pm mid-Sep-mid-Oct & Mar-mid-Jun, to 4pm mid-Oct-Feb). Established in 1867 by English businessman Sir Thomas Hanbury, the 18-hectare Villa Hanbury estate is planted with 5800 botanical species,



including cacti, palm groves and citrus orchards. Today it's a protected area, under the care of the University of Genoa. Take bus 1a from Via Cavour in Ventimiglia; the bus continues on to the Ponte San Lodovico frontier post, from where you can walk down to the Balzi Rossi on the French border.

A 10-minute stroll along the seafront from Ventimiglia's town centre, the family-run **Hotel Seagull** (☎ 0184 35 17 26; [www.seagullhotel.it](http://www.seagullhotel.it); Passeggiata Marconi 24; s/d from €55/75;  ) has simple but appealing sky-blue-and-white rooms, a fragrant garden and a breezy terrace. Both half- and full-board options are available.

Cheap, cheerful eateries congregate around Via Cavour.

From the **train station** (Via della Stazione), Corso della Repubblica leads to the beach. Trains connect Ventimiglia with Genoa (€9.30, two to 3½ hours, hourly), Nice (50 minutes, hourly) and other destinations in France.

## PIEDMONT

Piedmont has got '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 this spatially challenged but boldly ambitious European kingdom provided the nascent nation with its first prime minister, the Count of Cavour, and its dynastic royal family, the noble House of Savoy.

Bisected by the Po river and overshadowed by the snowcapped Alps, capital city Turin has unquestionable importance with its grand Napoleonic centre and solid industrial base dominated by automobile manufacturer Fiat. Beyond the car factories, Piedmont is notable for its food – everything from arborio rice to white truffles – a lucrative yield that is produced in pastoral, verdant fields that are often likened to those in nearby Tuscany – but without the tourists.

Piedmont's smaller towns were once feuding fiefdoms that bickered over trade and religion. Today the biggest skirmishes are over who produces the best wine or which valley showcases the finest cheese. Traditionally, Asti and Alba stand tallest in the culinary stakes while understated Cuneo uses its longstanding chocolate obsession to help fuel outdoor adventures in the nearby Maritime Alps.

## Activities

Piedmont is a jumping-off point for Italy's largest wilderness area, the **Parco Nazionale della Val Grande** ([www.parcovalgrande.it](http://www.parcovalgrande.it)).

Serious walkers can tackle the two-week **Grande Traversata delle Alpi** (GTA), starting in southern Piedmont and following a network of Alpine *rifugi* (mountain huts) north through the alpine province of Cuneo, the Valle di Susa and into Aosta (see the boxed text, p237).

**Horse riding** is plentiful in summer; contact **Agriturismo Piemonte** (☎ 011 53 49 18; [www.agriturismopiemonte.it](http://www.agriturismopiemonte.it), in Italian; Via Lagrange 2) in Turin for a list of farms that offer a range of activities including riding, as well as accommodation and dining.

Some of Europe's most fashionable **skiing** pistes are within easy striking distance of Turin.

## TURIN

pop 901,000 / elevation 240m

Turin: where do you start? The list is daunting. Here is a metropolis that harbours one of the world's biggest car companies (Fiat), a globally iconic football team (Juventus), two of Italy's finest museums (the Museo Egizio and the Mole Antonelliana), and one of history's most controversial and perplexing mysteries (the Holy Shroud). Probably the best place to mull over the highlights is in one of the lavishly gilded cafe-patisseries that embellish this so-called 'Capital of the Alps' with its swanky shopfronts and endless covered walkways.

Fiercely Italian with tinges of French influence, Turin has long acted as a gateway between northern and southern Europe and in many ways the city retains classic elements of both. Though lacking the ancient monuments of Rome, the bustle of Naples, the jaw-dropping vistas of Venice or the fashion swank of Milan, Turin has confidence and grandiosity in spades. As Italy's fourth-largest city it hosted the 2006 Winter Olympics and, with the majestic Po river flowing through its centre, its seductive capabilities are not open to question.

Like all great cities, Turin has left an important mark on international culture, particularly in the field of gastronomy. Tic Tacs originated here as did solid chocolate, Lavazza coffee, breadsticks, and important elements within the Slow Food Movement.



What Turin doesn't have is crowds. For new arrivals it's a mystery as puzzling as the Shroud itself. But real Torino-philés keep mum. Theirs is a secret worth keeping.

Whether the ancient city of Taurisia began as a Celtic or Ligurian settlement is unknown: it was destroyed by Hannibal in 218 BC. The Roman colony of Augusta Taurinorum was established here almost two centuries later. In succeeding years, Goths, Lombards and Franks tramped through the city. In 1563

## TURIN IN...

### One Day

Arise before the traffic and head off for an early morning walk/jog/bike ride along the Po river. Shower, change and grab a leisurely breakfast in the **Caffè San Carlo** (p231) while watching the animated morning caffeine rush. Flip a coin and choose between one of two world-class museums – the **Museo Egizio** (p226) or the **Museo Nazionale del Cinema** (p227) – either of which should keep you occupied until lunchtime. Enjoy a *panini* while browsing the books in **Mood** (p230) before hitting the cobbles around Via Garibaldi and gawping at the artistic shop-window displays. For more art hit the temporary exhibitions in the **Palazzo Bricherasio** (p226) before sipping an aperitif in **Fiorio** (p232) and heading off for dinner in **8¾**(p229).

### Two Days

On day two start early again and head up to the **Basilica di Superga** (p228) in the tram before the crowds. Soak up the view and dip your finger in the holy water before descending for a picnic lunch at the **Porta Palazzo market** (p230). In the afternoon complete the second half of the Mole-Egizio museum visit (whichever you missed yesterday) and go for a boat trip along the **river Po** (p228). Sample the chocolate in **Al Bicerin** (p231) before picking up your **opera ticket** (p232) and Torinese date for a night full of quintessential Italian music. Linger over a late-night meal in the legendary **Restaurant del Cambio** (p230) and blow the rest of your holiday budget in **Hiroshima Mon Amour** (p232).

the Savoy abandoned their old capital of Chambéry (now in France) to set up court in Turin, which shared the dynasty's fortunes thereafter. The Savoy annexed Sardinia in 1720, but Napoleon virtually put an end to their power when he occupied Turin in 1798. Turin was occupied by Austria and Russia before Vittorio Emanuele I restored the House of Savoy and re-entered Turin in 1814. Nevertheless, Austria remained the true power throughout northern Italy until the Risorgimento (literally 'the Resurgence', referring to Italian unification) in 1861, when Turin became the nation's inaugural capital. Its capital status lasted only until 1864, and the parliament had already moved to Florence by the time full-size chambers were completed.

Turin adapted quickly to its loss of political significance, becoming a centre for industrial production during the early 20th century. Giants such as Fiat lured hundreds of thousands of impoverished southern Italians to Turin and housed them in vast company-built and -owned suburbs. Fiat's owners, the Agnelli family (who also happen to own the champion Juventus football club, Turin's local newspaper and a large chunk of the national daily *Corriere della Sera*), remain one of Italy's most powerful establishment forces. Fiat's fortunes declined later in the 20th century, however, and only revived around a decade ago.

The highly successful 2006 Winter Olympics were a turning point for the city. The Olympics not only ushered in a building boom, including a brand-new metro system, but transformed Turin from a staid industrial centre into a vibrant metropolis. Turin was scheduled to again step into the spotlight in 2008, as the European Capital of Design, hosting conferences and exhibitions. Preparations are now underway for 2011, when it will be the focus of the nation while hosting the 150th anniversary of the Risorgimento.

### Orientation

Via Roma, Turin's main shopping thoroughfare since 1615, runs northeast from Stazione Porta Nuova to the central square, Piazza Castello. Stazione Porta Nuova is currently the main point of arrival, although the revamped Stazione Porta Susa will ultimately become the city's main station, and an increasing number of trains will use it in the coming years.

Busy Corso Vittorio Emanuele II is the main tram and bus route, running southeast to northwest. Piazza Carlo Felice, the square in front of Stazione Porta Nuova, and Via Nizza, which continues southwest past the station, are the main axes of Turin's seedier side.

The Mole Antonelliana's metallic spire dominates the horizon to the east, beyond which lies the Po and much of the city's night-

life. Just to the west of Piazza Castello, bars and bookshops fill the Quadrilatero Romano (Turin's 'Latin Quarter').

## Information

### BOOKSHOPS

**Libreria Luxemburg** (☎ 011 561 38 96; Via Battisti 7)

Anglo-American bookshop.

**Touring Club Italiano** (☎ 011 562 72 07; Via San

Francesco d'Assisi 3) Map and guidebook heaven.

### EMERGENCY

**Police station** (☎ 011 5 58 81; Corso Vinzaglio 10)

### INTERNET ACCESS

**1PC4YOU** (☎ 011 83 59 08; Via G Verdi 20g; per hr €6;

☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-10pm Sun)

### LAUNDRY

**Lav@sciuga** (www.lavasciuga.torino.it; ☎ 8am-10pm)

Branches at Piazza della Repubblica 5, Via Sant'Anselmo

9 and Via Vanchiglia 10 provide free internet access for customers.

### LEFT LUGGAGE

**Stazione Porta Nuova** (opposite platform No 16;

1st/next 12hr €3/2; ☎ 6am-midnight)

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Farmacia Boniscontro** (☎ 011 53 82 71; Corso Vittorio

Emanuele II 66; ☎ 3pm-12.30am) Night pharmacy.

**Ospedale Mauriziano Umberto I** (☎ 011 5 08 01;

Largo Turati 62) Hospital.

**Pharmacy** (☎ 011 518 64 67; Stazione Porta Nuova;

☎ 7am-7.30pm)

### MONEY

A bank, ATM and exchange booth can all be found within Stazione Porta Nuova; others

are dotted throughout the city. A 24-hour automatic banknote-change machine can be found outside **Unicredit Banca** (Piazza CLN).

### POST

**Post office** (Via Alfieri 10; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat)

### TOURIST INFORMATION

The tourist board's **call centre** (☎ 011 53 51 81; www.turismotorino.org; ☎ 9.30am-9.30pm) can provide updated information and assistance for visitors.

**Circolo Culturale Maurice** (☎ 011 521 11 16; www.mauriceglbt.org, in Italian; Via della Basilica 3-5) Gay and lesbian information.

**Tourist office** (☎ 011 53 51 81; ☎ 9.30am-7pm) At Stazione Porta Nuova; offers a free accommodation and restaurant booking service.

**Tourist office** (☎ 011 53 51 81; ☎ 8am-11pm) At the airport.

### Sights

Turin's boulevards and beautiful piazzas are lined with some outstanding museums.

### PIAZZA CASTELLO

Turin's central square shelters a wealth of museums, theatres and cafes. Essentially baroque, the grand piazza was laid out from the 14th century to serve as the seat of dynastic power for the House of Savoy.

The piazza is dominated by **Palazzo Madama**, a part-medieval, part-baroque castle built in the 13th century on the site of the old Roman gate. It was named after Madama Reale Maria Cristina, the widow of Vittorio Amedeo I, who lived here in the 17th century. Today, part of the palace houses the **Museo Civico d'Arte Antica** (☎ 011 443 35 01; Piazza Castello; adult/child €7.50/6; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Fri & Sun, to 8pm Sat), containing a sumptuous collection of works that document the city's artistic movements post-Italian unification.

In the northwestern corner of the square is the baroque **Chiesa di San Lorenzo**, designed by Guarino Guarini. The church's richly complex interior compensates for the spare facade.

Statues of the mythical twins Castor and Pollux guard the entrance to the **Palazzo Reale** (☎ 011 436 14 55; Piazza Castello; adult/child €6.50/3.25; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun) and, according to local legend, also watch over the border between the sacred ('white magic') and diabolical ('black magic') halves of the city. Built for Carlo

### MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR EURO

Serious sightseers will save a bundle with a **Torino + Piemonte Card** (2/3/5/7 days €19/22/31/35, junior 2 days €10). It covers admission to most of Turin's monuments and museums, a ride up the Mole Antonelliana panoramic lift, a return trip on the Sassi-Superga cable car, and all public transport costs including GTT boats on the Po river and the Turismo Bus Torino (see p228). It also offers discounts for some guided tours and theatres. You can buy the card at the tourist office.

**LIGURIA, PIEDMONT  
& VALLE D'AOSTA**

<b>TRANSPORT</b>	
Bus Stop for Airport .....	77 E4
Gruppo Torinese Trasporti	
Information .....	78 E4

To Ospedale Mauiziano  
Umberto I (1km); Stadio  
Olimpico di Torino (3km);  
Asti (60km); Genova (170km)





Emanuele II around 1646, its lavishly decorated rooms house an assortment of furnishings, porcelain and other knick-knacks. The surrounding **Giardino Reale** (Royal Garden; admission free; ☎ 9am-1hr before sunset), east of the palace, was designed in 1697 by André le Nôtre, who also created the gardens at Versailles.

The entrance to the Savoy **Armeria Reale** (Royal Armoury; ☎ 011 54 38 89; www.artito.arti.beniculturali.it; Piazza Castello; adult/child €4/free; ☎ 9am-2pm Tue-Fri, 1-7pm Sat & Sun) is under the porticoes just right of the palace gates and safeguards one of Europe's best collections of arms.

### DUOMO DI SAN GIOVANNI

Turin's **cathedral** (Piazza San Giovanni), built between 1491 and 1498 on the site of three 14th-century basilicas, is the home of the famous Shroud of Turin (purported to be the burial cloth in which Jesus' body was wrapped). A copy of the cloth is on permanent display in front of the cathedral altar.

The Romanesque **bell tower**, which stands alone to the left of the cathedral, was designed by Juvarra and built in 1723. Just to the north lie the remains of a 1st-century **Roman amphitheatre**, while a little further to the northwest lies **Porta Palatina**, the redbrick remains of a Roman-era gate.

Across the road is the **Museo d'Antichità** (Museum of Antiquity; ☎ 011 521 11 06; Via XX Settembre 88c; adult/child €4/2; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun), displaying antiquities amassed by the Savoy dynasty, including Etruscan urns, Roman bronzes and Greek vases, alongside assorted locally excavated archaeological finds.

### MUSEO NAZIONALE DEL RISORGIMENTO ITALIANO

Baroque **Palazzo Carignano** was the birthplace of Carlo Alberto and Vittorio Emanuele II, and the seat of united Italy's first parliament from 1861 to 1864. You can normally see the parliament as part of the **Museo Nazionale del Risorgimento Italiano** (☎ 011 562 11 47; Via Accademia delle Scienze 5), though the museum was closed for renovations at the time of writing, and was due to reopen at the end of 2009.

### PALAZZO DELL'ACCADEMIA DELLE SCIENZE

The immense **Palazzo dell'Accademia delle Scienze** (Via Accademia delle Scienze 6) houses two outstanding museums: the 18th-century-established **Museo Egizio** (Egyptian Museum; ☎ 011 561 77 76; adult/child €7.50/free; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun), with some

of Europe's most important ancient Egyptian treasures; and the **Galleria Sabauda** (☎ 011 54 74 40; adult/child €4/free; ☎ 8.30am-2pm Tue, Fri, Sat & Sun, 2-7.30pm Wed, 10am-7.30pm Thu), containing the Savoy family's incredible collection of art, which includes works by Van Dyck, Rembrandt, Poussin, Tintoretto and Jan Brueghel. A combination ticket for both museums costs €8 for adults (free for children).

### MUSEO REGIONALE DI SCIENZE NATURALI

Your average menagerie of stuffed animals (brown bears and so on) is on show at the **Museo Regionale di Scienze Naturali** (Natural Science Museum; ☎ 011 432 63 65; Via Giovanni Giolitti 36; adult/child €5/free; ☎ 10am-7pm Wed-Mon), but what sets this natural science museum apart is its setting: a monumental 17th-century hospital with four inner courtyards and a chapel.

### MODERN & CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUMS

Turin is famed for its ground-breaking contemporary art. Its origins, according to Valentina Marocco, of the Museum for Contemporary Art, Castello di Rivoli (below), come from Turin's role as 'the hometown of the Arte Povera, a revolutionary art movement that developed at the end of the 1960s. The movement had an enormous impact on an international level with artists like Mario Merz, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Gilberto Zorio, Giuseppe Penone.' Valentina says this inspired 'a visionary generation of art collectors, critics and gallerists'.

The **Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea** (GAM; ☎ 011 562 99 11; www.gamtorino.it; Via Magenta 31; adult/child €7.50/4; ☎ 9am-7pm Tue-Sun) is dedicated to 19th- and 20th-century artists, including de Chirico, Otto Dix and Klee.

Temporary exhibitions are held in **Palazzo Bricherasio** (☎ 011 517 18 11; www.palazzobricherasio.it, in Italian; Via Lagrange 20; adult/child €7.50/free, audioguide 1/2 people €3.50/5; ☎ 2-8pm Mon, 9am-8pm Tue & Wed, to 11pm Thu-Sun). In its time, the gallery, in a 17th-century palace, has hosted surrealist Dali and been 'wrapped' by Christo and Jeanne-Claude.

At Lingotto, the Pinacoteca Giovanni e Marella Agnelli (opposite) has a world-class collection of masters.

A worthwhile trip further afield, the star of Turin's contemporary art scene is the 17th-century **Castello di Rivoli** (☎ 011 956 52 22; www.castellodirivoli.org; Piazza Mafalda di Savoia, Rivoli;

adult/child €6.50/4.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Thu, to 9pm Fri-Sun, free guided tours 3.30pm & 6pm Sat, 11am, 3pm & 6pm Sun). It's a striking contrast to the contemporary art housed inside at the **Museo d'Arte Contemporanea**. Works by Franz Ackermann, Gilbert and George, and Frank Gehry would have been beyond the wildest imagination of the Savoy family, who resided at this site from the 14th century onwards. The castle is outside central Turin in the town of Rivoli (not to be confused with the city's metro station named Rivoli). Take GTT bus 36 from Piazza Statuto to Rivoli bus station, then bus 36n or any 36 marked 'Castello' up the hill. Journey time is about one hour. Otherwise, take the metro to the Fermi stop, from where there's a free daily shuttle – the museum has shuttle schedules.

For an artistic stroll around the city centre, pick up the free brochure *L'Arte Contemporanea* from the tourist office, which maps out Turin's striking public art installations.

## VIA PO & AROUND

Trendy cafes are strung out along and around Via Po, which connects Piazza Castello with Italy's mightiest river by way of Piazza Vittorio Veneto.

Walking southwest along the Po river brings you to **Castello del Valentino** (closed to the public), a mock chateau built in the 17th century. The 550,000 sq-metre French-style **Parco Valentino** (admission free; ☎ 24hr) surrounding the chateau opened in 1856 and is filled with joggers, promenaders and cafes night and day (though take care on your own here late at night).

A little further southwest is **Borgo Medievale**, which includes the faux medieval **Rocca** (Castle; ☎ 011 443 17 01; Viale Virgilio 107; adult/child €5/4; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, to 6pm Sun Apr-Sep, to 4pm Tue-Sat, to 5pm Sun Oct-Mar) and **village** (Borgo; admission free; ☎ 9am-8pm Apr-Sep, to 7pm Oct-Mar). They were built for the Italian General Exhibition in 1884.

Southeast of the Piazza Vittorio Veneto, across the Po, is the **Chiesa di Gran Madre di Dio** (closed to the public), built from 1818 to 1831 to commemorate the return of Vittorio Emanuele I from exile. Some claim it's yet another secret repository for the Holy Grail.

## Mole Antonelliana

The symbol of Turin is the **Mole Antonelliana** (Via Montebello 20). This 167m tower, with its distinctive aluminium spire, appears on the Italian two-cent coin. It was originally intended as a

synagogue when construction began in 1862, but was never used as a place of worship.

A decade ago, the tower became home to the multifloored **Museo Nazionale del Cinema** (☎ 011 813 85 60; www.museonazionaledelcinema.org; adult/child €6.50/free; ☎ 9am-8pm Tue-Fri & Sun, to 11pm Sat), which takes you on a fantastic tour through cinematic history – from the earliest magic lanterns, stereoscopes and other optical toys to the present day. Movie memorabilia on display includes Marilyn Monroe's black lace bustier, Peter O'Toole's robe from *Lawrence of Arabia* and the coffin used by Bela Lugosi's Dracula. At the heart of the museum, the vast Temple Hall is surrounded by 10 interactive 'chapels' devoted to various film genres.

