Tour Code
XPM

ADVENTURESABROAD

PIEMONTE PANORAMA

Trails & Tastings in Italy's Quiet Corner

13 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Torino/Turin

Welcome to Piemonte! Arrivals at Torino Airport.

Torino announces itself differently from other Italian cities. No ancient forum, no famous dome dominating the skyline — instead, wide baroque boulevards designed for royal processions, elegant arcaded streets where the espresso culture runs deeper than anywhere else in Italy, and Alps visible at the end of almost every northward street on a clear day. This is where Italy decided to become a country, where the House of Savoy ruled for centuries with one eye always on France, and where the Slow Food movement eventually pushed back against everything that threatened to make Italian eating ordinary.

We gather this evening for our first dinner together -- the beginning of thirteen days that will move between vineyard hills, mountain valleys, and the Ligurian coast without ever quite leaving the table.

Overnight in Torino.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Torino: Town Tour - Transfer to Asti Area

Torino repays a morning on foot. The city's aristocratic bones are everywhere -- baroque palaces commissioned by Savoy dukes, wide boulevards designed for royal processions, arcaded streets that shelter the coffee houses where Italian unification was quietly plotted over espresso. When Italy unified in 1861 this was the new nation's first capital, and the architecture still carries that ambition without quite believing it ended.

Our guided walking tour moves through Piazza Castello, past the Church of San Lorenzo -- baroque at its most exuberant -- to the elegant symmetry of Piazza San Carlo, Torino's drawing room, where the arcades have been hosting aperitivo since the 18th century. Hidden courtyards reveal themselves between palazzo facades; the city rewards the curious walker.

After a lunch break and free time, we transfer south to our agriturismo near Asti -- about ninety minutes through a landscape that shifts from urban sophistication to vineyard hills with remarkable speed. Four nights on a working farm among the vines is the counterpoint Torino sets up perfectly.

Overnight near Asti.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Monferrato Hill District: Vineyard Hike & Wine Tasting

This morning we transfer to Nizza Monferrato for a leisurely hike through vineyard-covered hills with a local guide.* Our route crosses the transition zone where Monferrato's Barbera vines give way to the Langhe's Moscato grapes and hazelnut groves, following quiet farm roads that wind between medieval hill towns and ancient castles perched on hilltop peaks.

The landscape unfolds in gentle undulations—vineyard rows following the contours, their geometry interrupted by stone farmhouses and Romanesque church towers. The Langhe-Roero and Monferrato districts earned UNESCO World Heritage status in 2014 for wine-making traditions that stretch back centuries. These rolling hills produce some of Italy's most celebrated wines—Barolo, Barbaresco, Barbera—alongside white truffles and handmade pasta that define Piemontese cuisine. Local growers still work plots passed through families for generations, though modern techniques now complement ancestral knowledge.

At a family-run winery focused on Barbera production, we settle in for lunch in the estate's dining room overlooking the vineyards: seasonal vegetable antipasti, fresh pasta tossed with local butter and sage, and selections of salami and cheese from nearby producers, all paired with the estate's wines. The Barbera grape thrives in these clay-rich soils, producing wines with bright acidity that cut through the region's rich

cuisine.

We then hike back to our agriturismo, about 2 hours through the vineyards as afternoon light softens across the hills. Our one-way distance is about 5 km (3.5 mi); a return journey by bus to our hotel is also available (talk to your leader on tour).

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

Overnight near Asti.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 4 Asti Area Touring

This morning we drive to Neive, a medieval village in Cuneo province where the hills fall away in vineyard terraces toward the valley floor. The Moscato vines here produce something quite different from the powerful Nebbiolo reds ripening a few kilometres away — light, slightly sparkling, faintly sweet — a reminder that within this compact region, soil composition and microclimate create distinct wine personalities from one ridge to the next. The French call it terroir; Piemontese producers have been practising the concept for centuries without needing the word.