The Mole's glass **panoramic lift** (lift & museum ticket €8) whisks you 85m up through the centre of the museum to the Mole's roof terrace in 59 seconds. Fair warning if you're even slightly prone to vertigo: it's suspended only by cables, so when you look out it's as if you're free-floating in space. The 360-degree views from the outdoor viewing deck are dazzling by day or night.

## LINGOTTO

Around 3km south of the city centre is the **Lingotto Fiere** (☎ 011 664 41 11; www.lingottofiere.it; Via Nizza 294), Turin's former Fiat factory, which was redesigned by architect Renzo Piano into a congress and exhibition centre. In addition to two striking Le Meridien hotels (see p229), it houses the precariously perched 'treasure chest' rooftop gallery **Pinacoteca Giovanni e Marella Agnelli** (☎ 011 006 27 13; Via Nizza 230; adult/child €4/2.50; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sun), with masterpieces by Canaletto, Renoir, Manet, Matisse and Picasso, among others.

Adjacent to the congress centre is the Slow Food Movement's 'supermarket', **Eataly** (☎ 011 1950 6811; www.eatalytorino.it; Via Nizza 230; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Sun). This vast converted factory now houses a staggering array of Slow Food-affiliated food and beverages, with a separate area for each, including cheeses, breads, meats, fish, pasta, chocolate and much more. The best time to visit is around 12.30pm to 2.30pm, when each area has its own little restaurant serving lunch. There's also a high-end restaurant here, for which you'll need to book ahead.

Some trains stop in Lingotto, but the easiest way to get here from the city centre is to take bus 1 or 35 from Stazione Porto Nuova.

## BASILICA DI SUPERGA

In 1706 Vittorio Amedeo II promised to build a basilica to honour the Virgin Mary if Turin was saved from besieging French and Spanish armies. The city was indeed saved, and architect Filippo Juvarra built the church on a hill across the Po river. **Basilica di Superga** (☎ 011 899 74 56; [www.basilicadisuperga.com](http://www.basilicadisuperga.com); Strada della Basilica di Superga 73) became the final resting place of the Savoy, whose lavish tombs make for interesting viewing, as does the dome here. In 1949 a plane carrying the entire Turin football team crashed into the basilica in thick fog, killing all on board. Their tomb rests at the rear of the church.

To get here take tram 15 from Piazza Vittorio Veneto to the Sassi-Superga stop on Corso Casale, then walk 20m to **Stazione Sassi** (☎ 011 576 47 33; Strada Comunale di Superga 4), from where an original 1934 **tram** (one-way/return Mon-Fri Sat & Sun €2/4 €3.50/5.50; 🚏 from Sassi 9am-noon & 2-8pm Mon, Wed, Thu & Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-8.30pm Sat & Sun, 30min later from Superga, closed Tue) rattles the 3.1km up the hillside in 18 minutes.

## Tours

**Guided walking tours** (€6.50-8) following changing themes, such as Literary Turin, Tasty Turin and so on, depart on Saturday at 6pm. General city tours leave at 10am on Saturdays. Tours generally last around 1½ hours. Contact the tourist board call centre (p223) to confirm departure points, and to ask about various factory tours that are also available.

**Turismo Bus Torino** (1-day ticket adult/child €5/3; 🚏 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Jan-Jun & mid-Sep-mid-Dec, 10am-6pm daily Jul-mid-Sep & holiday-festival periods) is a hop-on, hop-off bus service with an on-board staff member providing information, and serves over a dozen different points around central Turin. Tickets are sold onboard; information is available from Gruppo Torinese Trasporti (GTT; p233).

GTT also operates **Navigazione sul Po** (adult return €3.10) boat trips on the Po. Boats to the Borgo Medievale in Parco Valentino and on to Moncalieri depart from **Imbarco Murazzi** (Murazzi del Po 65) four times a day from Tuesday to Saturday and seven times a day on Sundays from May to September, with fewer departures at other times of the year.

Turin's 'black and white magic' is illuminated on quirky walking tours with **Somewhere** (☎ 011 668 05 80; [www.somewhere.it](http://www.somewhere.it)). The company also runs other tours on lesser-known aspects

of the city, such as 'Underground Turin'. Tours cost around €25; confirm departure points when booking.

## Festivals & Events

The tourist office has details of these and other events.

**CioccolatÒ** Turin's famous chocolate is the focus of celebrations during March – see the boxed text, p231.

**Festival Internazionale di Film con Tematiche Omosessuali** ([www.turingfilmfestival.com](http://www.turingfilmfestival.com)) Held in April, this is a five-day international gay and lesbian film festival.

**Book fair** Held every May, Turin's is one of the most important in Europe.

**Salone Internazionale del Gusto** Every October in even-numbered years, foodies roll into town for this festival organised by Slow Food, with traditional producers from around the world showcasing their wares in a huge market at Lingotto Fiere. A day's entry costs €20, after which tastings cost between €1 and €5.

**Turin Film Festival** Headed up by Palme d'Or winner Nanni Moretti; takes place in November.

## Sleeping

Lonely Planet's accommodation booking service ([lonelyplanet.com/hotels](http://lonelyplanet.com/hotels)) reviews properties in all price ranges that can be booked online.

If you're here over the weekend, you can get some good discounted rates at various three- to five-star hotels with a 'Torino Weekend' package ([www.turismotorino.org](http://www.turismotorino.org)), which includes a free two-day Torino + Piemonte Card (see the boxed text, p223) and an added freebie, such as a bottle of wine. It's available year-round except during special events.

## BUDGET

**Ostello Torino** (☎ 011 660 29 39; [www.ostellotorino.it](http://www.ostellotorino.it); Via Alby 1; dm/s/tw without bathroom €15/22/42; 🚏 mid-Jan-mid-Dec; 🚿 ☎) Turin's 76-bed HI hostel, 1.8km from the train station, can be reached by bus 52 (bus 64 on Sunday) from Stazione Porta Nuova. Facilities are good (including online computers, wi-fi, and dinner Monday to Saturday for €10) and breakfast's included, but there's an afternoon lock-out.

**Halldis** (☎ 02 89 82 71; [www.halldis.com](http://www.halldis.com); apartments per week from €800; 🚿 🚿 ☎) This Italian-based estate agency offers some good short-term apartments with prices that can work out as cheap as €30 to €40 per person per day. There are numerous city-centre options and they come with minimal paperwork and quick and easy key pick-up.

**Hotel Bologna** (☎ 011 562 01 93; www.hotelbolognasrl.it, in Italian; Corso Vittorio Emanuele II 60; s/d €75/95) Right across from Stazione Porta Nuova and just off Via Roma, this handily located two-star hotel is a good bet. Rooms come with extra-big showers, although those overlooking the neighbouring restaurant can be noisy.

**Hotel Due Mondi** (☎ 011 650 50 84; www.hotelduemondi.it; Via Saluzzo 3; s/d €55/69; ☎ ☑ ☐ ☐) A close-to-the-station bargain, the Due Mondi equips its small rooms with bright laminate floors, comfortable furnishings and ingenious shower-sauna cubicles. Most rooms have wi-fi, there's a cosy sitting area downstairs and a classy restaurant next door lures you in with tasty-looking food trolleys. With such elegant diversions, the slightly seedy surroundings barely register.

### MIDRANGE

**Hotel Montevecchio** (☎ 011 562 00 23; www.hotelmontevecchio.com; Via Montevecchio 13; s €40-85, d €60-100; ☐) In a quiet residential area yet just 300m from Stazione Porta Nuova, this two-star hotel has colourful, stencilled rooms in sunset shades, an above-average buffet breakfast and a handy guest laundry.

**Ai Savoia** (☎ 339 1257711; www.aisavoia.it; Via del Cazmine 1b; s €75, d €85-115; ☐) Occupying an 18th-century townhouse, this little treasure overlooks pretty Piazza Savoia. The classical decor of each of its three rooms is ornate without being overwrought, and staff is friendly and obliging.

**Hotel Roma e Rocca Cavour** (☎ 011 561 27 72; www.romarocca.it; Piazza Carlo Felice 60; s €62.50-95.50, d €91-124; ☐ ☎) If you've stayed in too many cramped hotel rooms, you'll love this 1854-established hotel opposite the Porta Nuova train station. Hallways are wide, ceilings are high and antiques-furnished rooms are sumptuously proportioned, especially the flowing 'comfort' rooms.

**Hotel Dogana Vecchia** (☎ 011 436 67 52; www.hoteldoganavecchia.com; Via Corte d'Appello 4; s/d €90/110; ☐) Mozart, Verdi and Napoleon are among those who have stayed at this historic three-star inn. Recent renovations have fortunately preserved its old-world charm, and its location in the Quadrilatero Romano is hard to beat.

**Hotel Chelsea** (☎ 011 436 01 00; www.hotelchelsea.it; Via XX Settembre 79e; s €85-120, d €110-160; ☐ ☐) A stone's throw from Turin's main square, Piazza Castello, the Chelsea has modern, softly lit rooms with coordinated bedspreads

and drapes. Parents can use a baby monitor while dining at its romantic downstairs restaurant, La Campana, which serves Pugliese cuisine (restaurant menus €20).

### TOP END

**Le Meridien Lingotto & Le Meridien Art + Tech** (☎ 011 664 20 00; www.lemeridienlingotto.it; Via Nizza 262; Le Meridien Lingotto d €270-300, Le Meridien Art + Tech d €390-410; ☐ ☎ ☐ ☐) These twin hotels are both situated within the historic Fiat car factory, which was built in the 1920s and renovated by Renzo Piano in the late 1980s. The factory's original full-length windows have been retained, allowing light to flood the large, luxurious four-star rooms of Le Meridien Lingotto and those of its five-star annexe, Le Meridien Art + Tech. Guests can jog around the former car-testing circuit on the roof, which was featured in the classic 1969 film *The Italian Job*.

### Eating

Turin's cuisine has been influenced by everyone from the French to the Sicilians, but the bulk of the inspiration comes from its own hinterland – Piedmont. Specialities include *risotto alla Piemontese* (risotto with butter and cheese), *finanziera* (sweetbreads, mushrooms and chicken livers in a creamy sauce) and *panna cotta* (like an Italian crème caramel).

The San Salvario neighbourhood, in the southeastern part of the city, has a host of multicultural eateries, particularly around Piazza Madama Cristina, as well as some of the city's best pizzerias and pubs.

### BUDGET

**our pick** 83% (Ottoetre Quarti; ☎ 011 517 63 67; Piazza Solferino 8c; pizzas €3.80-10, mains €8-18; ☎ Mon-Fri; ☎) Ignore the clever-clogs name. There's nothing particularly Fellini-esque about this... restaurant – but come expecting great food. Twin dining rooms with French-washed blue and pink walls, striped tablecloths, and bread served in white paper bags. Try *bistecca di vitello alla grissinopoli* (steak or veal crumbed with crunchy breadsticks), huge salads and excellent Piedmontese wines by the bottle.

**Pizzeria Il Rospetto** (☎ 011 669 82 21; Piazza Madama Cristina 5; pizzas €5-12; ☎) There are hundreds of pizzerias in Turin and the nuances of each are never the same, but if you took a poll, the hole-in-the-wall Il Rospetto (little toad) in San Salvario would definitely be competing for top



honours. Fast, crowded and insanely popular, it has over 30 tasty thin-crust flavours to sink your teeth into here – including the dessert-style Nutella pizza!

**Kuoki** (☎ 011 839 78 65; Via Gaudenzio Ferrari 2h; set menus €9-25, mains €6-10; ☎ 11am-3pm & 6.30-11pm Mon-Sat; ☎ ) Head around the corner from the Mole Antonelliana to this intriguing spot run by Giorgio Armani's former personal chef, Toni Vitiello. At high communal tables, you can dine on Italian blackboard specials, or sushi bar twists such as a Kuoki roll (salmon or tuna with ricotta, olive oil and basil). Toni's other fusion creations include chicken in Coca-Cola with orange peel.

**Pizzeria Stars & Roses** (☎ 011 516 20 52; Piazza Paleocapa 2; pizzas €7-9; ☎ Tue-Sat) The list of pizzas on offer at this stylish place is lengthy and adventurous, with toppings including salmon and whisky, or caviar and vodka. Each of its rooms is themed according to colour (red, white, silver, pink, blue and black), so you can choose to suit the occasion. Police mugshots of erstwhile arrested movie stars (Hugh Grant, Al Pacino, et al) line the walls.

## MIDRANGE

**Porta di Savona** (☎ 011 817 35 00; Piazza Vittoria Veneto 2; meals €16-24; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun, dinner only Tue) An economical, low-on-pretension trattoria with a deserved reputation for superb *agnolotti al sugo arrosto* (Piedmontese ravioli in a meat gravy), and *gnocchi di patate al gorgonzola*. The mains – including *bollito misto alla Piemontese* (boiled meat and vegetable stew) – are equally memorable. Be patient: the food takes a while to arrive, probably because it's 100% homemade and 100% Piedmontese.

**Swish** (☎ 011 516 00 85; Via Cesare Battisti 13; set menu €21, mains €7.50-14.50) Turinese comic TV presenter Piero Chiamretti's latest culinary offering is this funky postmodern set-up with retro toys adorning its outlandish interior, and dishes such as mussels in tomato sauce or *penne* with zucchini.

## TOP END

**Restaurant del Cambio** (☎ 011 54 66 90; Piazza Carignano 2; set menus from €60; ☎ Mon-Sat) Crimson velvet, glittering chandeliers, baroque mirrors and a timeless air greet you at this grande dame of the Turin dining scene, regularly patronised by Count Cavour in his day. It first opened its doors in 1757, and classic Piedmont cuisine

still dominates the menu. Bookings and smart dress are advised.

## SELF-CATERING

**Porta Palazzo** (Piazza della Repubblica; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm Mon-Fri, to 6.30pm Sat) Europe's largest open-air food market has literally hundreds of food stalls. Pick up a picnic.

**Brek** (Piazza Carlo Felice 18; buffets from €10; ☎ 8.30am-11pm) Only Italians could take 'fast food' and make it credible and edible. Brek is a small self-service restaurant chain where you can pick up fresh pasta, pizza, sausages, salads and desserts. Inside, the ambience is far from plastic. Indeed you might even be inclined to linger awhile in the plant-bedecked outdoor courtyard.

**Grom** (www.grom.it; Piazza Paleocapa 1d; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Thu, to 1am Fri & Sat, 11am-11pm Sun) The first-ever outlet of this Slow Food-affiliated ice cream, renowned for organic flavours such as green tea, was started here in Turin. There's another branch at Via Accademia delle Scienze 4, which keeps the same hours.

## Drinking

*Aperitivi* is a Turinese institution. As in Milan (see the boxed text, p274), if you're on a budget, you can fill up on a generous buffet of bar snacks for the cost of a drink.

The main drinking spots are the riverside area around Piazza Vittoria Veneto, and the Quadrilatero Romano district.

**Pastis** (☎ 011 521 10 85; Piazza Emanuele Filiberto 9; ☎ 9am-3.30pm & 6pm-2am) This boldly painted cafe-bar is where chic Torinese office workers go for a two-hour lunch break – spicy meatballs with an obligatory glass of wine.

**Mood** (☎ 011 566 08 09; Via Battisti 3e; ☎ cafe 8am-9pm Mon-Sat, bookshop 10am-9pm Mon-Sat) An addictive coffee–cocktail bar–bookshop combo that you'll struggle to escape from. Flick through the design hardbacks or Dante classics while sipping a cappuccino or a €7 *aperitivo*. The interior's slavishly hip, all polished concrete and shiny laminate.

**I Tre Galli** (☎ 011 521 60 27; Via Sant'Agostino 25; ☎ noon-midnight) Spacious and rustic, this is a fabulous spot for a drink any time, but most people come for the gourmet *aperitivi* snacks served on a buzzing pavement terrace. Meals cost about €15.

**La Drogheria** (☎ 011 812 24 14; Piazza Vittoria Veneto 18; ☎ 11am-2am) La Drogheria's sofas are coveted by a fun, unpretentious student crowd enjoying cheap drinks and *aperitivi* fare.

**Lobelix** (☎ 011 436 72 06; Via Corte d'Appello 15f; ☎ 7pm-3am Mon-Sat) Beneath the trees on Piazza Savoia, the terrace here is a favourite place for an *aperitivo* – its buffet banquet is one of Turin's most extravagant.

## HISTORIC CAFES

Turin's cafes have their rivals – Trieste and Rome to name but two – but it's splitting hairs really. These are evocative places full of literary legend, architectural excellence, aromatic coffee and the city's best gossip – and gossipers. Then there's the chocolate, either liquid or solid (see the boxed text, below), a speciality unto itself.

**our pick** **Caffè San Carlo** (☎ 011 53 25 86; Piazza San Carlo 156; ☎ 8am-1am) Perhaps the most gilded of the gilded, this sumptuous cafe dates from 1822. You'll get neck ache admiring the chandeliers.

**Caffè Mulassano** (☎ 011 54 79 90; Piazza Castello 15; ☎ 7.30am-10.30pm) With dozens of customers and only four tables, the art nouveau Mulassano is where regulars sink white-hot espressos *a piedi* while discussing yesterday's football scores with the bow-tied barista.

**Platti** (☎ 011 506 90 56; Corso Vittorio Emanuele II 72; ☎ 7.30am-9pm) Sweet-laden coffee, cake and liquor shop with gilded 1870 interior.

**Caffè Torino** (☎ 011 54 51 18; Piazza San Carlo 204; ☎ 7.30am-1am) This chandelier-lit showpiece opened in 1903. A brass plaque of the city's emblem, a bull (Torino in Italian means 'little bull'), is embedded in the pavement out the front; rub your shoe across it for good luck.

**Caffè Elena** (☎ 011 812 33 41; Piazza Vittorio Veneto 5; ☎ 8.30am-midnight Mon, Tue, Thu & Sun, to 1am Fri & Sat) Wood-panelled cafe once patronised by Nietzsche, these days with Starck-designed chairs.

**San Tommaso 10** (☎ 011 53 42 01; Via San Tommaso 10; ☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Sat) The Lavazza family started

## LA DOLCE VITA: TURINESE CHOCOLATE

Chocoholics the world over can thank Madama Reale (Madame Royale), queen of the Savoy State, for the introduction of chocolate – previously only available to nobility – to the masses. In 1678 Reale granted the first licence to Turinese chocolate-maker Giò Antonio Ari – and solid chocolate was born.

Chocolate production quickly became big business in Turin and remained so until Napoleon arrived, when trade restrictions were placed on cocoa-bean imports. But chocolate-makers Isidore Caffarel and Michele Prochet came up with a novel solution, using naturally sweet hazelnuts from Piedmont's groves to stretch the beans further. In 1865, they launched their chocolate made from hazelnuts and cocoa (at that time without milk – the Swiss learnt chocolate-making in Turin and later became the first to add it). Caffarel and Prochet christened their new chocolate Gianduiotto, after the Carnival mask character, Gianduja. In a savvy marketing move, Gianduja handed out samples to delighted Turinese carnivalgoers. These elongated triangular chocolates were the first ever to be wrapped in paper.

A century on, the chocolate-hazelnut Gianduiotto flavour inspired the creation of Nutella, which is manufactured by Piedmontese company Ferrero Rocher in Alba.

Turin celebrates all things cocoa-related for two weeks every March during **CiocolatoTÒ** ([www.ciocolato-to.com](http://www.ciocolato-to.com)), with tastings, chocolate-making demonstrations, sculptures and dozens of creators selling their chocolates at stalls. The festival's exact location changes each year.

Year-round, you can pick up a ChocoPass from Turin's tourist office. The pass includes 10 tastings at specified stores and cafes over 24 hours (€10), or 15 tastings over 48 hours (€15).

The city's most famous chocolate house is **Peyrano** (☎ 011 53 87 65; [www.peyrano.com](http://www.peyrano.com); Corso Vittorio Emanuele II 76), creator of *Dolci Momenti a Torino* (Sweet Moments in Turin) and *grappini* (chocolates filled with grappa). Other famed chocolate-makers include **Gerla** (Corso Vittorio Emanuele II 88) and **Giordano** (Piazza Carlo Felice 69).

Among the historic cafes where you can taste chocolate in all its guises are **Baratti & Milano** (☎ 011 561 30 60; Piazza Castello 27; mains about €10-15; ☎ 8am-9pm Tue-Sun), with a stunning interior dating back to 1858; and **Pepino** (☎ 011 54 20 09; Piazza Carignano 8; ☎ 8.30am-8pm Sun-Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat, longer hr in summer), which invented ice cream dipped in chocolate on a stick here in 1937. The 1763-established **Al Bicerin** (☎ 011 436 93 25; Piazza della Consolata 5; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, to 1pm & 3.30-7.30pm Sat & Sun), beneath a 14th-century bell tower, takes its name from *bicerin*, a caffeine-charged hot drink of chocolate, coffee and cream. It also serves snacks such as chocolate on toast. See above for more historic cafes.

roasting coffee here in 1900. Now modernised, the cafe offers a staggering variety of flavours as well as an excellent restaurant; you can also buy espresso machines here.

**Fiorio** (☎ 011 817 32 25; Via Po 8; ☎ 8.30am-1am Tue-Sun) There's something evocative about inhabiting Mark Twain's old window seat as you contemplate the gilded interior of a cafe where 19th-century students once plotted revolutions and the Count of Cavour deftly played whist. And all this before your coffee has even arrived.

## Entertainment

Entertainment listings are included in 'Torino Sette', the Friday insert of the newspaper **La Stampa** ([www.lastampa.it](http://www.lastampa.it), in Italian). Cinema, theatre and exhibition listings are also included in its daily 'Spettacoli Cronaca' section. Also worth picking up at the tourist office and in many bars around town is the free 80-page **News Spettacolo** ([www.newspettacolo.com](http://www.newspettacolo.com), in Italian), a weekly booklet listing several hundred entertainment venues. **Extra Torino** ([www.extrat torino.it](http://www.extrat torino.it)) contains comprehensive, up-to-date listings in English.

Tickets for rock concerts are sold at **FNAC** (☎ 011 551 67 11; Via Roma 56). For other events, the tourist office has information and sells tickets.

## NIGHTCLUBS & LIVE MUSIC

Most clubs open from 9pm to late and cover charges vary depending on the night. Turin's clubbing district centres on Murazzi del Po (also called Lungo Po Murazzi), the arcaded riverside area stretching between Pontes Vittorio Emanuele I and Umberto I – follow the crowds (and the music).

Away from the city centre, head to **Docks Home** (☎ 011 28 02 51; Via Valprato 68), set in a converted 1912 warehouse, for house music and exhibitions, and shake your booty at legendary dance club **Hiroshima Mon Amour** (HMA; ☎ 011 317 66 36; Via Bossoli 83; admission free-€15), playing everything from folk and punk to tango and techno.

## CINEMAS

**Cinema Massimo** (☎ 011 812 56 58; Via Giuseppe Verdi 18; admission €7) Near the Mole Antonelliana, the cinema offers an eclectic mix of films, mainly in English or with subtitles. One of its three screens only shows classic films.

## THEATRE

**Teatro Regio Torino** (☎ 011 881 52 41; [www.teatroregio.torino.it](http://www.teatroregio.torino.it), in Italian; Piazza Castello 215; ☎ ticket office 10.30am-6pm Tue-Fri, to 4pm Sat & 1hr before performances)

Sold-out performances can sometimes be watched for free on live TV in the adjoining Teatro Piccolo Regio (☎ 011 881 52 41), where Puccini premiered *La Bohème* in 1896.

## SPORT

Turin has two football teams, **Torino Football Club** ([www.torinofc.it](http://www.torinofc.it), in Italian), and the *Vecchia Signora* aka **Juventus** ([www.juventus.it](http://www.juventus.it)). Most Torinese favour the former, while the rest of the world leans heavily towards the latter. Watching either is a quasi-religious experience. They both currently play at the **Stadio Olimpico di Torino** (☎ 011 327 79 88; Corso Sebastopoli 123) on the southwestern edge of town, served by buses on match days. Tickets are hard to come by; check the websites for info, or ask at the tourist office.

## Shopping

Via Roma's arcaded walkways shelter the city's most expensive fashion boutiques, while those along Via Garibaldi are more affordable. Via Po has some great secondhand record shops and vintage and alternative clothes.

Peek through the open doorway of 1872-established **Pastificio Defilippis** (☎ 011 54 21 37; Via Lagrange 39; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Sat) to watch the family making dozens of varieties of pasta; you can buy it here fresh or dried.

Excellent wine shops are splashed around the city. Turin's famous chocolates (see the boxed text, p231) make sweet souvenirs.

A giant **antiques market** (Gran Balon; [www.balon.it](http://www.balon.it); Piazza Borgo Dora; ☎ 8.30am-6pm) takes place on the second Sunday of every month in Borgo, while a smaller version (Balôn) is held every Saturday in the same location.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Turin airport** (TRN; ☎ 011 567 63 61; [www.turin-airport.com](http://www.turin-airport.com)), 16km northwest of the city centre in Caselle, has connections to European and national destinations. Several budget airlines fly here, including Easyjet and Ryanair.

### BUS

Most international, national and regional buses terminate at the **bus station** (☎ 011 433 25 25; Corso Castelfidardo). You can also get to Milan's Malpensa airport from here.

### TRAIN

Regular daily trains connect Turin's **Stazione Porta Nuova** (Piazza Carlo Felice) with Milan (€9.20,

## THE OLD LADY & THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

In Italy no pastime ignites as much passion as *calcio* (football) and no football team fires the public imagination like the mighty *Vecchia Signora* (Old Lady) from Turin, better known to the world and history as Juventus.

With 27 Serie A titles (10 clear of its nearest rivals) and 11 European crowns to its name, Juventus is one of the most successful teams in football history. Iconic players who have donned the famous black-and-white *bianconeri* shirt (adopted after they once 'borrowed' a strip from British team Notts County) include Renato Cesarini, John Charles, Zinedine Zidane, Paolo Rossi, Alessandro del Piero and Michel Platini. With a popularity that extends way beyond Turin and Italy, Juventus is said to have one of the biggest fan bases in the world – an estimated 170 million – and you'll spot well-worn *bianconeri* shirts on everyone from Mozambican market traders to tuk-tuk drivers in Bangkok.

Juventus, in common with most Italian teams, plays football like its players don fashion, with an instinctive panache. In a nation that spawned Michelangelo, beauty is everything. There's no crude hoofing the ball into the air à la British Premier League here. Instead it is manoeuvred skilfully across the playing surface waiting for that all-important moment of divine inspiration which lights up so many Italian games. Ironically, the genius is countered by another distinctly Italian football tactic – guile. Serie A games are renowned for their fake play acting and theatrical attempts to curry favour with the referee, and it isn't always pretty.

The guile went a step too far in May 2006 when Juventus, along with four other Italian clubs, was implicated in a match-fixing scandal that shook Italian football to its foundations. At the centre of the affair – known as *Calciopoli* in Italy – was Juventus general manager Luciano Moggi, who was accused by the Italian Football Federation of rigging games by selecting favourable referees. Found guilty as charged, Juventus was docked nine points, banned for a year from Europe, stripped of its 2005 and 2006 Serie A championship titles and – worst of all – automatically relegated to Serie B for the first time in its history.

With true Torinese aplomb it didn't take long for the *Vecchia Signora* to stage a Sinatra-like comeback. Led by inspirational captain Alessandro del Piero, Juventus – older, wiser and seemingly contrite – was promoted back into Serie A within a year and the Italian national team, with a side that included five Juventus players, won the World Cup. It was a barely believable twist of irony.

Juventus' biggest rivals are its fellow citizens from Torino FC. Paradoxically Torino counts on a far greater number of fans in Turin itself, while Juventus' massive haul is drawn from around the world. Hotly contested (and sometimes violent) matches between the two sides are known as the *Derby della Mole*.

1¼ hours), Aosta (€7.55, two hours), Venice (€35, five hours), Genoa (€15, 1¼ hours) and Rome (from €46.50, seven hours). Most also stop at **Stazione Porta Susa** (Corso Inghilterra), which will gradually take over as the main station in the next few years. Some trains also stop at **Stazione Torino Lingotto** (Via Pannunzio 1), though it's generally more convenient to travel between the city centre and Lingotto by bus.

## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

**Sadem** (☎ 011 300 01 66; [www.sadem.it](http://www.sadem.it), in Italian) runs buses to the airport from Stazione Porta Nuova (40 minutes), also stopping at Stazione Porta Susa (30 minutes). Buses depart every 30 minutes between 5.15am and 10.30pm

(6.30am and 11.30pm from the airport). Single tickets cost €5 from **Confetteria Avvignano** (Piazza Carlo Felice 50), opposite where the bus stops, or €5.50 if bought on the bus.

A taxi between the airport and the city centre will cost around €35 to €40.

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Major car-rental agencies have offices at Stazione Porta Nuova and the airport.

### PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The city boasts a dense network of buses, trams and a cable car run by **Gruppo Torinese Trasporti** (GTT; ☎ 800 01 91 52; [www.gtt.to.it](http://www.gtt.to.it), in Italian), which has an **information office** (☎ 7am–9pm)

at Stazione Porta Nuova. Buses and trams run from 6am to midnight and tickets cost €0.90 (€12.50 for a 15-ticket carnet, €3 for a one-day pass).

Turin's single-line metro runs from suburban Collegno to Stazione Porta Susa. Work is underway to extend it to Stazione Porta Nuova and Lingotto. This section should open in 2010. See [www.metrotorino.it](http://www.metrotorino.it) for progress reports.

## TAXI

**Centrale Radio** (☎ 011 57 37)

**Radio Taxi** (☎ 011 57 30)

## THE MILKY WAY

Neither a chocolate bar nor a galaxy of stars, Piedmont's Milky Way (Via Lattea) consists of two parallel valleys just west of Turin that offer top-notch skiing facilities. The more northern of the two, **Valle di Susa**, meanders past a moody abbey, the old Celtic town of Susa and pretty mountain villages. Its southern counterpart, the **Valle di Chisone**, is pure ski-resort territory. The valleys hosted many events at the 2006 Winter Olympics – including alpine skiing, freestyle skiing and bobsleigh – and the facilities and infrastructure are state-of-the-art.

## Information

Larger tourist offices in the valleys include the following; hours may be shorter outside peak season:

**Avigliana** (☎ 011 936 60 37; Piazza del Popolo 2;

☎ 9am–1pm & 2–6pm Mon–Fri)

**Bardonecchia** (☎ 0122 9 90 32; [www.montagnedoc.it](http://www.montagnedoc.it);

Piazza de Gasperi 1; ☎ 9am–12.30pm & 2.30–7pm)

**Cesana Torinese** (☎ 0122 8 92 02; [cesana@montagne.doc.it](mailto:cesana@montagne.doc.it);

Piazza Vittorio Amedeo 3; ☎ 9am–12.30pm &

2.30–7pm)

**Sestriere** (☎ 0122 75 54 44; [www.sestriere.it](http://www.sestriere.it); Via

Louset; ☎ 9am–12.30pm & 2.30–7pm)

**Susa** (☎ 0122 62 24 47; Corso Inghilterra 39;

☎ 9am–noon & 3–6pm)

## Sights

Brooding above the road 14km from Turin is the **Sacra di San Michele** (☎ 011 93 91 30; adult/child €4/3; ☎ 9.30am–12.30pm & 3–6pm Tue–Fri, 9.30am–noon & 2.40–6pm Sat & Sun, to 5pm Oct–Mar), a Gothic-Romanesque abbey that has kept sentry atop Monte Pirchiriano (962m) since the 10th century. Look out for the whimsical 'Zodiac Door', a 12th-century doorway sculpted with *putti*

(cherubs) pulling each other's hair. To get to the abbey get off at **Sant'Ambrogio** station and hike up a steep path for 1½ hours. Alternatively, there's a special bus from Avigliana train station six times a day from May to September. Concerts are held on Saturday evenings in summer; ask for details at the tourist office in **Avigliana** (population 10,500), 12km west.

A Druid well remains as testimony to the Celtic origins of **Susa** (population 6580; elevation 503m) before it fell under the Roman Empire's sway. Susa's Roman ruins make for an interesting stop on the way to the western ski resorts. In addition to the remains of a Roman **aqueduct**, a still-used **amphitheatre** and the triumphal **Arco d'Augusto**, dating from 9 BC, you can visit the town's early-11th-century **cathedral**.

Also worth a brief stop is the forbidding **Forte di Exilles** (☎ 0122 5 82 70; adult/child €6/2; ☎ 10am–7pm Tue–Sun Apr–Sep, to 2pm Oct–Mar), overlooking the quiet village of Exilles, 15km west of Susa. Its military role only ended in 1943.

## Activities

The prestigious Milky Way ski domain embraces 400km of pistes and five inter-linked ski resorts: Sestriere (2035m), Sauze d'Oulx (1509m), Sansicario (1700m), Cesana Torinese (1350m) and Claviere (1760m) in Italy; and Montgenèvre (1850m) in neighbouring France. Its enormous range of slopes and generally reliable snow conditions provide for skiers and boarders of all abilities. A single daily ski pass costing €34 covers the entire Milky Way, including the French slopes of Montgenèvre. More information is available online at [www.vialattea.it](http://www.vialattea.it).

Built in the 1930s by the Agnelli clan of Fiat, **Sestriere** (population 885) ranks among Europe's most glamorous ski resorts due to its enviable location in the eastern realms of the vast Milky Way ski domain.

The tourist offices have mountains of information on every conceivable summer and winter sport, including **heli-skiing**, **bobsledding**, **golfing** on Europe's highest golf course, **walking**, **free climbing** and **mountain biking**.

Cross-country skiing in the area is centred on **Bardonecchia** (population 3084; elevation 1312m), the last stop in Italy before the Fréjus Tunnel.

Avigliana's tourist office also has route maps and information on summertime walking and mountain biking, including the protected lakes



and marshlands in the **Parco Naturale dei Laghi di Avigliana** ([www.parks.it/parco.laghi.avigliana](http://www.parks.it/parco.laghi.avigliana)), located on the town's western fringe. From Avigliana, experienced walkers can tackle a strenuous climb or take a 30km circular bike trail to the Sacra di San Michele abbey.

Rafting and kayaking trips from Cesana Torinese are organised through **OK Adventure** (☎ 335 628 27 28; [www.okadventure.it](http://www.okadventure.it); 3hr trips €40-50).

## Sleeping & Eating

Many hotels shut outside winter and summer. Exact closing dates can vary from year to year, depending on snowfalls and conditions. The area's tourist offices can make hotel reservations.

**Casa Cesana** (☎ 0122 8 94 62; Viale Bouvier, Cesana Torinese; s/d from €42/84; **P** ♿) Right across from Cesana's ski lift, this timber chalet was built for the 2006 Olympics. Its rooms are light-filled and spotless, there's a well-patronised restaurant open to nonguests (set menus around €18), and its bar is one of the area's liveliest.

**Hotel Susa & Stazione** (☎ 0122 62 22 26; [www.hotelsusa.it](http://www.hotelsusa.it); Corso Stati Uniti 4/6, Susa; s/d €60/83; **P**) Handy all-round base for the area and located directly opposite Susa's train station, this cycle-friendly hotel has 12 uniform rooms with private bathrooms and a restaurant (set menu €20). The staff gives out maps and itinerary proposals.

**Grand Hotel Principi di Piemonte** (☎ 0122 79 41; [www.gh-principipiemonte.it](http://www.gh-principipiemonte.it); Via Sauze 3, Sestriere; d from €180; **P** ♿ **Q** **R**) Built in 1932 for the Agnelli family and frequented by famous faces over the years, this iconic curved building topped by turrets and spires has sleek rooms, gastronomic dining (with half-board deals available) and a decadent spa.

Sestriere's central square, Piazza Fraiteve, is loaded with places to eat and drink, including the perennially popular pizzeria **Pinky** (☎ 0122 7 64 41; Piazza Fraiteve 5n; pizzas €4-6) and the trendier **Napapijri** (☎ 0122 7 71 06; Piazza Agnelli 1; meals €17-18).

## Getting There & Away

The main Italy–France motorway and railway line roar along the Valle di Susa, making the area easily accessible by both public transport and car (though motorists should keep change on hand for the numerous tolls).

**Sapav buses** (☎ 800 801901, 0122 62 20 15; [www.sapav.it](http://www.sapav.it), in Italian) link Susa with Avigliana (35

minutes), Oulx (45 minutes), Turin (1¼ hours) and the Milky Way resorts. From Sestriere, buses serve Cesana (25 minutes), Oulx (45 minutes) and Turin (two to three hours) up to five times daily.

## SOUTHERN & EASTERN PIEDMONT

Gourmands on the rebound from an Emilia Romagna foodie tour (fattened up with balsamic vinegar and Parmesan) might think it couldn't get any better. But it can and it does. The bucolic hills, valleys and townships of southern and eastern Piedmont are northern Italy's giant pantry, stuffed with sweet hazelnuts, rare white truffles, arborio rice, delicate veal, subtle cheeses and grapes that metamorphose into Barolo and Barbaresco wines. Out here in the damp Po river basin they give out Michelin stars like overzealous schoolteachers give out house points, and with good reason. The food is sublime, doused in traditions as old as the towns that fostered them. There's Bra, home of the Slow Food Movement; Pollenzo, host to a University of Gastronomic Sciences; Asti replete with truffles and wine; and Alba, where it's almost impossible to have a bad lunch, let alone dinner.

Many trace the gourmet routes in a car but, to compensate for the calorific overload, there are also excellent walking and cycling opportunities.

South of Cuneo, and forgotten by most, are the Maritime Alps, a one-time hunting ground for Savoy kings, and now given over to nature and hikers.

## Cuneo & Around

pop 54,700 / elev 543m

Arriving in Cuneo's gargantuan **Piazza Galimberti**, you'd think you just touched down in a capital city. Yet diminutive Cuneo is a veritable mystery to anyone outside northern Italy (except perhaps for lovers of its signature rum-flavoured chocolates). Bursting with bold Napoleonic splendour, the outsize square was finished in 1884 and sits aside an older portico-embellished town founded in 1198. To the southwest lie the Maritime Alps (see the boxed text, p237), a rugged outdoor adventure playground, while beyond the mountaintops sits France.

Cuneo's **tourist office** (☎ 0171 69 32 58; [www.comune.cuneo.it](http://www.comune.cuneo.it); Via Roma 28; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm Mon-Sat) has information on the town. Region-wide information is provided by

**Azienda Turistica Locale del Cuneese** (ATL; ☎ 0171 69 02 17; www.cuneoholiday.com; Via Vittorio Amedeo II 8a; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Fri), which also stocks excellent free hiking-biking booklets with maps.

The city's history is interpreted at the **Museo Civico di Cuneo** (☎ 0171 63 41 75; adult/child €2.60/1.55; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 2.30-5.30pm Tue & Sat, 8.30am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Wed-Fri, 10am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Sun), set around the cloisters of the deconsecrated San Francesco convent and church.

From Cuneo you can head out into the valleys radiating towards the southern French Alps. When snowfalls are good, you can **ski** and **snowboard** here.

## SLEEPING

**Hotel Ligure** (☎ 0171 63 45 45; www.ligurehotel.com; Via Savigliano 11; s €55-65, d €70-80, apt long stays €40; ☎ ☎ ☎) In the heart of the old town, this two-star hotel has a handful of apartments with their own kitchens (minimum seven-night stay; no breakfast). If you're just passing through, its freshly spruced-up hotel rooms (with breakfast) are simple but spotless. Call ahead to reserve a parking space.

**Ourpick Hotel Royal Superga** (☎ 0171 69 32 23; www.hotelroyalsuperga.com; Via Pascal 3; s €55-70, d €75-95; ☎ ☎ ☎) For Superga read superb. This appealing, old-fashioned hotel in a corner of Piazza Galimberti has all mod cons, including a free internet point (still all too rare in Italy), free DVDs to watch in your room, free *aperitivo* if you linger in the lobby between 5pm and 9pm, and free city bikes for guests. Breakfast (included) is a delicious spread made from organic produce.