Neive's cobbled lanes climb between ochre stone buildings toward the central piazza in the unhurried way of hilltop villages that have seen no particular reason to rush since the medieval period. The walk threads through a landscape where the geometry of vine rows follows the contour of every slope, broken only by farmhouses and the occasional Romanesque tower.

This afternoon we continue to Barbaresco — where a medieval tower dominates the village skyline and the Nebbiolo grape, under DOCG regulations as strict as any in Italy, produces wines that command serious attention worldwide. At a hillcrest winery with views across the Langhe, we taste Barbaresco alongside a winemaker who can explain precisely why the vineyard on one side of a stone wall tastes different from the one on the other.

Overnight near Asti.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Cooking Class & Acqui Terme Touring

This morning we visit Acqui Terme with a local guide. The Romans founded Acquae Statiellae here in the 2nd century AD for its thermal waters, constructing elaborate bath complexes whose ruins still punctuate the modern townscape. The town's central Piazza della Bollente displays the source: an eclectic pavilion where sulphur-rich water bubbles up at 75 degrees Celsius, steam rising year-round from the fountain. Locals once gathered here to fill containers for home bathing; now it serves primarily as civic landmark and curiosity.

The medieval Pisterna quarter preserves narrow streets that climb toward the Cathedral of the Assumption, its Romanesque foundations overlaid with later baroque embellishments. Nearby stands the Paleologi Castle, named for the Byzantine-descended dynasty that ruled Monferrato from the 14th to 16th centuries. Their territorial conflicts with Savoy shaped much of Piemonte's medieval history, before both fell to larger powers and eventually unified Italy absorbed all.

After exploring Acqui Terme and a quick lunch on your own, we continue to a farmhouse in the hills surrounding Canelli for a hands-on cooking class. The chef-owner guides us through traditional Piemontese recipes—handmade tajarin pasta with its egg-rich dough, perhaps vitello tonnato or brasato al Barolo depending on season. We divide into small teams so everyone participates in preparing each dish. The evening culminates with dinner featuring what we've created, paired with local wines that demonstrate how food and viticulture evolved together in this region.

We return to our agriturismo after dinner.

Overnight near Asti.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Asti - Chocolate Tasting - Rice Mill Tour - Barolo

We check out of the agriturismo this morning with the particular reluctance that good places earn — then drive to Asti, where the food market fills the central piazzas with seasonal produce, local cheese, and cured meats. Torre Troyana rises 44 metres above the streetscape, a survivor of the tower-building rivalries that once consumed Italian communes and a reminder that Asti was a serious medieval power before history moved on.
At a family-owned chocolate producer we learn something most visitors don't know: Piemonte's chocolate tradition is as deep as its wine culture. Turin's court chocolatiers were among the first in Europe to work with cacao arriving from the Americas, pioneering techniques in the 18th century that still influence Italian confectionery. The tasting — samples paired with Moscato — makes the argument more convincingly than any history lesson.

Then the Po plains, and one of the day's quieter revelations. The mondine — women who spent months knee-deep in paddies transplanting rice seedlings, working in harsh conditions that inspired protest songs still sung today — are the human story behind Piemonte's rice culture. At Mulino San Giovanni, a historic rice mill, that story connects to the present: the preserved 19th-century farmhouse alongside the contemporary production of Acquerello, one of Italy's premium rice brands, whose grains age up to a year before sale. Lunch at a nearby restaurant, where the chef demonstrates proper risotto preparation, lands the point on the plate.

By late afternoon we reach the Barolo area — the evening yours to explore at your own pace.

Overnight in Barolo OR nearby Cherasco.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 7 Hiking in the Barolo Wine Region

From the town of Barolo—birthplace of the wine that bears its name—we set out on foot with a local guide through the heartland of Nebbiolo cultivation. The Langhe hills roll away in every direction, vineyard-covered slopes interrupted by stone farmhouses and church towers that mark village centres. Barolo production operates under Italy's strictest DOCG regulations: only Nebbiolo grapes from 11 specific communes, minimum three years' ageing including two in oak, five years for Riserva designation.