**Castello Rosso** (☎ 0175 23 00 30; www.castellorosso.com; Via Ammiraglio Reynaudi 5; s €75-140, d €105-165; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Prince and princess fantasies can be lived out at this 15th-century castle set in gazebo-dotted parklands. Take time out from the regal restaurant and the wellness centre to check out the original frescoes on the 2nd floor. The castle is 10km north of Cuneo; pick-up can be arranged.

## EATING & DRINKING

Typically for Piedmont, Cuneo has some standout places to wine and dine.

**Lo Schiaccianoci** (☎ 0171 60 36 28; Via Peveragno 4; meals €14-20; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Mon) A tiny but affordable place (if you can bag a seat) just off Via Roma that is ideal for small lunchtime taster plates or something more substantial if

you're so inclined. The original wood ceilings and magnolia curtains add intimacy. Try the risotto marinara or the ratatouille.

**Locanda da Peiu** (☎ 0171 41 21 74; www.locanda.dapeiu.com; set menus €35; ☎ Tue-Sun) Only the best and freshest local ingredients are used at Locanda da Peiu, located 3km from the town centre, but within an easy five-minute bus ride (ask for schedules when you book). The €35 set menus are outstanding value, including antipasti, first and second plates, dessert and wine. Quality dishes include gnocchi with Castelmagno cheese, served in a hard-baked bread basket.

**Ourpick Osteria della Chiocciola** (☎ 0171 6 62 77; Via Fossano 1; lunch menu €17.20, dinner €28-33; ☎ Mon-Sat) You can stop by for a glass of wine (from €6) with cheese and salami on the ground floor of this acclaimed Slow Food restaurant. Upstairs, in a buttercup dining room, choose from the handwritten menu's alchemy of flavours.

Historic chocolatiers include the 1864-established **Bruno** (☎ 0171 68 19 50; www.localistorici.it; Via Roma 28) and the 1920s **Arione** (☎ 0171 69 25 39; www.arione-cuneo.com; Piazza Galimberti 14; ☎ 8am-8pm Tue-Sat, to 1pm & 3.30-8pm Sun), which invented the *Cuneesi al Rhum* – a large, rum-laced praline wrapped in cellophane. The chocolates came to the attention of Hemingway, who made a detour from Milan en route to Nice in 1954 to try them – there's a photograph of his visit in the window.

**Bar Corso** (☎ 0171 60 20 14; Corso Nizza 16; ☎ 7am-1am Thu-Tue) makes Cuneo's best gelati, and is a popular spot for a drink.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Regular trains run from Cuneo's central train station, at Piazzale Libertà, to Saluzzo (€2.70, 35 minutes, up to six daily), Turin (€5.30, 1¼ hours, up to eight daily), San Remo (€6.50, 2¼ hours, three daily) and Ventimiglia (€5.40, two hours, around four daily), as well as Nice (2¼ hours, at least six daily) in France. A second train station for the Cuneo-Gesso line serves the small town of Mondovì, from where there are connections to Savona and Genoa.

## Saluzzo

pop 16,500 / elev 395m

Like Asti and Alba, Saluzzo was once a powerful city-state and its historical importance – while now diminished – means it still merits a visit. Indeed the town is something of a for-

## DETOUR: THE MARITIME ALPS

Northern Italy, crowded? Not if you bring your hiking boots. Shoehorned between the rice-growing plains of Piedmont and the sparkling coastline of Liguria lie the brooding Maritime Alps – a small pocket of dramatically sculpted mountains that rise like stony-faced border guards along the frontier of Italy and France. Smaller, yet no less majestic than their Alpine cousins to the north, the Maritimes are speckled with mirrorlike lakes, foraging ibexes and a hybrid cultural heritage that is as much Southern French as Northern Italian.

Despite their diminutive size, there's a palpable wilderness feel to be found among these glowering peaks. Get out of the populated valleys and onto the imposing central massif and you'll quickly be projected into a high-altitude Shangri La. Whistling marmots scurry under rocky crags doused in mist above a well-marked network of mountain trails where the sight of another hiker – even in peak season – is about as rare as an empty piazza in Rome. This is Italy at its most serene and serendipitous. Not 20km to the south lie the swanky resort towns of Portofino and San Remo, where martini-supping celebrities wouldn't be seen dead without their expensive handbags and private yachts. Yet up here in the high country that straddles the invisible border between Italy and France all you need is a map, a decent pair of shoes, and enough cheese and ciabatta to keep you going until dinnertime.

The main trailheads lie to the south of the city of Cuneo in a couple of recently inaugurated regional parks: the **Parco Naturale delle Alpi Marittime** and the **Parco Naturale dell'Alta Valle Pesio e Tamaro**. The Lago di Valscura Circuit (21km) starts in the airy spa of Terme di Valdieri and follows an old military road via the Piano del Valasco to an icy lake near the French border. It loops back past the Rifugio Questa before descending via the same route. For a two-day hike try the Marguareis Circuit (35km) that begins in the small ski centre of Limone Piemonte and tracks up across cols and ridges to the **Rifugio Garelli** (☎ 0171 73 80 78; dm €36; ☞ Jun-Sep). Day two involves looping back through a small segment of France to your starting point in Limone. For more information on both hikes check out Lonely Planet's *Hiking in Italy* guide or consult the APT offices in either Terme or Limone.

gotten gem usually missed by gourmand tourists heading east for Barolo and the Langhe. Their loss could be your gain.

The town is divided into 'old' and 'new' quarters, deceptive terms given that the new town is older than most North American cities. The two sections are a short walk apart. Once a medieval stronghold, the town maintained its independence until the Savoy won it in a 1601 treaty with France. One of its better-known sons was the Italian writer Silvio Pellico (1788–1854). Imprisoned for his patriotism against the Austrian occupation, he wrote parts of his novel *Le Mie Prigioni* (My Prisons) by cutting himself and using his blood as ink. A second well-known local is General Carlo dalla Chiesa (1920–82), whose implacable pursuit of the Mafia led to his assassination.

## SIGHTS

The burnt red-tiled rooftops of Saluzzo's old town make a timeless picture from the loggia beneath the 15th-century belfry of the **Torre Civica** (☎ 0175 4 14 55; Via San Giovanni; admission €1.30,

incl Museo Civico di Casa Cavassa €5; ☎ 9.30am–12.30pm & 2.30–6.30pm Thu–Sun Mar–Sep, & Sat & Sun Oct–Feb), reached by a steep flight of steps. Saluzzo's medieval rulers meted out justice from **La Castiglia** (Piazza Castello), the 13th-century castle atop Saluzzo. At the time of writing it was scheduled to reopen shortly to the public – ask the **tourist office** (☎ 0175 4 67 10; www.comune.saluzzo.it; Piazza Risorgimento; ☎ 9am–12.30pm & 3–6.30pm Mon–Sat, 9am–noon & 3–7pm Sun Apr–Sep, 9am–12.30pm & 2–5.30pm Mon–Sat, 9am–noon & 2–6pm Sun Oct–Mar) for updates.

The **Museo Civico di Casa Cavassa** (☎ 0175 4 14 55; Via San Giovanni 5; adult/child €4/2, incl Torre Civica €5; ☎ 10am–1pm & 2–6pm Thu–Sun Apr–Sep, 10am–1pm & 2–5pm Tue & Wed Oct–Mar) is a fine example of a 16th-century noble residence, and contains a valuable 1499 gold-leaved painting, *Nostra Signora dell Grazie* (Our Lady of Mercy) by Hans Klemmer.

Steps lead from cobbled Via San Giovanni to the beautiful 14th-century **San Giovanni church**, one of many churches in town.

A few kilometres south of Saluzzo, the creaking medieval **castle** (☎ 0175 8 78 22;

[www.findoambiente.it](http://www.findoambiente.it); Viale Coni Zugna 5, Manta; adult/child incl audioguide €5/2.50; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-mid-Dec, to 6pm Tue-Sun Feb-Sep, closed mid-Dec-Jan) in the village of Manta is one of the finest examples of its kind, and carefully guards Europe's most important cycle of late-Gothic secular frescoes. Its large park remains open throughout the day.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Albergo Ristorante Persico** (☎ 0175 4 12 13; [www.albergo.persico.net](http://www.albergo.persico.net); Vicolo Mercati 10; s/d €43/63; (P) ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This simple but comfy hotel is tucked just off Piazza Cavour in Saluzzo's new town. Discounted half-board options are available at the restaurant (closed Monday), which has regional menus ranging from €15 to €25 for nonguests. Free wi-fi is available in the lobby.

**Perpoin** (☎ 0175 4 23 83; [www.hotelsaluzzo.com](http://www.hotelsaluzzo.com); Via Spielberg 19-27; s €40-70, d €70-100, set menus €12-25; (P) ☎) Enjoy hearty home cooking (and fresh-from-the-oven Nutella-filled croissants at breakfast) at this family-run hotel-restaurant in the new town's centre. There is no hotel reception (the building is a maze of corridors); call ahead to confirm your arrival.

**L'Ostu dij Baloss** (☎ 0175 24 86 18; [www.ostudijbaloss.it](http://www.ostudijbaloss.it); Via Gualtieri 38; bistro menus €16, restaurant menus €34-40; ☎ lunch Tue-Sat, dinner Mon-Sat; ☎ ☎) Spring lamb cooked three ways (grilled, in red wine, and baked) and homemade *tajarin* pasta (finely cut strands, similar to tagliatelle) are among the local specialities served at Baloss' damask-clothed upstairs restaurant in Saluzzo's old town. At street level, its casual bistro with funky contemporary decor serves lighter seasonal dishes.

**Le Quattro Stagioni** (☎ 0175 4 74 70; Via Volta 21; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) As the name implies, the food changes with the season at this bodega-cum-restaurant situated in a street of dark porticos and obscure arcades. The smell of fruity wine through the doorway provides the initial temptation but wait till you get inside for crusty pizza, al dente pasta and the rest. There's a pleasant *giardino* (garden) attached.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are **buses** (☎ 0175 4 37 44) from Saluzzo to/from Turin (€3.50, 1½ hours, hourly). Otherwise, take a train to Savigliano (€1.70, 30 minutes, up to six daily), from where there are connections for Turin.

## Alba

pop 32,000 / elev 172m

In the gastronomic heaven that is Italy, Alba is an all-time highlight. Eschewing the modern penchant for junk food, this once-powerful city-state has redirected its energy into showcasing the fine art of *real* cooking, with fresh ingredients plucked from within spear-throwing distance of your restaurant table. Gastronomically, the town is famous for its Ferrero Rocher chocolate factory (Kinder Surprises and Nutella), white truffles and aged wines – including the incomparable Barolo, the Ferrari of reds. All becomes clearer at the annual truffle fair and the equally ecstatic *vendemia* (grape harvest).

Alba's fertile larder, the vine-striped Langhe Hills, radiate out from the town like undulating vegetable gardens replete with grapes, hazelnut groves and fine wineries. Exploring them on foot or with two wheels is a rare pleasure.

## INFORMATION

From the train station walk left along Corso Bandiera and its continuation, Corso Matteotti, to reach the tourist office.

In the town's historic centre, Alba's **tourist office** (☎ 0173 3 58 33; [www.langheroero.it](http://www.langheroero.it); Piazza Risorgimento 2; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, from 10am Sat & Sun mid-Nov-Mar, 9am-1pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Sat & Sun Apr-mid-Sep, 9am-1pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm Sat, to 7pm Sun mid-Sep-mid-Nov) sells walking maps and has internet access.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

A historical heavyweight, Alba enjoyed prosperity that reached its apex in the Middle Ages and lasted until 1628 when Savoy took control. At its peak Alba sported more than 100 towers. A sturdy four remain along with the imposing 12th-century **Cattedrale di San Lorenzo** (Piazza Duomo). Also worth a peep is the **Museo Civico Archeologico 'Federico Eusebio'** (Via Vittorio Emanuele II; admission free; ☎ 3-6pm Tue-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Sat & Sun)

The surrounding cobbled streets are lined with chic boutiques, bars and restaurants.

## TOURS

Alba's tourist office (above) can organise an astounding number of Langhe/Roero valley excursions. Highlights include a 10km **walk** (2½hr walks €15) through the chestnut groves of

Roero, **winery tours** (3½hr tours €80-100) in an air-conditioned minibus, **cooking courses** (half-/full-day courses €70/100), a **truffle-hunting excursion** (two hours; price depends on group size), **horse-riding** (per day €80) in the Upper Langhe, **rafting** (3hr from adult/child €20/12) on the River Tanaro, and – for the ultimate view of the vineyards – a **hot-air balloon flight** (incl transfers, wine & breakfast €220-250). Sunrise balloon flights last one hour, but you'll need to allow four hours in total.

Most activities and tours need to be booked at least two days ahead (tours may be cancelled if there aren't sufficient numbers).

## SLEEPING

The Langhe hills shelter some serene sleeping and eating options – see the Around Alba section (right), or contact the tourist office's **accommodation-booking service** (Conorzio Turistico Langhe Monferrato Roero; ☎ 0173 36 25 62; www.turismodoc.it), through which you can also make restaurant reservations.

**Hotel Savona** (☎ 0173 44 04 40; www.hotelsavona.com; Via Roma 1; s/d €72/110; Ⓟ ☎ 📺) A business-like three-star that will put you close to all of Alba's amenities (culinary or otherwise), the Savona springs no surprises but hits the spot with clean comfortable rooms and knowledgeable English-speaking staff.

**Hotel San Lorenzo** (☎ 0173 36 24 06; www.albergo-sanlorenzo.it; Piazza Rossetti 6; s €65-75, d €95-100; ☎ closed 2 weeks Jan & 2 weeks Aug; Ⓟ) It's very simple. Take 11 rooms in a refurbished 18th-century house, stick it footsteps from the cathedral, call it a boutique hotel and add a unique downstairs pastry shop selling 'healthy' butter/egg/dairy-free confectionery. The result is one of those only-in-Alba moments. Enjoy it while you can.

## EATING & DRINKING

**Vincafé** (☎ 0173 36 46 03; Via Vittorio Emanuele II 12; set menus €10-25) It's hip, but by no means exclusive. Anyone can sup on a glass of wine here, as long as you can squeeze through the door (it's small and popular) and have got the time and/or expertise to sift through a list of over 350 varieties. If in doubt, choose Barolo. Downstairs, in a cool vaulted stone cellar, the restaurant serves up huge healthy salads and pastas.

**ourpick Osteria dei Sognatori** (☎ 0173 3 40 43; Via Macrino 8b; meals €12-20; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Menu? What menu? You get whatever's in the pot at this rustic beneath-the-radar place and it's always delicious. Bank on homemade

pasta in a nutty pestolike sauce and the best breadsticks in Italy. Walls are bedecked with football memorabilia and B&W snaps of bearded wartime partisans.

**Piazza Duomo-La Piola** (☎ 0173 44 28 00; Piazza Risorgimento 4; meals €20-30, set menu €60-80; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Mon & dinner Sun) The best of both worlds are bivouacked in this two-in-one, suit-all-budgets culinary extravaganza in Alba's main square. Downstairs, La Piola sports local blackboard specials, such as *vitello tonnato*, that change daily and allow diners to create their own plates. Upstairs, the theme goes more international in chef Enrico Crippa's Michelin-starred Piazza Duomo, where you can eat creative food beneath colourful wall frescoes painted by contemporary artist Francesco Clemente.

Via Vittorio Emanuele II, Alba's main pedestrian street, is lined with cafes and delicatessens selling fresh truffles in season, and *crutina al tartufo* (hard cheese with flecks of black truffle). Market stalls in the town centre sell fresh produce and local delicacies every Saturday morning.

## GETTING THERE & AROUND

From the **bus station** (☎ 800 019152; Corso Matteotti 10) there are frequent buses to/from Turin (€3.70, 1½ hours, up to 10 daily) and sporadic buses to/from Barolo (€1.60, 25 minutes, two daily) and other surrounding villages.

From Alba's **train station** (Piazza Trento e Trieste) there are regular trains to/from Turin (€4.80 via Bra/Asti, 50 minutes, hourly).

Irregularity of buses makes touring the Langhe better by car or bike. For bike hire try **Cidi Gagliardini** (☎ 0173 44 07 26; Via Ospedale 7) or ask at the tourist office. Prices hover at around €15 per day. Cars go from €23 per day or the tourist office can hook you up with a driver (prices vary). Even better – hire a Vespa!

## Around Alba

Alba vs Asti, Barolo vs Barbaresco: sometimes it seems as if southeastern Piedmont is hiding a whole alphabet's worth of historical rivalries. The castle-crowned Langhe hills produce some of Italy's best reds. Hire a bike and wobble freely between tasting rooms.

## CHERASCO

pop 7200 / elev 288m

Located 23km west of Alba, within the Langhe's lush wine country, Cherasco is actually



best known for *lumache* (snails). The town is home to the **Istituto Internazionale di Elicoltura** (International Institute for Heliculture; ☎ 0172 48 92 18; www.lumache-elici.com; Via Vittorio Emanuele 55), which provides technical advice for snail breeders (heliculture is edible-snail breeding). Snails in this neck of the woods are dished up *nudo* (shell-less). They can be panfried, roasted, dressed in an artichoke sauce or minced inside ravioli. Piedmont dishes made with snails include *lumache al barbera* (snails simmered in Barbera red wine and ground nuts) and *lumache alla Piemontese* (snails stewed with onions, nuts, anchovies and parsley in a tomato sauce).

Traditional trattorias serving such dishes include **Osteria della Rosa Rossa** (☎ 0172 48 81 33; Via San Pietro 31; set menus €30-35; ☎ 12.30-2pm & 8-9pm Fri-Tue). Advance reservations are required.

Wine is not forgotten in Cherasco, though. The **Scuola di Degustazione Enoteca Patrito** (☎ 0172 48 96 75; www.enotecapatrito.it; Via Vittorio Emanuele 78; courses per 2 people 2hr/day €80/210) runs detailed wine-tasting courses in several languages (cheaper for larger groups, as pricey bottles are opened especially for participants).

Typically for Piedmont, chocolate is not forgotten, either. The beautiful confectioner **Pasticceria Barbero** (☎ 0172 48 83 73; www.pasticceriabarbero.com; Via Vittorio Emanuele 74; ☎ Thu-Tue) is a Heritage-listed monument of wood, white marble and brass. Since opening in 1881 it has handmade *Baci di Cherasco* ('Cherasco's kisses', made with 60% chocolate and toasted local hazelnuts), along with other treats such as grappa-filled sweets, chocolate truffles and, of course, snails (made from chocolate, honey and hazelnut paste).

**Al Cardinal Mazzarino** (☎ 0172 48 83 64; www.cardinalmazzarino.com; Via Pietro 48; s €150-200, d €180-220; ☎) is one of Cherasco's most atmospheric sleeping options. This former cardinal's residence, situated in the town centre, has just three antiques-filled rooms, as well as a high-quality regional restaurant (also open to nonguests).

## BAROLO & LA MORRA

Made from Nebbiolo grapes, and aged in oak barrels for three to four years, the velvety, truffle-scented reds produced around Barolo (population 680) and its 10 adjoining villages (including La Morra, Cherasco and Serralunga) are revered by critics as the 'king of wines'.

Situated at the heart of these esteemed vineyards, the diminutive village of Barolo

is lorded over by its castle, the **Castello Falletti** (☎ 0173 5 62 77; www.baroloworld.it; admission €3.50; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm Fri-Wed), which can be toured during a visit to its **Enoteca Regionale del Barolo**. Right inside the castle, the *enoteca* (wine bar) has three Barolo wines available for tasting each day, costing each/all three €/2.5.

If you want to visit some of the Barolo vineyards (and taste-test some of their produce), contact **L'Insieme** (☎ 0173 50 92 12; www.linsieme.org; Cascina Nuova 51, La Morra) in La Morra (population 2670). L'Insieme is an association of nine small, independent winemakers who have banded together to create premium wines, ploughing back some of the profits into international charities. Members such as **Mauro Veglio** (☎ 3336 72 49 68; www.mauroveglio.com; Frazione Annunziata, Cascina Nuova 50, La Morra) will be happy to give you a tour and free tasting. More economical bottles of Nebbiolo (using the same grapes as Barolo but aged in oak for just one year before they're ready to drink) are also for sale. Phone ahead for reservations and directions.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Barolo** (☎ 0173 5 63 54; www.hotelbarolo.it; Via Lomondo 2, Barolo; s/d €65/90; ☎) In the small town of Barolo overlooked by the famous *enoteca*-masquerading-as-a-castle, Hotel Barolo is a fine place to sit back on the terrace with a glass of you-know-what, contemplating the 18th-century Piedmontese architecture that guards its shimmering swimming pool. You don't have to go far for a good meal – the on-site Ristorante Brezza has been serving up truffles and the like for nigh on a century.

**Villa Carita B&B** (☎ 0173 50 96 33; www.villacarita.it; Via Roma 105, La Morra; s/d/ste €90/120/150; ☎) When you dream of Italy, chances are somewhere in that dream is a room with a view across sun-dappled vineyards. This B&B not only has blink-to-be-sure-you're-not-still-dreaming daytime views from every room (and its panoramic terrace), but romantic nighttime views of La Morra's village lights. Tucked below the main building, one room and one suite are hidden in the hillside with their own private terraces.

**Belvedere** (☎ 0173 5 01 90; Piazza Castello 5, La Morra; set menus €42; ☎) lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat Mar-Dec, closed last week in Jul) 'Beautiful view' is no arbitrary name – it's adjacent to La Morra's

## KING BAROLO & QUEEN BARBARESCO

In a country that produces more *vino* than anywhere else on the planet (including France), it's perhaps fitting that the precocious Piedmontese have christened their prized home-produced Barolo and Barbaresco the 'king and queen of wines'. Red, full-bodied and lauded worldwide, these royal oenological lineages are both formulated from 100% Nebbiolo grapes grown less than 3km apart in a triangle of land that lies between the two medieval fiefdoms of Alba and Asti. In Piedmontese dialect *nebbia* means 'little fog', an allusion, not to the state of your brain after six glasses, but to the early autumn mists that hang like a Holy Shroud over the Langhe hills during the October grape harvest.

While both wines exhibit classic Piedmontese aromas of roses, truffles and tar, there are some subtle but key differences. Situated slightly to the east, the Barbaresco zone's balmy climate allows for an earlier harvest and maceration process, meaning smoother, more elegant flavours (hence the 'queen' tag) and less aged vintages. Furthermore, Barbaresco's growing area is significantly smaller than Barolo's, leading to a lower grape output but – in the minds of many aficionados – a higher level of consistency.

Nurtured to the west, Barolo's heritage is much older than that of its royal partner. Its initial formula was perfected by such historic luminaries as the Comte di Cavour, who fed it to his regal friends in the House of Savoy leading it to be dubbed the 'wine of kings'. Old-fashioned Barolo was tannic, aged and often rather sweet, but following a reinvention in the 1970s and '80s – in an episode known rather dramatically as the 'Barolo wars' – fruitier and more youthful varieties have emerged.

Both wines make an excellent accompaniment to grilled meats, stews, veal and even truffles.

lookout point. But Gian Bovio's *risotto al Barolo*, Barbera-cooked steak and triple-pyramid of chocolate all do their best to distract you from the vistas; as does the bewildering decision of choosing among more than 1000 wines.

## SERRALUNGA D'ALBA

pop 500

On the highest point of Serralunga d'Alba, 15km south of Alba, the **Castello di Serralunga d'Alba** (☎ 0173 61 33 58; admission free; ☞ 10am–noon & 2–5pm Tue–Sun winter, to 6pm Tue–Sun summer) is the Langhe's most absorbing castle, due to its intact but completely unrenovated, shell-like interior. Wandering around its echoing rooms, you'd swear you can hear the footsteps of the armoured sentry who once guarded it. The former fortress was built in the 11th century, but most of what you see today was reconstructed in the 14th century, including a then-state-of-the-art defence system (you can still see the remains of the drawbridge). If no one's around during opening hours, knock on the castle-keeper's door to be let in.

Beneath the castle, this untouched little village has a handful of simple restaurants, including **Ristorante di Anselma** (☎ 0173 61 31 24; Piazza Cappellano 3a; mains around €10; ☞ Tue–Sun),

where you can enjoy a plateful of Langhe cuisine or just a glass of local wine.

## BARBARESCO & NEIVE

Same grape, different flavour! Only a few kilometres separate Barolo from Barbaresco (population 660), the home of the renowned wine of the same name, but a rainier micro-climate and fewer ageing requirements have made the latter into a softer, more delicate red that plays 'queen' to Barolo's 'king'. You can worship Barbaresco wines at the intimate **Enoteca Regionale del Barbaresco** (☎ 0173 63 52 51; Piazza del Municipio 7, Barbaresco; ☞ 9.20am–6.30pm Mon, Tue & Thu–Sat, 9.30am–1pm & 2.30–6pm Sun), housed inside a deconsecrated church, with wines lined up where the altar once stood. It costs €1.50 per individual tasting; six Barbaresco wines are available to try each day.

**our pick** **Ristorante Rabayà** (☎ 0173 63 52 23; Via Rabayà 9, Barbaresco; set menus €28–40; ☞ Fri–Wed, closed mid-Feb–early Mar), on the fringe of town, is one of Barbaresco's first-rate restaurants. It has the ambience of dining at a private home. Its antiques-furnished dining room has a roaring fire, but when the sun's shining, there's no better spot than its terrace set high above the vineyards. Try Rabayà's signature rabbit in Barbaresco, followed by a platter of local cheese.

If you haven't had your fill of wine yet, head a further 4km east to the pin-drop-quiet village of Neive (population 2930), where you'll find the **Bottega dei Quattro Vini** (☎ 0173 67 70 14; Piazza Italia 2, Neive; ☹ vary). This two-room shop was set up by the local community to showcase the so-titled four DOC wines (Dolcetto d'Alba, Barbaresco, Moscato and Barbera d'Alba) produced on Neive's hills. (Neive was the first village in Italy to lay claim to four DOCs.) Inside, sample wines by the glass (€1.80 to €4.50), accompanied by cold local specialities (€3.50 to €10) such as anchovies in green sauce, Langhe cheese served with *cugnà* (jam made from pressed grape residue) and *torta di nocchie* (flourless hazelnut cake, best paired with late-harvest Passito wine). The shop is a showroom for just 34 local producers, and sells bottles at cellar-door prices.

## Bra & Pollenzo

pop 28,300

Bra – the name barely registers outside the northwest. But it was in this small, unassuming Piedmontese town in 1987 that the audacious Slow Food Movement first took root. The brainchild of a group of disenchanted local journalists, the initial manifesto (see the boxed text, opposite) ignited a global crusade against the encroaching fast-food juggernaut whose plastic tentacles were threatening to engulf Italy's centuries-old gastronomic traditions. The backlash worked and Bra happily broadcasts its success. There are no cars and no supermarkets in this refreshingly laidback town's historic centre where small, family-run shops (which shut religiously for a 'slowdown' twice a week) are replete with organic sausages, handcrafted chocolates and fresh local farm produce.

## INFORMATION

Bra's **tourist office** (☎ 0172 43 01 84; [www.comune.bra.cn.it](http://www.comune.bra.cn.it), in Italian; Via Moffa di Lisio 14; ☹ 9am–1pm & 3–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–noon Sat & Sun Mar–Nov) has information on both towns and the region.

## SIGHTS

The town remains home to the **Slow Food headquarters** (☎ 0172 41 96 11; [www.slowfood.it](http://www.slowfood.it); Via della Mendicizia Istruita 14), though there's not a lot to see apart from an office (dispensing leaflets) and a small bookshop, plus an affiliated restaurant, Osteria del Boccondivino (opposite).

Bra's history began long before its 1987 Slow Food epiphany. The sloping main

square contains some stately baroque architecture best exemplified in the **Chiesa di San Andrea** (Piazza Caduti), designed by Bernini. The **Santuario della Madonna dei Fiori** (Viale Madonna dei Fiori) mixes baroque with neoclassical and is devoted to the Madonna, who supposedly appeared here in 1336, while the elegantly domed **Chiesa di Santa Chiara** (Via Craveri) is a jewel of Piedmontese Rococo.

The town's history is exhibited in the Palazzo Traversa, aka the **Museo Civico Artistico-Storico** (☎ 0172 42 38 80; Palazzo Traversa, Via Parpera 4; admission free; ☹ 3–6pm Tue–Thu, 10am–noon & 3–6pm Sat & Sun 2nd week of month) and includes Roman artefacts, 18th-century paintings and medieval weaponry; while the **Museo Civico di Storia Naturale** (☎ 0172 41 20 10; Via Craveri 15; admission free; ☹ 3–6pm Tue–Sun) features fossils, minerals and stuffed birds.

Around 4km southeast of Bra is the village of Pollenzo, once an important Roman settlement and since 2004 the equally important home of the **Università di Scienze Gastronomiche** (University of Gastronomic Sciences; ☎ 0172 45 84 19; [www.unisg.it](http://www.unisg.it); Piazza Vittorio Emanuele 9), another creation of Carlo Petrini, founder of the Slow Food Movement. The campus occupies a former royal palace, and offers three-year courses in gastronomy and food management. Also here is the acclaimed **Guido Ristorante** (Guido Ristorante; ☎ 0172 45 84 22; [www.guidoristorante.it](http://www.guidoristorante.it); set menus €75; ☹ Tue–Sat, closed Jan & Aug) that people have been known to cross borders to visit, especially for the veal. Next door is the Albergo Dell'Agenzia (below), and the **Banca del Vino** (☎ 0172 45 84 18; [www.bancadelvino.it](http://www.bancadelvino.it), in Italian), and a wine-cellar-'library' of Italian wines. Free guided tastings are available by reservation. The university also has a campus in Colorno, in the province of Parma.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**our pick** **Albergo Cantine Ascheri** (☎ 0172 43 03 12; [www.ascherihotel.it](http://www.ascherihotel.it); Via Piumati 25, Bra; s/d €80/120; ☐ ☹ ☹) Built around the Ascheri family's 1880-established winery, incorporating wood, steel mesh and glass, this ultracontemporary hotel includes a mezzanine library, 27 sun-drenched rooms, and a vine-lined terrace overlooking the rooftops. From the lobby you can see straight down to the vats in the cellar (guests get a free tour). It's just one block south of Bra's train station.

**Albergo Dell'Agenzia** (☎ 0172 45 86 00; [www.albergoagenzia.it](http://www.albergoagenzia.it); Via Fossano 21, Pollenzo-Bra; s €155, d €195–240; ☐ ☹ ☹) Prince Charles, among others, has

**THE BIG FORK MANIFESTO** *Alison Bing*

Remember lunch? Not the stuff you bolt down at your desk one-handed as you type, text or telephone, but a proper Italian *pranzo* – the kind that makes you wait and salivate with fork in hand, knowing your day is about to take a turn for the better. Can't recall? Neither could a handful of dejected Italian journalists in the small town of Bra, Piedmont back in 1987. McDonald's had just begun expansion into Italy, and lunch outside the bun seemed to be fading into fond memory. But rather than wallow in Proustian melancholy, Carlo Petrini and his fellow *neoforchetoni* ('big forks', or foodies) decided to do something about it. In a manifesto published in the like-minded culinary magazine *Gambero Rosso*, they declared that a meal should be judged not by its speed, but by its pure pleasure. The organisation they founded would soon become known worldwide as **Slow Food** ([www.slowfood.com](http://www.slowfood.com)), and its mission to reconnect artisanal producers with enthusiastic, educated consumers has taken root with more than 80,000 members in 50 countries – not to mention Slow Food *agriturismi*, restaurants, farms, wineries, cheesemakers and revitalised farmers' markets across Italy.

Far more than a pack of picky eaters, Slow Food is a political dynamo, promoting biodiversity, sustainability and shared food resources worldwide. A former Fiat factory in Turin becomes a vast salon with the world's best finger food at the biennial **Salone del Gusto & Terre Madre**, the global Slow Food symposia featuring Slow Food producers, chefs, activists, restaurateurs, farmers, scholars, environmentalists and epicureans from 131 countries. These Olympian foodie events are held in even-numbered years; odd years feature speciality events such as **Slow Fish** ([www.slowfish.it](http://www.slowfish.it)) in Genoa and **Cheese** ([www.cheese.slowfood.com](http://www.cheese.slowfood.com)) and **Slow Food on Film** ([www.slowfoodonfilm.it](http://www.slowfoodonfilm.it)) in Bra. Paradoxically, Slow Food is now growing faster than McDonald's in Piedmont: there may be 28 outlets of the American fast-food chain in the region, but there are twice as many acclaimed Slow Food restaurants. At this slow but steady rate, perhaps future generations will remember how to use a fork, and wield it wisely.

*Alison Bing has been a Slow Food San Francisco member since 2004.*

stayed at the unique Albergo Dell'Agenzia, part of the same complex that houses the Università di Scienze Gastronomiche in Pollenzo. The rooms are spacious and elegantly furnished with huge beds, walk-in wardrobes and sparkling-clean bathrooms. With a restaurant run by people who really know their business, a well-stocked wine cellar and a park, what more could you ask for?

**Osteria del Boccondivino** (☎ 0172 42 56 74; [www.boccondivinoslow.it](http://www.boccondivinoslow.it), in Italian; Via Mendicittà Istruita 14, Bra; set menus €26-28; ☒ Tue-Sat) Up on the 1st floor of the recessed courtyard of the Slow Food Movement's headquarters, this homey little eatery lined with wine bottles was the first to be opened by the emerging organisation back in the 1980s. The food is predictably fresh and excellent, and the local Langhe menu changes daily.

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

From the train station on Piazza Roma, trains link Bra with Turin (€3.50, one hour), via Carmagnola, while buses connect Bra with Pollenzo (€1, 15 minutes, Monday to Saturday morning).

**Asti**

pop 73,400 / elev 123m

Situated just 30km apart, Asti and Alba were fierce rivals in medieval times when they faced off against each other as feisty independent strongholds ruled over by feuding royal families. The rivalry is still recalled in the annual **Palio d'Asti**, a bareback horse race on the third Sunday of September that commemorates a victorious battle against Alba during the Middle Ages and draws over a quarter of a million spectators from villages around. (Alba answers with a more tongue-in-cheek donkey race on the first Sunday in October.) These days the two towns are united by viticulture rather than divided by factionalism. Asti – by far the bigger town – produces the sparkling white Asti Spumante wine made from white Muscat grapes, while Alba concocts Barolo and Barbaresco.

The 10-day **Douja d'Or** festival (a *douja* being a terracotta wine jug unique to Asti), in the first or second week in September, is complemented by the **Delle Sagre** food festival on the second Sunday of September.

Like Alba, the countryside around Asti contains precious black and white truffles. Asti's **truffle fair** is in November.

Asti's largely pedestrianised centre is attractive, though less intimate than Alba's. The town became a Roman colony in 89 BC, and after existing as an independent city-state in the 13th and 14th centuries, it was passed around between Spain, Austria, France and finally the Savoy, prior to unification.

## INFORMATION

The town's two **tourist offices** (☎ 0141 53 03 57; [www.astiturismo.it](http://www.astiturismo.it)) Piazza Alfieri 29 (☎ 9am-1pm & 2.30-6.30pm); Corso Alfieri 328 (☎ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm) have details of September's flurry of wine festivals.

## SIGHTS

During the late 13th century the region became one of Italy's wealthiest, with 150-odd towers springing up in Asti alone. Of the 12 that remain today, one, the 38m-tall **Torre Troyana o Dell'Orologio** (☎ 0141 39 94 60; Piazza Medici; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Apr-Sep, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Sat & Sun Oct), can be climbed. Also rising above Asti's historic core is the enormous belfry of the 13th-century Romanesque-Gothic **Cattedrale di Santa Maria Assunta** (Piazza Cattedrale). Its grandly painted interior merits a peek.

## SLEEPING & EATING

Outside the town centre, there are some lovely spots to sleep in the nearby Monferrato vineyards – see right or ask Asti's tourist offices for a list of properties, including *agriturismi*.

**Hotel Cavour** (☎ 0141 53 02 22; [www.hotelcavour-asti.com](http://www.hotelcavour-asti.com), in Italian; Piazza Marconi; s €45-50, d €65-73; (P) ☎) Asti's budget option is a small, cheap place, next to the railway station, where bright colours enliven otherwise drabish, dark rooms. Everything is clean, though the extrasensitive may detect the faint smell of cigarette smoke. There's a small restaurant downstairs and disabled access.

**Hotel Palio** (☎ 0141 3 43 71; [www.hotelpalio.com](http://www.hotelpalio.com); Via Cavour 106; d €75-107; (P) ☎) Wedged between the train station and the old town, the Palio's utilitarian exterior belies plush facilities inside. Reflecting Asti's juxtaposition of old and new, the hotel broadcasts chic, smart rooms with satellite TVs and wi-fi along with an atmospherically decorated inner sanctum. The owners also run the Ristorante Falcon Vecchia, one of Asti's oldest, which opened in 1607.

**Pompa Magna** (☎ 0141 32 44 02; Via Aliberti 65; set menus €20-30; ☎ Tue-Sun; ☎) This split-level brasserie-style restaurant is a great spot for a bruschetta and glass of very good wine (the Pompa Magna also owns an *enoteca* in town at Corso Alfieri 332; closed Mondays). But it's worth coming hungry for its chef-prepared menus and especially its *bûnnet* (an elaborate chocolate pudding) for dessert.

**Osteria La Vecchia Carrozza** (☎ 0141 53 86 57; Via Caducci 41; meals €18-25; ☎ Tue-Sun) You could be sharing the room with a quartet of nuns or a birthday party of celebrating college graduates at this local spot bedecked with white tablecloths and polished wine glasses, but characterised by plenty of down-to-earth Piedmontese ambience. This being Asti, the food is infused with truffles, Barolo wine and a formidable *agnolotti di astigiana*.

Fresh food, along with clothes and all sorts of household paraphernalia, is sold at Asti's Wednesday and Saturday morning markets on Piazza Alfieri and Piazza Campo del Palio.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Asti is on the Turin-Genoa railway line and is served by hourly trains in both directions. Journey time is 30 to 55 minutes to/from Turin (€3.90), and 1¼ hours to/from Genoa (€6.50), stopping at Alba (€2.70, 40 minutes).

## Around Asti

Vineyards fan out around Asti, interspersed with castles and celebrated restaurants. Buses run from Asti to many of the villages; Asti's tourist offices can provide schedules.

## MONFERRATO

A land of literary giants (contemporary novelist Umberto Eco and 18th-century dramatist Vittorio Alfieri hail from here) and yet another classic wine (the intense Barbera del Monferrato), the Monferrato area occupies a fertile triangle of terrain between Asti, Alessandria and its historic capital, **Casale Monferrato** (population 38,500).

The tiny hamlet of **Moncalvo** (population 3320), 15km north of Asti along the S457, makes a perfect photo stop, with a lookout above its **castle**, where you'll also find an **information office** (Piazza Antico Castello; ☎ Sat & Sun, specific hr vary) and wine tasting.

Many producers, such as Tenuta Castello di Razzano (opposite) conduct cellar tours; the **Consorzio Operatori Turistici Asti e Monferrato**



(☎ 0141 59 46 98; [www.terredasti.it](http://www.terredasti.it); Piazza Alfieri 29) in Asti has a detailed list of tours and can provide directions.

Dating from 1550, **Tenuta del Barone** (☎ 0141 91 01 61; [www.tenutadelbarone.com](http://www.tenutadelbarone.com); Via Barone 18, Penango; s €45-50, d €70-75, dinner incl wine €25; 🍷 🍷 🍷) is a family farm that has been converted into a cheery B&B. Sleep in the old stables and feast on huge amounts of homemade food. Medieval-cooking courses and wine tasting are often available. Penango, 2km from Moncalvo, is signposted from Moncalvo's southern end.

**Our pick** **Tenuta Castello di Razzano** (☎ 0141 92 21 24; [www.castellodirazzano.it](http://www.castellodirazzano.it); Frazione Casarello 2, Alfiano Natta; d/st €110/200; 🍷 🍷 🍷) is a rambling castle, which is possible to visit just to tour its working winery, and take part in a personal, seated wine tasting (from €6 for five wines, an aromatic wine and Barbera grappa plus local raw and cooked salami, bread, focaccia and pizzas; up to €15 for eight wines and a veritable feast of snacks). But to soak up the antiques-filled castle's atmosphere, you'll want to stay in one of its rooms the size of small apartments (some the size of large apartments) and roam its historic halls or curl up in its book-lined reading room. Alfiano Natta is 6km west of Moncalvo.

For Piedmontese pampering, head to **Locanda del Sant'Uffizio** (☎ 0141 91 62 92; Strada Sant'Uffizio 1, Cioccaro di Penango; s €128-175, d €171-240; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷), a restored 17th-century convent (and sleek new wing and wellness centre) set in 4 hectares of vineyards. Many of the convent's rooms – some with original frescoes – reflect the colour of the flowers after which they are named. Bike rental is free, and a pick-up service from Asti can be arranged. Sant'Uffizio has a small, elegant **restaurant** (lunch/dinner menus €23/55), which is open to non-guests, though you'll need to book ahead.

## NORTHERN PIEDMONT

The land around **Vercelli** (population 480,010), on the west bank of the Sesia river, is so flat and soggy that some 100 varieties of rice are grown here. The most famous style comes from tiny **Arborio** (population 1035) about 20km north of Vercelli, a settlement whose name has become synonymous with risotto.

Following the Sesia river north past Varallo to Monte Rosa, straddling the Valle d'Aosta, Alpine slopes climb sharply. Skiing, walking, biking and white-water rafting are among the possibilities for exploring this mountainous terrain.

In Piedmont's northeast are the captivating lakes of Lago d'Orta, and the western shore (and Borromean Islands) of Lago Maggiore; both are covered in the Lombardy & the Lakes chapter (p259).

**Ivrea** is worth a quick stop. Going quietly about its business most of the year, the town, 55km northeast of Turin en route to the Valle d'Aosta, explodes during its chaotic **Battaglia delle Arance**. Starting the Sunday before Shrove Tuesday, this three-day 'battle of the oranges' sees more than 3500 people pound each other with 400,000kg of oranges, re-enacting the townspeople's 12th-century uprising against the aristocracy. (Napoleon demanded oranges replace the stones originally used.)

Ivrea's **tourist office** (☎ 0125 61 81 31; [www.ca.navese-vallilanzo.it](http://www.ca.navese-vallilanzo.it), in Italian; Corso Vercelli 1; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 3-6pm Sat) has information on visiting the old town's medieval **castle** and 11th-century **cathedral**.

Typewriter manufacturer Olivetti was founded in Ivrea by local entrepreneur Camillo Olivetti (1868-1943) in 1896. Today its Bauhaus-inspired factory and giant glass office facades form part of **MAAM** (Museo a Cielo Aperto dell'Architettura Moderna; ☎ 0125 64 18 15; Via Jervis 26; admission free; ☎ museum 24hr, info centre 9am-1pm Tue-Sat), an open-air museum of modern architecture. Seven numbered information panels in English lead visitors on a tour of the Olivetti buildings' exterior (all are still in use).

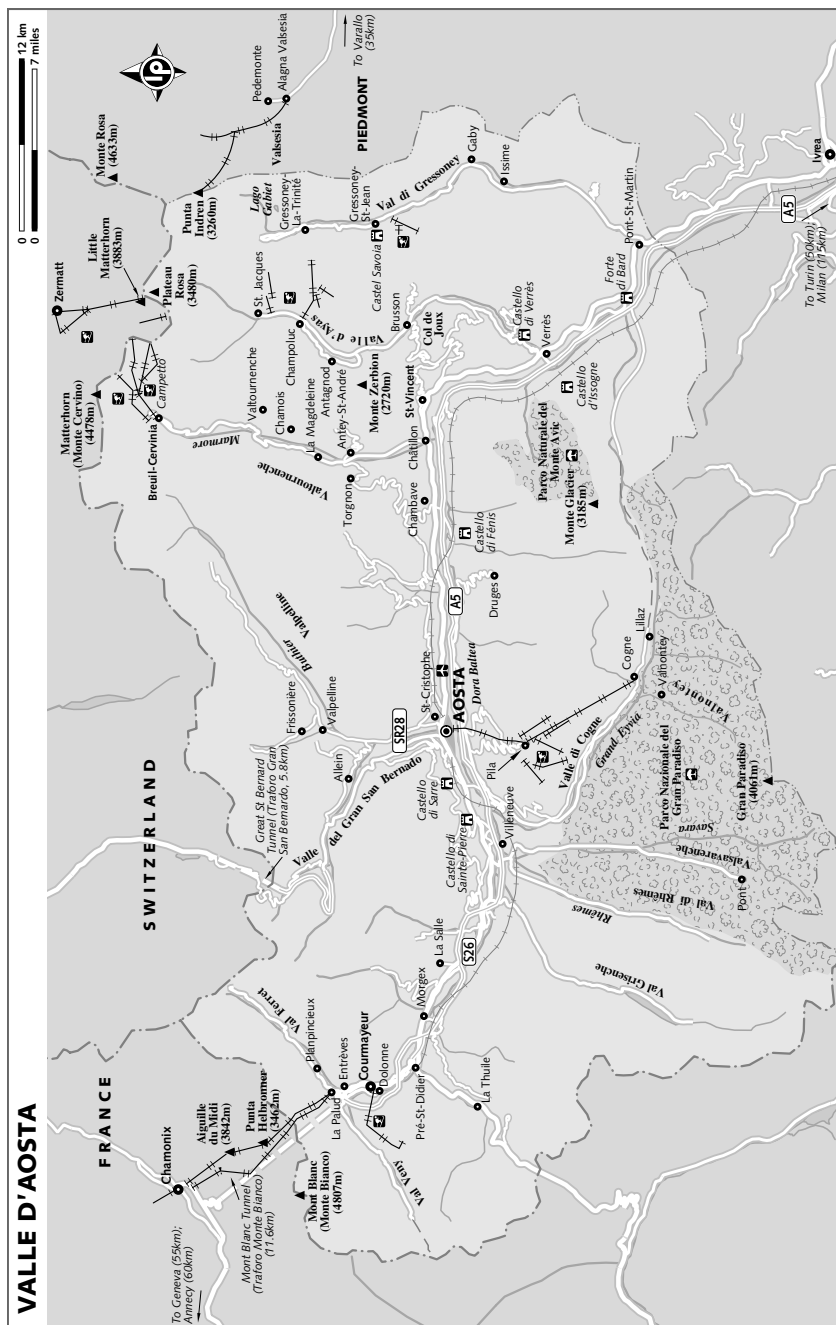
From Ivrea's train station on the corner of Corso Jervis and Corso Nigra in the new town, there are direct trains to/from Aosta (€3.50, one hour, hourly) and Turin (€3.90, one hour, up to eight daily). Both the historic centre and MAAM are an easy walk from here.

Northern Piedmont is also home to the Valsesia valley, which together with the Valle d'Aosta's Valle d'Ayas and Val di Gressoney forms the Monte Rosa ski area (see p256).

## VALLE D'AOSTA

pop 120,600

The semiautonomous Val d'Aosta is the smallest and least populous of Italy's regions and remained a virtual cul de sac until the opening of the Mount Blanc tunnel in 1965. While its Dolomite cousins exhibit notable German tendencies and Friuli Venezia Giulia leans subtly towards the east, Aosta's nuances are French. The result is a curious hybrid culture known as Valdostan, a historical mix

**VALLE D'AOSTA**

of French-Provençal and northern Italian that has infiltrated the food (polenta, spicy sausages and the famous *fontina* cheese) and ensured the survival of an esoteric local language, Franco-Provençal or Valdôtain, a dialect still used by approximately 55% of the population.

Comprising one large glacial valley running east-west, which is bisected by several smaller valleys, the Val d'Aosta is overlooked by some of Europe's highest peaks, including Mont Blanc, the Matterhorn, Monte Rosa and Gran Paradiso. Not surprisingly the region offers some of the best snow facilities on the continent with opportunities for skiers to descend hair-raisingly into France and Switzerland over lofty glaciers or traverse them in equally spectacular cable cars.

When the snow melts, the hiking is even more sublime, with access to the 165km Tour du Mont Blanc, the Gran Paradiso National Park, and Aosta's two Blue Riband high-altitude trails, the Alte Vie 1 and 2.

Aosta's roots are Roman – the eponymous town boasts some significant ruins – while annexation by the House of Savoy in the 11th century led to the building of numerous medieval castles. In the 12th and 13th centuries German-speaking Walsers from Switzerland migrated into the Val di Gressoney and a handful of villages still preserve the vernacular language and architecture.

With the opening of the Mont Blanc tunnel in 1965, life in the Val d'Aosta changed exponentially, with tourists flocking in to ski the high Alps in the two popular resort towns of Courmayeur and Breuil-Cervinia. Transformed from rural backwater to 21st-century success story, the Aostan economy now revolves around tourism and high-quality cheese and wine production. The region also boasts some of the highest living standards in Italy and reports the nation's (and world's) lowest birth rate.

## Activities

Thundering off-piste opportunities abound in the Valle d'Aosta's mountains, which also offer groomed runs for **downhill skiing**. Courmayeur (adjacent to Mont Blanc) and Breuil-Cervinia (from where you can ski to Zermatt, Switzerland) are the best-known resorts, but smaller spots such as Pila (immediately south of Aosta) and the Monte Rosa ski areas also have scenic ski-

ing for all levels. The Valle di Cogne, in Parco Nazionale del Gran Paradiso, and the Val di Gressoney, at the southern foot of Monte Rosa, are leading **cross-country skiing** centres.

A three-/six-day lift pass covering the entire Valle d'Aosta, Alagna Valsesia (Piedmont) and Zermatt (Switzerland) costs €104/195. A six-day Mont Blanc Snow Safari pass (€231) is valid in the Four Valleys skiing area (Switzerland), Chamonix (France) and Valle d'Aosta. Various other passes are available; see [www.skivallee.it](http://www.skivallee.it).

## AOSTA

pop 34,200 / elev 565m

Jagged Alpine peaks rise like wizened white sentinels above sprawling Aosta, looking down on a settlement that has honoured them since Roman times. Bounced around between Burgundy (France) and Savoy (Italy) in the Middle Ages, the modern town remains bilingual with a culture that claims to be Valdostan, a factor best reflected in its musical local dialect and simple but hearty cuisine.

An important Roman settlement, Aosta's geometric street layout and 2000-year-old walls have successfully survived a 21st-century invasion of cars and tourists, although these days skiers easily outnumber archaeologists (a ski lift departs from the town centre). An added bonus is Aosta's proximity to Gran Paradiso, Italy's oldest national park, a veritable paradise for summertime hikers and mountaineers.

## Information

Banks abound on and around the Piazza Chanoux.

**Aosta tourist office** (☎ 0165 23 66 27; [www.regione.vda.it/turismo](http://www.regione.vda.it/turismo); Piazza Chanoux 2; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-8pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-1pm & 3-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun Oct-May) Region-wide information including accommodation lists.

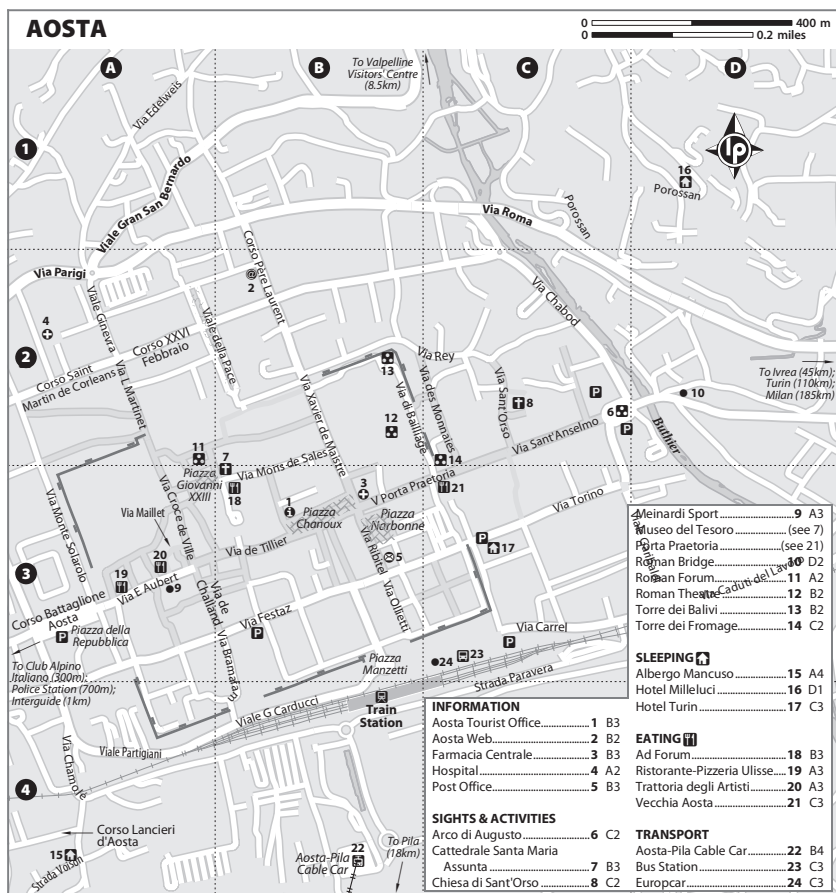
**Aosta Web** (☎ 0165 06 00 15; Ave Pere Laurent cnr XXVI Febbraio; per hr €2; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm, 2.30-8.30pm, closed Sun am) Internet.

**Farmacia Centrale** (☎ 0165 26 22 05; Piazza Chanoux 35) Pharmacy.

**Hospital** (☎ 0165 30 41; Viale Ginevra 3)

**Police station** (☎ 0165 26 21 69; Corso Battagione Aosta 169) West of the town centre.

**Post office** (Piazza Narbonne; ☎ 8.15am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat)



## Sights

### ROMAN RUINS

While Aosta's splayed suburbs can be a little hard on the eye, its 2000-year-old central district is awash with Roman ruins. The grand triumphal arch, **Arco di Augusto** (Piazza Arco di Augusto) has been strung with a crucifix in its centre since medieval times. From the arch, head east across the Buthier river bridge to view the cobbled **Roman bridge** – still in use since the 1st century. Afterwards, backtracking west 300m along Via Sant'Anselmo brings you to **Porta Praetoria**, the main gate to the Roman city.

Continuing north along Via di Baillage and down a dust track brings you to Aosta's **Roman theatre** (Via Porta Praetoria; admission free; ☎ 9am-7pm Sep-Jun, to 8pm Jul & Aug). Part of its 22m-high fa-

cade is still intact. In summer, performances are held in the better-preserved lower section. All that remains of the **Roman forum**, another couple of blocks west, beneath Piazza Giovanni XXIII, is a colonnaded walkway known as **Criptoportico**. The foreboding **Torre dei Balivi**, a former prison, marks one corner of the Roman wall and peers down on the smaller **Torre dei Fromage** (☎ vary depending on exhibition) – named after a family rather than a cheese. It's closed to the public except during temporary art exhibitions – the tourist office has a program.

### CATTEdraLE SANTA MARIA ASSUNTA

The neoclassical facade of Aosta's **cathedral** (Piazza Giovanni XXIII; ☎ 6.30am-noon & 3-7pm) belies the impressive Gothic interior. Inside, the carved

15th-century walnut-wood choir stalls are particularly beautiful. Two mosaics on the floor, dating from the 12th to the 13th centuries, are also worth studying, as are the religious art treasures displayed in the **Museo del Tesoro** (☎ 0165 4 04 13; adult/child €2.10/0.75; ☎ 9-11.30am & 3-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 8.30-10am & 10.45-11.30am Sun Apr-Sep, 8.30-10am, 10.45-11.30am & 3-5.30pm Sun Oct-Feb).

### CHIESA DI SANT'ORSO

Aosta's most intriguing sight is this **church** (Via Sant'Orso; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Sun Oct-Feb, 9am-7pm Mar-Jun & Sep, 9am-8pm Jul & Aug), which is part of a still-operating monastery. The church dates back to the 10th century but was altered on several occasions, notably in the 15th century when Giorgio di Challant of the ruling family ordered the original **frescoes** painted over and a new, lower roof installed. All was not lost: the renovations left the upper levels of the frescoes intact above the new roofline. You can ask the warden to unlock the door, letting you clamber up a narrow flight of wooden steps into the cavity between the original and 15th-century ceilings to view the well-preserved remnants.

The interior and the magnificently carved choir stalls are Gothic, but excavations have unearthed the remains of an earlier church. Beneath the altar, protected by glass, is a 12th-century mosaic, which was only discovered in 1999 when the church's heating system underwent maintenance.

The monastery's beautiful Romanesque **cloister**, with ornately carved capitals representing biblical scenes, is to the right of the church.

## Activities

### SKIING

The 1800m-high resort of **Pila** (☎ 0165 36 36 15; [www.pila.it](http://www.pila.it); half-/full-day pass €21.50/30; ☎ mid-Dec-mid-Apr), accessible by the Aosta-Pila cable car from Aosta or an 18km drive south, is quick and easy to reach from the town. Its 70km of runs, served by 13 lifts, form one of the valley's largest ski areas. Its highest slope, in the shadow of Gran Paradiso, reaches 2700m and sports an ace snow park with a half-pipe, jump and slide and freestyle area for boarders and freestyle skiers. The ski station is a village of sorts, but services such as the tourist office, police and medical services are handled from Aosta. For details on ski passes covering here and other resorts in the Valle d'Aosta, see p247.

## WALKING & MOUNTAIN BIKING

The lower slopes leading down from Pila into the Dora Baltea valley provide picturesque walks and rides. Mountain bikes can be transported for free on the **Aosta-Pila cable car** (adult one-way/return €3/5; ☎ 8am-12.15pm & 2-5pm or 6pm Jun-Aug) and mountain bikers can buy a one-day pass (transport only; €13), allowing unlimited use of the cable car and chairlifts. The tourist office gives advice on mountain-biking itineraries and walking trails and has lists of Alpine guides and mountain accommodation.

Recommended walking clubs that organise treks and provide guides include the following:

**Club Alpino Italiano** (CAI; ☎ 0165 4 01 94; [www.caivda.it](http://www.caivda.it), in Italian; Corso Battaglione Aosta 81; ☎ 6.30-8pm Tue, 8-10pm Fri) West of the city centre.

**Interguide** (☎ 0165 4 09 39; [www.interguide.it](http://www.interguide.it), in Italian; Via Monte Emilio 13; ☎ 6.30-8pm Tue, 8-10pm Fri) West of the city centre.

**Meinardi Sport** (☎ 0165 4 06 78; Via E Aubert; ☎ 3-7.30pm Mon, 9am-12.30pm & 3-7.30pm Tue-Sat) A well-stocked sports shop with walking supplies and maps.

## WINE & CHEESE TASTING

The Valle d'Aosta is home to vineyards producing sought-after wines that are rarely available outside the region, including those from Europe's highest vineyard, **Morgex et La Salle** ([www.caveduvinbland.com](http://www.caveduvinbland.com)), named for the two villages strung together by its vines. Aosta's tourist office has a free, comprehensive booklet in English with information on cellars you can tour and taste.

Local cheeses can be tasted at the Valpelline Visitors' Centre – see the boxed text, p250. You'll need your own wheels for both.

## Festivals & Events

For over 1000 years, the **Fiera di Sant'Orso**, the annual wood fair, has been held on 30 and 31 January around Porta Praetoria, in honour of the town's patron saint who made wooden shoes for the poor (hence you'll see many wooden shoes in craft shops around town). Woodcarvers from all over the valley gather to display their works and present an item to the saint at the Chiesa di Sant'Orso.

## Sleeping

Aside from Aosta's stash of business hotels, the valley harbours numerous cheaper (and often more charming) lodgings in the surrounding area. Ask at the tourist office.



**Hotel Turin** (☎ 0165 4 45 93; www.hotelurin.it; Via Torino 14; s €34-60, d €58-84; (P) (Q)) A modern, boxy glass-and-steel affair, the three-star Turin is a handy suitcase drag from the train station and a short distance to carry your skis or snowboard to ride the cable car up to Pila.