The 10 km loop follows quiet country roads through landscapes shaped entirely by viticulture. The guide explains how minute soil differences—more clay here, more limestone there, varying proportions of sand and silt—create the distinct crus that producers prize. A single hillside might contain three or four designated vineyards, each commanding different prices based on centuries of observed quality. Spring brings bright green shoots across brown earth; by September these hills turn gold and red before harvest.

We pause in Monforte d'Alba, a medieval village perched atop one of the Langhe's highest points. The settlement's concentric rings of buildings climb toward the church at the summit, defensive architecture from centuries when rival communes fought constant small wars. Cafés in the piazza provide refreshment and views that extend across the vineyard patchwork toward Alpine foothills in the distance.

Returning to Barolo, we have free time before dinner.

Walk: 10 km/6 mi loop, gentle terrain on country roads.

Overnight in Barolo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Truffle Hunting & Wine Tasting

This morning takes us into the woods with a local trifolau and his trained dog. White truffles—tartufo bianco d'Alba—grow in symbiosis with oak, hazelnut, poplar and willow roots, their fruiting bodies developing entirely underground. Only dogs can detect the scent of buried fungi;

pigs once served this role but proved too eager to eat the truffles they found. Our guide shares techniques passed through generations: reading terrain and tree species, recognising subtle surface signs like cracked earth or yellowed grass, training dogs to indicate location without damaging the delicate truffles with their paws.

The hunt reveals how environment shapes this prized ingredient. Specific soil pH between 7.5 and 8.5, proper moisture levels, and the right tree partnerships all prove essential. A productive truffle ground might yield for decades if carefully managed, or go barren if disturbed. White truffles cannot be cultivated—they exist only where nature provides exact conditions, making each autumn's harvest unpredictable. This scarcity drives prices that can exceed 3,000 euros per kilogram in exceptional years.

After our woodland expedition, we drive to Alba for lunch and time to explore the medieval town centre. Its cobbled streets and brick towers recall the prosperous commune that once rivalled nearby Asti, both cities growing wealthy from strategic positions along trade routes connecting the Mediterranean to Alpine passes.

This afternoon we visit a traditional wine cellar for tastings of four local wines, learning how Barolo's long ageing requirements distinguish it from faster-maturing Nebbiolo expressions like Barbaresco.

Overnight in Barolo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

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

Leaving Barolo, we transfer to Mondovi where a local guide meets us. A modern funicular climbs from the valley-floor town to Mondovi Piazza, the medieval upper quarter founded in 1198 when three villages rebelled against the Bishop of Asti. The central piazza stretches across two levels, palazzo facades bright with frescoes. The Mission church stands as Piedmont's finest example of Jesuit baroque, where Andrea Pozzo's trompe-l'oeil ceiling creates impossible architectural perspectives that seem to dissolve into sky.

After lunch we walk a secondary road toward Vicoforte, about 8 km following the Stations of the Cross marked by wayside chapels. Views open across the valley toward Alpine foothills. At Vicoforte, the sanctuary's massive elliptical dome dominates—only Rome's Pantheon exceeds its span. Architect Francesco Gallo built it in the 18th century atop foundations laid two centuries earlier by Ascanio Vitozzi, commissioned by Duke Carlo Emanuele I of Savoy. The interior soars above elaborate baroque decoration.

We continue 40 minutes by road to Cuneo for overnight. The town occupies a promontory between two rivers, its streets laid out with mountain views toward Monte Viso's distinctive pyramid rising from the Cottian Alps.

Walk: 8 km/5 mi on paved secondary road, gentle descent.

Overnight in Cuneo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Hike from Monterosso Grana - Pradleves

This morning we drive into Valle Grana's upper reaches where the valley narrows between steep mountainsides. Piemonte—"foot of the mountain"—takes its name from geography, and these Alpine valleys penetrate deep toward Italy's highest peaks and largest glaciers. Monte Viso dominates the southwestern horizon, its distinctive pyramid rising to 3841 metres/12,602 feet and marking the border with France.