**Albergo Mancuso** (☎ 0165 3 45 26; www.albergomancuso.com; Via Voison 32; s/d €45/55; (P)) This budget place is a little old-fashioned (check out the old 1970s concert photos on the stairway) and certainly not luxury but, to its credit, the Mancuso is friendly, family-run and incredibly cheap. The rooms are all different so ask for a preview before you decide (some are small). It also offers discounts in a couple of local restaurants including the Ulisse (see right).

**our pick** **Hotel Milleluci** (☎ 0165 4 42 74; www.hotelmilleluci.com; Loc Porossan 15; s €110-130, d €130-240; (P) (Q) (Q) (Q)) Old wooden skis, traditionally carved wooden shoes, clawfoot baths, indoor and outdoor pools, a Jacuzzi, sauna and gym, and sumptuous skiers' breakfasts make this large, family-run converted farmhouse seem more like a palace. Set on a hillside above town, its balconied rooms look out to the so-titled 'thousand lights' twinkling from Aosta below.

## Eating & Drinking

Traditional dishes include *seupa valpellenintze* (thick soup of cabbage, bread, beef broth and *fontina*) and *carbonada con polenta* (soup traditionally made with chamois, though these days usually beef).

Open-air cafe terraces spring up on Piazza Chanoux in summer.

**Trattoria degli Artisti** (☎ 0165 4 09 60; Via Maillet 5-7; meals €18-28; (☎) Tue-Sat) Fabulous Valdostan cuisine is dished up at this dark, cosy little trattoria, tucked down an alleyway off Via

Aubert. Antipasti such as puff pastry filled with Valdostan fondue, cured ham and regional salami are followed by dishes such as roe venison with polenta, and beef braised in Morgex et La Salle white wine.

**Ristorante-Pizzeria Ulisse** (☎ 0165 4 11 80; Via E Aubert 58; meals €15-18; (☎) lunch Mon-Sun, dinner Thu-Mon) Ulisse is the sort of place where the food is often brought to your table personally by the hardworking chef and the cooked-to-perfection €5 pizza Margheritas are better than anything you'll ever taste in fancy faux Italian chains.

**Ad Forum** (☎ 0165 4 00 11; Via Mons de Sales 11; meals €22-30; (☎) Tue-Sun; (Q)) Another fantastic Aosta restaurant setting, this time in a stylish garden (and interior rooms) built on part of the remains of the Roman forum. Conceptual dishes such as risotto with strawberries and spumante, or Lasagnetta with pear and blue cheese, come in generous portions, and you get an equally tasty complimentary aperitif while you wait. The attached *enoteca* has an excellent line-up of wines.

**our pick** **Vecchia Aosta** (☎ 0165 36 11 86; Piazza Porte Pretoriane 4; set menus €27; (☎) lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat; (Q)) Maybe it's the French influence, but Aosta restaurants such as the Vecchia score consistently highly when it comes to culinary creativity. Grafted onto a section of the old Roman wall, the setting is sublime and the waiters highly knowledgeable (and congenial). Take their advice and go for the lamb – a real vacation highlight.

## Shopping

Craft shops in town sell traditional Valdostan objects made by certified local artisans. Unique items to look out for include a *grolla* – a large wooden goblet whose name is derived

## VALDOSTAN CHEESE

Something like a cross between gouda and brie, *fontina* is preserved under its own DOP (designation of protected origin). It must be made from the full-cream, unpasteurised milk of Valdostan cows that have grazed on pastures up to 2700m above sea level. During a period of three months it matures in underground rock tunnels, and is turned daily and brushed and salted on alternate days. Learn more about these and other local cheese-making traditions at the **Valpelline Visitors' Centre** (☎ 0165 7 33 09; www.fontinacoop.it; Frissonière; admission free; (☎) 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 3-6pm Sat & Sun mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 9am-noon & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri mid-Sep–mid-Jun). You'll need wheels to get to the centre from Aosta. Follow the SR28 for 7km north to Valpelline, turn east towards Ollomont and after 1.5km turn west along a mountain road to Frissonière.

In Aosta, shops stock local cheeses, including Stravecchio di Montagna, an extremely strong, salty and potent hard cheese – eat it *before* asking how it is made.

from the word 'grail' in reference to the Holy Grail, which is said to have passed through the village and been copied by local craftsmen. Another Valdostan tradition is the *coppa dell'amicizia* (friendship cup) – a wooden bowl filled with coffee laced with citrus rind and strong grappa and set alight. The 'cup' has anything from two to 15 mouthpieces, out of which friends take turns drinking as it's passed around.

## Getting There & Away

Buses operated by **Savda** ([www.savda.it](http://www.savda.it)) run to Milan (1½ to 3½ hours, two daily), Turin (two hours, up to 10 daily) and Courmayeur (€3.20, one hour, up to eight daily), as well as French destinations including Chamonix. Services leave from Aosta's **bus station** (☎ 0165 26 20 27; Via Giorgio Carrel), virtually opposite the train station. To get to Breuil-Cervinia, take a Turin-bound bus to Châtillon (30 minutes, eight daily), then a connecting bus (one hour, seven daily) to the resort.

Aosta's train station, on Piazza Manzetti, is served by trains from most parts of Italy via Turin (€7.55, two to 2½ hours, more than 10 daily).

Aosta is on the A5, which connects Turin with the Mont Blanc tunnel and France. Another exit road north of the city leads to the Great St Bernard tunnel and on to Switzerland.

## Getting Around

Aosta's walled centre is closed to private cars. Shuttle buses run through town from the train station. Book a **taxi** (☎ 0165 3 1831) or hire your own wheels from **Europcar** (☎ 0165 4 1432) at the train station.

## AOSTA VALLEY CASTLES

Gothic castles loom above the Valle d'Aosta. Each castle is within view of the next, and messages used to be transferred along the valley by flag signals. If you're driving, you can take in several on a single trip, although note that closing days differ in some cases. From Aosta follow the scenic S26, which runs parallel to the busy A5. The castles are all clearly signposted (and in any case, they're impossible to miss).

East from Aosta is the magnificently restored **Castello di Fénis** (☎ 0165 76 42 63; admission €5; ☎ 9am-7pm Mar-Jun & Sep, to 8pm Jul & Aug, 10-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Wed-Sat & Mon, 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm

Sun Oct-Feb). Formerly owned by the Challant family, it features rich frescoes. It was never really used as a defensive post but served as a plush residence.

Past St-Vincent is the sober **Castello di Verrès** (☎ 0125 92 90 67; admission €3; ☎ 9am-7pm Mar-Jun & Sep, to 8pm Jul & Aug, 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Fri, Sat & Mon-Wed, 10am-12.30pm & 1-6pm Sun Oct-Feb), a late-Gothic monolith that stands on the ancient Via Francigena, a pilgrims' path between Canterbury in England and Rome.

Around 1km southwest of the Dora Baltea river, below the town of Verrès, is the 15th-century **Castello d'Issogne** (☎ 0125 92 93 73; admission €5; ☎ 9am-7pm Mar-Jun & Sep, to 8pm Jul & Aug, 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Thu-Sat & Mon & Tue, 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Sun Oct-Feb). This building was a castle, although you would hardly know it – it looks more like a stately home.

Further down the valley still, towards Pont-St-Martin, the hulking **Forte di Bard** (☎ 0125 83 38 11; adult/child €8/4; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, to 7pm Sat & Sun) was a no-nonsense military outpost given short shrift by Napoleon on his first campaign into Italy. Today it contains **Il Museo delle Alpi** and mounts archaeological and science-oriented exhibitions, which cost an additional €3 for adults and €2 for children. From Pont-St-Martin, you could strike north to Castel Savoia in Gressoney-St-Jean; see p256.

Heading west from Aosta towards Mont Blanc, you'll quickly come across **Castello di Sarre** (☎ 0165 25 75 39; admission €5/free; ☎ 9am-7pm Mar-Jun & Sep, to 8pm Jul & Aug, 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Sun Oct-Feb). Built in 1710 on the remains of a 13th-century fort, it was then bought by King Vittorio Emanuele II in 1869 to use as a hunting residence. The Savoyes sold the castle in 1972 and it now serves as a museum of the royal presence in the region.

Continuing west, **Castello di Sainte-Pierre** (☎ 0165 90 34 85; adult/child €3/free; ☎ 10am-noon & 1.30-5.30pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 10am-noon & 1.30-6.30pm Sun Mar-Sep, 10am-noon & 1.30-4.30pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 10am-noon & 1.30-5.30pm Sun Oct-Feb) is home to a natural history museum with changing exhibitions.

## COURMAYEUR

pop 3000 / elev 1224m

Flush up against France and linked by a dramatic cable-car ride to its cross-border cousin in Chamonix, Courmayeur is an activity-orientated Aosta village that has grafted upmarket ski facilities onto an

ancient Roman base. Its *pièce de résistance* is lofty Mont Blanc, western Europe's highest mountain, 4807m of solid rock and ice that rises like an impregnable wall above the narrow valleys of northwestern Italy, igniting awe in all who pass.

In winter Courmayeur is a nexus for skiers bound for the high slopes above town that glisten with plenty of late-season snow. In summer it wears a distinctly different hat; the Società delle Guide Alpine di Courmayeur is bivouacked here and the town has developed into an important staging post on the Tour du Mont Blanc (TMB), one of Europe's most iconic long-distance hiking trails.

## Information

**Ambulance** (☎ 0165 84 46 84)

**Centro Traumatologico** (☎ 0165 84 46 84; Strada dell'Volpi 3) Medical clinic; open shop business hours. The nearest hospital is in Aosta.

**Tourist office** (☎ 0165 84 20 60; www.courmayeur.net, in Italian; Piazzale Monte Bianco 13; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm)

## Activities

The **Società delle Guide Alpine di Courmayeur** (☎ 0165 84 20 64; www.guidecourmayeur.com; Strada del Villair), founded in 1859, is Italy's oldest guiding association. In winter its guides lead adventure seekers off-piste, up frozen waterfalls and on heli-skiing expeditions. In summer, rock climbing, canyoning, canoeing, kayaking and hiking are among its many outdoor activities. The association's dramatic history unfolds in the **Museo Alpino Duca degli Abruzzi** (☎ 0165 84 20 64; Piazza Henry 2; admission €3; ☎ 9am-noon & 3.30-6.30pm Thu-Tue, 3.30-6.30pm Wed).

For lower-altitude walks with a nature guide, contact **Sirdar** (☎ 347 2632466; www.sirdar-montagne.com, in Italian).

## SKIING

Courmayeur's network of cable cars, gondolas and numerous drag lifts is run by **Funivie Courmayeur Mont Blanc** (☎ 0165 84 66 58; www.courmayeur-montblanc.com; Strada Regionale 47).

Skiing lessons starting at around €30 an hour are available from the **Scuola di Sci Monte Bianco** (☎ 0165 84 24 77; www.scuolascimontebianco.com, in Italian; Strada Regionale 51), founded in 1922.

The **Vallee Blanche** offers an exhilarating off-piste descent from Punta Helbronner (see opposite) across the Mer de Glace glacier into Chamonix, France. The route itself is not difficult (anyone of intermediate ability can do it), but an experienced guide is essential to steer you safely around the hidden crevasses. All up, the 24km Vallee Blanche takes around four to five hours, allowing time to stop and take in the view. Highly experienced hardcore skiers can tackle the **Toula Glacier** descent, which also takes off from Punta Helbronner and drops for six sheer kilometres to La Palud. Again, a guide is essential. In both cases it's usually easy to join in with a guide-led group.

## WALKING & MOUNTAIN BIKING

In July and August the Courmayeur and Val Veny **cable cars** (☎ 0165 84 66 58; one-way/return €6/10) and the Maison Vieille **chairlift** (☎ 0165 84 66 58; one-way/return €4/5) whisk walkers and mountain bikers up into the mountains; transporting a bike is free. All three run from around 9.15am to 1pm and 2.15pm to 5.15pm from June to August.

## KINGS OF THE WILD FRONTIER

Most sane people complete the famous 165km hiking circuit of Mont Blanc in seven to 10 days; but for a few resolute loons – around 2000 of them annually, to be more precise – mere walking is not enough. Since 2003 a significant contingent of willowy-framed ultrarunners has been competing in an event known as the Ultra Trail Tour du Mont Blanc, or UTMB. Considered one of the most arduous single-stage foot races in the world, this masochistic mountain romp starts in Chamonix, France, and follows the traditional Tour du Mont Blanc hiking route in an anti-clockwise circuit through Italy and Switzerland. Aside from the crippling distance, runners must also cross approximately 15 alpine passes and log a total elevation gain of nearly 9000m (that's nine vertical kilometres!). The top competitors usually complete the course in a mind-boggling 21 hours, though times of 30 to 45 hours are more normal. The nexus for the race in Italy is the Valle d'Aosta town of Courmayeur.

If none of the above fazes you, check out the official race website at [www.ultratrailmb.com](http://www.ultratrailmb.com). But beware, race qualification rules are stringent.

The vertigo-inducing **La Palud–Punta Helbronner cable car** (☎ 0165 8 99 25; [www.montebianco.com](http://www.montebianco.com), in Italian; return trip €36; ☞ 8.30am–12.40pm & 2–4.30pm) departs every 20 minutes in each direction. At the 2173m-high midstation **Pavillon du Mt Fréty** (return €15.50), you can take a summer-time stroll through the flower-filled Alpine garden, **Giardino Alpino Saussurea** (☎ 0165 8 99 25; adult/child €2/1.50; ☞ 9.30am–6pm Jul–Sep), which is blanketed by snow in winter. Walking trails around here are numerous and many fall within the **Pavillon du Mt Fréty Nature Oasis**, a protected zone of 1200 hectares tucked between glaciers, where you have a good chance of spotting ibexes, marmots and deer.

Even in midsummer, temperatures plummet as low as -10°C at **Punta Helbronner** (3462m). Take heavy winter clothes and sunglasses for the blinding snow, and head up early in the morning to avoid the heavy weather that often descends here in the early afternoon. At Punta Helbronner a small, free **museum** displays crystals found in the mountains. From Punta Helbronner another cable car (from late May to late September, depending on the weather conditions) takes you on a breathtaking 5km transglacial ride across the Italian border to the **Aiguille du Midi** (3842m) in France (one-way/return €18/34), from where the world's highest cable car transports you into Chamonix, France (€46).

For many walkers (some 30,000 each summer), the trophy hike is the **Tour du Mont Blanc** (TMB). This 169km trek cuts across Italy, France and Switzerland, stopping at nine villages en route. Snow makes it impassable for much of the year. The average duration is anything from one week to 12 days; smaller sections are also possible. It's possible to undertake the hike without a guide, but if you're unfamiliar with the area, hooking up with a local guide is a good idea as the route traverses glacial landscapes.

Mountain bikes can be hired for around €10 per day at **Noleggio Courmayeur** (☎ 0165 84 22 55), in front of the Courmayeur chairlift.

## THERMAL SPA

Bubbling a natural 37°C from the mountains' depths, the thermal water at Pré-St-Didier has long been a source of therapeutic treatments. A beautiful 1920s building is the newly renovated location for this soothing **spa** (Terme di Pré-St-Didier; ☎ 0165 86 72 72; [www.termedipre.it](http://www.termedipre.it); Allée des Thermes; daily admission Mon–Fri €36, Sat & Sun €45;

☞ 10am–9pm Sun–Fri, to 11pm Sat). Admission includes use of a bathrobe, towel and slippers, plus fresh-squeezed juices, fruit and herbal teas. In addition to saunas, whirlpools and toning waterfalls there's an indoor-outdoor thermal pool. It's lit by candles and torches on Saturday nights, when it is spectacular amid the snow and stars.

Before leaving the spa, head 50-odd metres beyond the car park in the opposite direction to the village, where a little **Roman bridge** arcs over the trout-filled river.

## Sleeping & Eating

Ask the tourist office for a list of *rifugi* (mountain huts), usually open from late June to mid-September. Quality food shops and restaurants line Via Roma.

**Camping Arcen Ciel** (☎ 0165 80 92 57; [www.campingarcenciel.it](http://www.campingarcenciel.it); Strada Feysoulles 20, Morgex; per person/tent & car €5.20/7; ☞ year-round) This peaceful leafy camping ground sprawls over 1020 sq metres, with shady, well-spaced sites and its own bar-restaurant. It is 9km east of Courmayeur.

**Hotel Triolet** (☎ 0165 84 68 22; [www.hoteltriolet.com](http://www.hoteltriolet.com); Strada Regionale 63; s €70–100, d €100–150; P ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞) Triolet is a tad more elegant than your average ski digs; and it's smaller too with only 20 rooms, allowing service to remain personal as well as affable. Aside from the usual tick-list, there's a pleasant spa (Jacuzzi, steam room, sauna), ski lockers and a vista-laden breakfast room. The *funivia* (cable car) is a two-minute walk away. It's closed in the off-season – check ahead.

**our pick Hotel Bouton d'Or** (☎ 0165 84 67 29; [www.hotelboutondor.com](http://www.hotelboutondor.com); Strada Statale 26/10, Courmayeur; s €70–80, d €95–125; P ☞ ☞) Is it a dream? You open your eyes and there before you is the imposing hulk of Mont Blanc. There can't be many hotels where the view is this good, or the rooms this clean, or the service this attentive. To top it all, Bouton d'Or is situated in the centre of Courmayeur and sports a sauna, a decent breakfast, a shuttle to the cable car, and a lounge full of interesting alpine paraphernalia.

**Mont Blanc Hotel Village** (☎ 0165 86 41 11; [www.hotelmontblanc.it](http://www.hotelmontblanc.it); La Croisette 36; s €173–240, d €198–265; P ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞) On the hillside of La Salle, 10km east of Courmayeur, this haven of luxury has beautiful stone-and-wood rooms, many with enormous balconies with views across the valley. A series of cavelike nooks conceals spa treatment rooms and steaming saunas.

Half-board is available at the hotel's standard restaurant. To truly dine in style, guests and nonguests can head to the hotel's second, gastronomic restaurant (following).

**La Terraza** (☎ 0165 84 33 30; Via Circonvallazione 73; set menus €19; ☞ lunch & dinner) A lively, central bar-restaurant-pizzeria with the full gamut of pizzas, steaks and hearty après-ski fare. True to the local spirit there are also plenty of Valdostan dishes, including polenta, spicy sausage, fondue and pasta with the celebrated *fontina* cheese.

**Rifugio Pavillon** (☎ 0165 84 40 90; Pavillon du Mt Fréty; meals €25; ☞ 10am-5pm Dec-Oct) Perched at the first midstation on the Punta Helbronner cable car at a heady height of 2173m, with a deckchair-lined sun terrace, this bar-cafe-restaurant cooks up mountain feasts including Savoy cabbage rolls with chestnuts, and wheat pasta in deer sauce.

## Getting There & Away

Three trains a day from Aosta terminate at Pré-St-Didier, with bus connections (20 to 30 minutes, eight to 10 daily) to **Courmayeur bus station** (☎ 0166 84 13 97; Piazzale Monte Bianco) outside the tourist office. There are up to eight direct Aosta-Courmayeur buses daily (€3.20, one hour) and long-haul buses serve Milan (€15.50, 4½ hours, three to five daily) and Turin (€9, 3½ to 4½ hours, two to four daily).

Immediately north of Courmayeur, the 11.6km-long Mont Blanc tunnel leads to Chamonix (France). At the Italian entrance, a plaque commemorates Pierlucio Tinazzi, a security employee who died while saving at least a dozen lives during the 1999 disaster when a freight truck caught fire in the tunnel.

## PARCO NAZIONALE DEL GRAN PARADISO

Italy's oldest national park is also one of its most diverse – and aptly named. Gran Paradiso, formed in 1922 after Vittorio Emanuele II gave his hunting reserve to the state (ostensibly to protect the endangered ibex) is a veritable 'grand paradise'. What makes it special is a tangible wilderness feel (rare in Italy). The park's early establishment preceded the rise of the modern ski resort and, as a result, the area has, so far, resisted the lucrative lure of the tourist trade with all its chairlifts, dodgy architecture and après-ski clubs.

Gran Paradiso incorporates the valleys around the eponymous 4061m peak (Italy's 7th highest), three of which are in the Valle d'Aosta: the Valsavarenche, Val di Rhêmes and the beautiful Valle di Cogne. On the Piedmont side of the mountain, the park includes the valleys of Soana and Orco.

The main stepping stone into the park is tranquil **Cogne** (population 1474; elevation 1534m), a refreshing antidote to overdeveloped Cervinia on the opposite side of the Val d'Aosta. Aside from its plethora of outdoor opportunities, Cogne is known for its lace-making; you can buy the local fabrics at the charming craft and antique shop, **Le Marché Aux Puces** (☎ 0165 74 96 66; Rue Grand Paradis 4; ☞ closed Wed).

## Information

Cogne's **tourist office** (☎ 0165 7 40 40; www.cogne.org; Piazza Chanoux 36; ☞ 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat) has stacks of information on the park and a list of emergency contact numbers. The **Consorzio Gran Paradiso Natura** (☎ 0165 92 06 09; www.granparadisoonatura.it; Loc Trépoint 91, Villeneuve) also has tourist information.

## Activities

Gran Paradiso is one of Italy's best hiking areas, with over 700km worth of trails linked by a recuperative network of *rifugi*.

Despite a (welcome) dearth of downhill-ski facilities, 80km of well-marked **cross-country skiing trails** (admission per day €4) line the unspoiled Valle di Cogne. Alas, there is still 9km of downhill slopes. A one-day ski pass covering the use of Cogne's single cable car, chairlift, and drag lift costs €22. Skiing lessons are offered by the **Scuola Italian Sci Gran Paradiso ski** (☎ 0165 7 43 00; Piazza Chanoux 38, Cogne). For something more esoteric, try an **ice-climbing** expedition on the Lillaz waterfall with Cogne's Società Guide Alpine (see opposite).

From Cogne an easy walking trail (3km) leads southeast through forest to this waterfall. **Swimming** is popular here, but take care as the water can be dangerously cold, even in high summer.

The park's amazing biodiversity, including butterflies and Alpine flora, can be seen in summer at the fascinating **Giardino Alpino Paradisia** (☎ 0165 7 41 47; adult/child €3/1.50; ☞ 10am-5.30pm Jun–mid-Sep, to 6.30pm Jul & Aug), an Alpine botanical garden in the tiny hamlet of Valnontey (1700m), 3km south of Cogne. Guided nature



walks from July to September are organised by the **Associazione Guide della Nature** (☎ 0165 7 42 82; Piazza Chanoux 36, Cogne; ☹ 9am-noon Mon, Wed & Sat).

A classic, moderately strenuous hike from Valnontey is to the **Rifugio Sella** (☎ 0165 7 43 10; dm €17) a former hunting lodge of King Vittorio Emanuele II. From the town bridge follow the Alta Via 2 uphill for two to 2½ hours. More adventurous hikers can continue along the exhilarating Sella-Herbetet Traverse (15km), a seven-hour loop that will drop you back in Valnontey. You'll need a head for heights and a good map. The main point of departure for the Gran Paradiso peak is Pont in the Valsavarenche. Technically it's no Mont Blanc and can be completed in a day, but you'll need a guide. Contact the **Società Guide Alpine di Cogne** (☎ 0165 7 48 35; Via Bourgeois 33, Cogne).

**Horse riding** (per hr €25) and 45-minute **horse-and-carriage rides** (per carriage of up to 4 people €40) through the mountain meadows are run by **Pianta Cavalli** (☎ 3333 14 72 48) in Valnontey.

## Sleeping & Eating

Wilderness camping is forbidden in the park, but there are 11 *rifugi*; the tourist office has a list.

**Camping Lo Stambecco** (☎ 0165 7 41 52; [www.camp-inglostambecco.com](http://www.camp-inglostambecco.com); Valnontey; per person/tent/car €73/6; ☹ May-Sep; ☐) Pitch up under the pine trees in the heart of the park at this well-run and friendly site. Its sister hotel, La Barme, rents bikes to explore the mountains.

**Hotel Sant'Orso** (☎ 0165 7 48 21; Via Bourgeois 2, Cogne; s/d €46/92, half-board €71/142; ☹ spring & autumn closures vary; ☐ ☹) Cogne personified – ie tranquil, courteous, and understated – the Sant'Orso is nonetheless equipped with plenty of hidden extras. Check out the restaurant, small cinema, sauna, kids room and terrace. Further kudos is gained by the fact that you can start your cross-country skiing pretty much from the front door. The owners also run the Hotel du Gran Paradis nearby.

**Hotel Ristorante Petit Dahu** (☎ 0165 7 41 46; [www.hotelpetitdahu.com](http://www.hotelpetitdahu.com); Valnontey; s €36-50, d €72-100, restaurant menus €35; ☹ closed May & Oct; ☐) Straddling two traditional stone-and-wood buildings, this friendly, family-run spot has a wonderful restaurant (also open to nonguests; advance bookings essential) preparing rustic mountain cooking using wild Alpine herbs.

**Our pick Hotel Bellevue** (☎ 0165 7 48 25; [www.hotelbellevue.it](http://www.hotelbellevue.it); Rue Grand Paradis 22, Cogne; d €170-240, 2-person chalet €250-320; ☹ mid-Dec-mid-Oct; ☐ ☹)

Overlooking meadows, this green-shuttered mountain hideaway evokes its 1920s origins with romantic canopied timber 'cabin beds', weighty cowbells strung from old beams and clawfoot baths. There are open fireplaces (stacked with a woodpile of logs) in some rooms. Afternoon tea is included in the price as well as use of the health spa, and you can also rent mountain bikes and snowshoes. Its four restaurants include a Michelin-starred gourmet affair, a cheese restaurant (closed Tuesday) with cheese from the family's own cellar, a lunchtime terrace restaurant and a brasserie (closed Monday) on the village's main square a few moments' stroll away.

## Getting There & Around

There are up to seven buses daily to/from Cogne and Aosta (50 minutes). Cogne can also be reached by cable car from Pila.

Valley buses (up to 10 daily) link Cogne with Valnontey (€0.90, five minutes) and Lillaz (€0.90, five minutes).

## VALTOURNENCHE

Take one of Europe's most dramatic mountains – the Matterhorn (4478m) – and stick an ugly amalgam of concrete buildings in front of it. The result: Breuil-Cervinia, one of Italy's oldest ski resorts, but also one of its least attractive. Byron once stood here and marvelled at 'Europe's noble rock'. One wonders what he would have made of the modern circus. The upside is that Cervinia's ski facilities are second to none; you can hit the snow year-round up here and even zoom across into Zermatt, Switzerland. The downside is the incongruity of it all. Messy resort or splendiferous mountain; take your pick. Smaller skiing areas include **Antey-St-André** (1080m), **La Magdeleine** (1644m) and **Valtournenche** (1524m), 9km south of Breuil-Cervinia.

## Information

The valley's tourist offices can help with accommodation:

**Breuil-Cervinia** (☎ 0166 94 91 36; [www.cervinia.it](http://www.cervinia.it); Via Carrel 29; ☹ 9am-noon & 3-6.30pm)

**Valtournenche** (☎ 0166 9 20 29; [valtournenche@montecervino.it](http://valtournenche@montecervino.it); Via Roma 45; ☹ 9am-noon & 3-6.30pm)

## Activities

Plateau Rosa (3480m) and the Little Matterhorn (3883m) in the Breuil-Cervinia ski

area offer some of Europe's highest skiing, while the Campetto area has introduced the Valle d'Aosta to night skiing. A couple of dozen cable cars, four of which originate in Breuil-Cervinia, serve the 200km of downhill pistes. A one-day ski pass covering Breuil-Cervinia and Valtournenche costs €36.

Contact Breuil-Cervinia's **Scuola di Sci del Breuil Cervinia** (☎ 0166 94 09 60; [www.scuolascibreuil.com](http://www.scuolascibreuil.com)) or **Scuola Sci del Cervino** (☎ 0166 94 87 44; [www.scuolacervino.com](http://www.scuolacervino.com)) for skiing and snowboarding lessons, and its mountain-guide association **Società Guide del Cervino** (☎ 0166 94 81 69; [www.guidedelcervino.com](http://www.guidedelcervino.com); Via J Antoine Carrel 20) to make the most of the Matterhorn's wild off-piste opportunities.

Between July and September several cableways and lifts to **Plateau Rosa** continue to operate, allowing year-round skiing on the Swiss side of the mountain. A one-day international ski pass costs €50.

Basic maps are available for **walking** at the information offices. Two classic long-distance hikes include the **Giro del Cervino**, a tough eight-to-10-day romp around the base of the Matterhorn, and the equally challenging **Tour Monte Rosa** ([www.tourmonterosa.com](http://www.tourmonterosa.com)). Ascents of Matterhorn are for serious climbers only. Società Guide del Cervino (above) organises five-day trips from €1200.

## Sleeping & Eating

There are stacks of hotels in Breuil-Cervinia. If you want a quieter scene, try nearby Valtournenche, a village that shares its name with the wider valley.

**Hotel Punta Maquignaz** (☎ 0166 94 91 45; [www.puntamaquignaz.com](http://www.puntamaquignaz.com); Breuil-Cervinia; d half-board €144-270; ☎ spring & autumn closures vary) With stacked logs in the hallway, cowbells and bearskins, this timber chalet has a consistent reputation for excellent food as part of its half-board deals.

**Rifugio Guide del Cervino** (☎ 0166 9 21 01; [giorgio.carrel@galactica.it](http://giorgio.carrel@galactica.it); ☎ Dec-mid-May & late Jun-mid-Sep) Ride the Plateau Rosa cable car to this mountain hut, breathtakingly nestled at the height of 3480m on Plateau Rosa. At full moon it hosts dinners, followed by a torchlit ski descent down into Breuil-Cervinia.

## Getting There & Away

**Savda** (☎ 0165 36 12 44) operates buses from Breuil-Cervinia to Châtillon (one hour, seven daily), from where there are connecting buses to/from Aosta and trains to other destinations

in Italy. Longer-haul seasonal bus services from Breuil-Cervinia include to/from Turin, Milan and Genoa.

## VALLE D'AYAS, VAL DI GRESSONEY & VALSESIA

The beauty of the Alps is that, despite pockets of overdevelopment, many of the valleys have held onto their ancient traditions. While the rest of the Valle d'Aosta leans culturally towards France, the three valleys of Ayas, Gressoney and Sesia (the latter is in Piedmont) that snake north to the feet of majestic **Monte Rosa** (4633m) hide an 800-year-old Walser tradition. The German-descended Walsers migrated from Switzerland's Valais region in the 13th century, and their community has survived intact; many of the people who live in this rugged region still speak German (and Tich dialect) as a mother tongue and inhabit traditional Walser wood-slatted houses built on short stilts.

You can find out more about the community's history at the excellent **Museo Walser** (☎ 0163 92 29 35; admission €2; ☎ 2-6pm Sat & Sun Sep-Jun, 2-6pm daily Jul & Aug) in Pedemonte just north of Alagna Valsesia (1191m), a small ski resort at the head of Valsesia. At the other end of the valley, **Varallo** (population 7795; elevation 451m) guards the amazing **Sacro Monte di Varallo** (☎ 0163 5 39 38; [www.parks.it/riserva.sacro.monte.varallo](http://www.parks.it/riserva.sacro.monte.varallo); admission free), a series of 50 chapels and 800 life-sized religious statues dating back to the 15th century that depict the Passion of Christ. The Monte is accessed via a walking path from Piazza Ferrari in town.

To the west the Valle d'Ayas harbours its own ski resort, **Champoluc** (population 500; elevation 1560m), a storybook spot saved from tourism overload by the difficult road twisting from the A5 exit at Verrès around some tortuous hairpin bends.

The main villages in the Val di Gressoney are pretty lakeside **Gressoney-St-Jean** (population 816; elevation 1385m), and **Gressoney-La-Trinité** (population 306; elevation 1637m), a few kilometres north – both Walser strongholds. Queen Margherita picked Gressoney-St-Jean as the location for **Castel Savoia** (☎ 0125 35 53 96; adult/child €3/2; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Mon-Sat, to 7pm Sun Mar-Sep, 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 1.30-6pm Sun, closed Thu Oct-Feb) in 1894, a dreamlike mansion enjoyed by the Italian royals well into the 1900s.

## Information

Tourist offices in the valleys include the following:

**Alagna Valsesia** (☎ 0163 92 29 88; [www.alagna.it](http://www.alagna.it); Piazza Grober 1) The Valsesia's main information source for mountain activities.

**Champoluc** (☎ 0125 30 71 13; [www.ariatmonterosa.com](http://www.ariatmonterosa.com); Via Varasc 16; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 4-7pm Jan-Apr, 9am-12.30pm & 3-6pm May-Dec)

**Gressoney-St-Jean** (☎ 0125 35 51 85; [www.ariatmonterosawalser.it](http://www.ariatmonterosawalser.it); Villa Deslex; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Sun)

**Varallo** (☎ 0163 56 44 04; [www.turismovalsesiavercelli.it](http://www.turismovalsesiavercelli.it); Corso Roma 38; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm & 2.30-7pm Sat)

## Activities

**Monterosa Ski** ([www.monterosa-ski.com](http://www.monterosa-ski.com)) sports 180km of downhill runs (best suited to intermediate skiers) and 38 ski lifts. From **Alagna Valsesia** a cable car climbs to Punta Indren (3260m). Its 25km-long Gressoney-St-Jean piste takes skiers past Castel Savoia and dozens of traditional Walser houses.

White-water rafting, canoeing and kayaking take place in the Sesia's wild rapids from May to September; contact Varallo's **Accadueo Scuola di Sport Fluviali** (☎ 347 583 68 88; [www.accadueo-sesia.it](http://www.accadueo-sesia.it), in Italian; Crevola Varallo).

From Alagna, the **Corpo Guide Alagna** (☎ 0163 9 12 10; [www.guidaalagna.com](http://www.guidaalagna.com); Piazza Grober) organises a smorgasbord of winter and summer activities. A highlight is its summer two-day trip up to the highest *rifugio* in Europe, the **Capanna Regina Margherita** (☎ 0163 9 10 39; dm €80) perched atop Punta Gnifetti on the Swiss-Italian border at an astounding 4554m. Guided ascents cost from €180 per person depending on group size (including a night in the refuge).

The valleys are interconnected by many long-distance trails, including the **Alta Via 1** and the interpretive **Grande Sentiero Walser**. You can tackle a bite-sized chunk of the Alta Via by walking from Valtournenche (p255) to St Jacques at the head of the Valle d'Ayas (15km, 5½ to 6.5 hours). From here the Grande Sentiero Walser heads south and then southeast across the Col di Pinter (2777m) to Gressoney-St-Jean (17km, eight hours). From Gressoney-La-Trinité (4km north of St Jean) you can ride the cable car up to Lago Gabiet, an Alpine lake (elevation 2357m), from where numerous shorter trails can be picked up.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Rifugio Gabiet** (☎ 0125 36 62 58; [www.rifugiogabiet.it](http://www.rifugiogabiet.it); Lago Gabiet; d half-board €80; ☎ mid-Dec-mid-Apr & mid-Jun-mid-Sep) Peering down on Lago Gabiet from a height of 2880m, this heady spot has 25 rooms with Walser furniture, a cosy lounge room with a toasty open fire, and a sundeck. It can be reached by cable car from Gressoney-La-Trinité.

**Hotel Lyskamm** (☎ 0125 35 54 36; [www.lyskammhotel.com](http://www.lyskammhotel.com); Gressoney-St-Jean; s €40-60, d €80-120; ☎ ☎ ☎) Of 1887 vintage, the Lyskamm still wears its 'Grande Albergo' badge with pride. Being situated in picturesque Gressoney-St-Jean obviously helps, as do clean rooms, sharp service, a good restaurant and plenty of games for stormy, snowy nights. Two ski lifts are nearby.

**Hotel Genzianella** (☎ 0125 30 71 56; [www.hotelgenzianella.it](http://www.hotelgenzianella.it); Place de la Grotte 5; s/d €52/104; ☎ ☎) A simple 20-room mountain hotel in the tiny village of St Jacques in the Valle d'Ayas 3km north of the Champoluc ski shenanigans. There's a ski bus and cross-country opportunities in the winter. In summer you can sit out in the garden and contemplate whether to hike west (Alta Via 1) or east (Grande Sentiero Walser).

**Hotel Breithorn** (☎ 0125 30 87 34; [www.breithornhotel.com](http://www.breithornhotel.com); Route Ramey 27, Champoluc; s/d €60/120, restaurant mains €15-20; ☎ ☎) Built early last century, this dreamy hotel in Champoluc's village centre has timber-panelled rooms dressed in crisp white cotton, an excellent on-site restaurant and its own mountain guide organising a weekly program of free excursions for guests. For the ultimate mountain retreat, ask about the hotel's remote chalet (double half-board from €230; mains €20), which can only be reached by jeep in summer or Skidoo in winter.

**La Grange** (☎ 0125 30 78 35; St Jacques; mains €7-16; ☎ noon-2am Thu-Tue) Fab music bar at the base of St Jacques' ski lift serving Alpine classics such as stewed sausages with polenta, roast wild pig and potatoes and, of course, fondue.

**Atelier Gourmand** (☎ 0125 30 78 88; Rte Ramey 69, Champoluc; lunch menus €15-21, mains €6.50-17) Romantic village restaurant with a candlelit stone dining room warmed by an open fire, a mountain-inspired menu and over 300 wines.

## Getting There & Away

Trains running through Aosta stop in St-Vincent and Verrès, from where you can

**LONG-DISTANCE PATHS IN VALLE D'AOSTA**

Energetic walkers will have a field day in the Valle d'Aosta, where long-distance hiking trails criss-cross the high country like interconnecting blood vessels. As elsewhere in Italy, a comprehensive network of *rifugi* (mountain huts) makes multiday trekking easy – or you can just join segments of the paths for shorter day hikes. Here's a run-down of the highlights:

- **Alta Via 1** – the 13-stage 'path of the giants' traverses the north side of the Valle d'Aosta from Gressoney to Courmayeur and passes in the shadow of Europe's highest peaks.
- **Alta Via 2** – this 12-stage high-altitude nature trail traverses the valley's southern flanks from Champorcher to Courmayeur and takes in large swathes of Parco Nazionale del Gran Paradiso. Its high point is 3300m Col Lauson.
- **Grande Sentiero Walser** – a heritage trail that follows the ancient Walser migration route across the Valtournenche, Valle d'Ayas and Val di Gressoney. The historic path is waymarked with fascinating interpretive panels.
- **Tour Monte Rosa** – a nine-day, 150km extravaganza around the base of 4633m Monte Rosa, this trek also encompasses parts of Switzerland. It enters Valle d'Aosta at Olen Pass near the Valsesia and exits at Colle Teodulo north of Valtournenche.
- **Tour du Mont Blanc** – this marathon 165km, seven-to-10-day romp through Italy, France and Switzerland around western Europe's highest mountain is one of the continent's most iconic walks and incorporates some truly breathtaking scenery. The nexus for the hike in Italy is Courmayeur.
- **Tour de Cervino** – a spectacular 145km circumnavigation of the Matterhorn that traverses three different cultures (Walser, Francophone and Italian) and crosses two glaciers. For experienced hikers only.
- **Via Francigena** – a medieval pilgrims' route running between Canterbury in England and Rome that has been partially restored. Its path through the Valle d'Aosta descends from the St Bernards Pass, cuts through the town of Aosta and then follows the main valley via Châtillon and Verrès into Piedmont.
- **Grande Traversata delle Alpi (GTA)** – second only to the peninsula-spanning Sentiero Italia, the 200km GTA runs the length of the Italian Alps, from the Dolomites to the Maritimes. The trail kisses the southeast corner of the Valle d'Aosta in and around the Parco Nazionale del Gran Paradiso.

catch a bus to the Ayas or Gressoney valleys. **Valdostana Impresa Trasporti Automobilistici** (☎ 0125 96 65 46) operates buses from Verrès train station to St Jacques (€3.20) via Champoluc (€3, one hour, up to nine daily).

**Autoservizi Novarese** (☎ 011 903 10 03) operates buses from Varallo to Turin (2¼ hours, two daily). For information on buses to/from Alagna Valsesia (one hour, up to five daily) contact **ATAP** (☎ 0158 40 81 17).

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