Our guide leads us on a morning hike through landscapes shaped by centuries of Alpine pastoralism—stone barns for summer grazing, terraced meadows carved from steep slopes, irrigation channels directing snowmelt to hayfields. These mountain communities developed economies based on transhumance, moving livestock between valley floors in winter and high pastures in summer, a pattern that persisted until recent decades fundamentally reshaped rural life.

We then visit a cheese farm where Castelmagno ages in natural grottoes carved into the mountainside. This ancient cheese—documented since the 13th century when it reportedly served as currency for tax payments—nearly disappeared during the World Wars as young people abandoned struggling mountain farms. Local producers revived traditional methods starting in the 1980s, and Castelmagno now holds protected designation status. After learning the production process, we enjoy lunch: five cheese varieties at different ages, potato gnocchi bathed in Castelmagno fondue, and wine from the valleys below.

In the afternoon we hike from Monterosso Grana to Pradleves, about 5 km through chestnut woods and past stone chapels that mark the old pathway connecting valley communities before roads reached these heights.

Walks: Morning hike in upper Valle Grana. Afternoon: 5 km/3 mi through chestnut forest, gentle terrain.

Overnight in Cuneo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 11 The Italian Riviera

Piemonte takes its name from geography — piè di monte, foot of the mountain — and today we see what that geography actually means. In under two hours we descend from Alpine foothills through olive terraces to the Mediterranean coast, watching the landscape transform as altitude drops: the severe stone architecture of mountain villages softening, palms and agave appearing, pastel-painted houses clinging to cliffs above a sea that smells nothing like the valley we woke up in.

Our hike follows the ancient Roman road from Spotorno to Noli — sections of original paving still visible where the modern road diverges inland, the Via Aurelia working its way along clifftops above the Gulf of Genoa. Noli itself is a quiet revelation: one of medieval Italy's five maritime republics alongside Venice, Genoa, Pisa, and Amalfi, its smaller scale meaning fewer grand monuments but an old town intact in ways the famous republics are not.

Lunch at a beachfront restaurant marks the day's other transformation — olive oil replacing butter, focaccia and basil pesto where tajarin pasta dominated, fresh anchovies and sea bass where mountain trout was yesterday's menu. The same country, a different conversation entirely.

Optional: Hike to Noli's Castle of Monte Ursino for coastal panoramas. Your Tour Leader will arrange for interested participants.

Walk: Spotorno to Noli on ancient Roman road, coastal clifftop views.

We return to Cuneo for the evening.

Overnight in Cuneo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 12 Cuneo - Abbey of Saint Michael - Torino

We drive toward Torino this morning with a stop at the Abbey of Saint Michael.

The Sacra di San Michele crowns a rocky spur above Val di Susa, founded between 983 and 987 on Mount Pirchiriano at 962 metres/3156 feet elevation. The location exemplifies how medieval monasticism sought remote, challenging sites—isolation serving both defence and spiritual discipline. The abbey belongs to a curious geographic alignment: four monasteries dedicated to the Archangel Michael form a near-straight line across Europe from Ireland's Skellig Michael through England's St Michael's Mount and Greece's Monastery of Saint Michael to Mount Carmel in Jerusalem. Whether medieval monks deliberately created this alignment or whether it emerged through coincidence and later interpretation remains debated.

The approach reveals the architectural challenge: how to build a major monastery atop an irregularly shaped rocky pinnacle. The solution involved constructing massive supporting pillars to create level platforms, then raising the church and monastery buildings above. The Scalone dei Morti—Stairway of the Dead—climbs through levels carved from living rock, its name derived from niches where monks' bones once rested. The church interior demonstrates Romanesque austerity, stone columns supporting barrel vaults with minimal decoration.

Continuing to Torino, we reach our centrally located hotel with free time to explore before gathering for our farewell dinner.

Overnight in Torino.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Departure

Torino returns us to the world gently — espresso under the arcades one last time, the Alps still visible at the end of the street if the morning is clear.
Piemonte has a way of recalibrating what you expect from a landscape, a meal, a glass of wine. Most travellers find that recalibration follows them home.

Buon viaggio!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast