

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.

Italy's northwest corner sits where Alpine peaks meet vineyard-covered hills, where baroque elegance blends with mountain rusticity. This is where Italy's unification ignited in the 1850s, where the House of Savoy ruled, and where the Slow Food movement was born. Piemonte produces Italy's most celebrated wines—Barolo, Barbaresco, Barbera—and guards traditions from white truffles to handmade tajarin pasta. The French influence runs deep here, a legacy of centuries when Savoyard dukes ruled lands on both sides of the Alps.

We gather this evening to meet fellow travellers over our first meal together.

Overnight in Torino.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Torino: Town Tour - Transfer to Asti Area

This morning we explore Torino with a local guide.

The city reveals its aristocratic past at every turn—wide boulevards designed for royal processions, baroque palaces commissioned by Savoy dukes, art nouveau galleries sheltered under vaulted arcades. When Italy unified in 1861, Torino became the new nation's first capital, and the House of Savoy provided its royal family until the monarchy's abolition in 1946. The grand architecture remains, now repurposed for a modern city that balances industrial heritage with cultural vitality.

Our walking tour centres on Piazza Castello, where the Church of San Lorenzo demonstrates baroque architecture at its most exuberant. From the Royal Theatre we continue to Piazza Carignano, then to the 18th-century Piazza San Carlo, often called Torino's drawing room for its elegant symmetry. Our guide reveals hidden courtyards and discusses the social transformations that reshaped the city from royal capital to industrial powerhouse and back to cultural centre.

After lunch and free time, we transfer to our agriturismo south of Asti, about 90 minutes away. These working farms offer accommodation alongside their agricultural operations—typically surrounded by vineyards in this region. It's an intimate way to experience rural Piemonte, where some of Italy's finest food traditions still thrive in farmhouse kitchens rather than restaurant dining rooms.

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

A scenic drive brings us to Neive, a medieval village in Cuneo province where paved roads and trails lead through Moscato vineyards that produce the region's famous sparkling wines. The countryside unfolds in vineyard terraces interrupted by stone farmhouses and distant castle towers. Moscato d'Asti—slightly sweet, lightly fizzy—differs markedly from the powerful reds produced just kilometres away, reflecting how soil composition and microclimate create distinct wine zones even within this compact region.

Neive's medieval architecture provides cultural counterpoint to the agricultural landscape: narrow cobblestone lanes climb between stone buildings toward the central piazza, their warm ochre facades testament to prosperity built on viticulture. Our walk threads through this hill country where generations have shaped terrain into productive beauty.

This afternoon we visit Barbaresco, where a medieval tower dominates the town centre and narrow streets wind between historic buildings. The tower served both defence and civic pride, its height announcing the town's importance across the valley. From here we continue to a hillcrest winery commanding panoramic views across the Langhe. In the estate's tasting room we sample Barbaresco wines—Nebbiolo grapes aged to the strict DOCG standards that have made this appellation legendary. The winemaker explains how soil variations between neighbouring vineyards create distinct flavour profiles even from the same grape variety, a concept the French call *terroir* but which Piemontese producers have practised for centuries.

We return to our agriturismo with leisure time before dinner.

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 Acqueae 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 Pistera 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 Lunch

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

Checking out of our agriturismo this morning, we drive to Asti to explore the town's food market—stalls piled with seasonal vegetables, wheels of local cheese, and cured meats hanging from hooks. The central piazzas retain their medieval character despite modern shops, Torre Troyana rising 44 metres above the streetscape as testament to the tower-building rivalry that once consumed Italian communes.

We visit a family-owned chocolate producer whose artisanal methods contrast with industrial production. Tasting samples paired with Moscato wine, we learn how Piemonte's chocolate tradition developed in the 18th century when Turin's court chocolatiers pioneered techniques for working with the new ingredient arriving from American colonies.

We then continue to the Po River plains, Italy's rice-growing heartland, for a tour of Mulino San Giovanni, a historic rice mill. Local guides explain the evolution from manual labour to modern production, connecting stories of harsh 19th-century working conditions—when women called mondine spent months knee-deep in paddies transplanting seedlings—to today's mechanised processes. After lunch at a nearby restaurant, where the chef demonstrates proper risotto preparation, we tour Tenuta Colombara to see both the preserved 19th-century farmhouse and the contemporary production of Acquerello, one of Italy's premium rice brands whose grains age up to a year before sale.

By late afternoon we reach the Barolo area. Dinner is on your own this evening in town.

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 Vicofopte - 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 Vicofopte, about 8 km following the Stations of the Cross marked by wayside chapels. Views open across the valley toward Alpine foothills. At Vicofopte, 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.

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

Leaving Piemonte's hills, we descend toward the Ligurian coast where the Alps meet the Mediterranean. The landscape shifts dramatically as we lose elevation—Alpine severity softening first to terraced olive groves, then to Mediterranean vegetation where palms and agave cluster around pastel-painted towns clinging to coastal cliffs. The change marks more than geography; Liguria developed its own distinct culture, the medieval Republic of Genoa controlling Mediterranean trade routes while Piemonte's dukes ruled landlocked mountains.

Our hike follows the ancient Roman road from Spotorno to Noli. The Via Aurelia once connected Rome to southern France along this route, and sections of original paving remain visible where modern roads diverge inland. Spotorno's medieval core gives way to coastal pathways carved into cliffsides above the sea. Views extend across the Gulf of Genoa toward distant headlands, fishing boats working the waters below.

Noli preserves its medieval character remarkably intact—the town once ranked as one of Italy's four maritime republics alongside Genoa, Venice, Pisa and Amalfi, though its smaller size left fewer grand monuments. We stop for lunch at a beachfront restaurant sampling Ligurian specialties quite different from Piemontese cuisine: olive oil replaces butter, focaccia and basil pesto become staples, fresh anchovies and sea bass feature prominently where mountain trout dominated inland.

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

We'll return to Cuneo, where you'll have the evening free to explore the town and enjoy dinner at one of the local restaurants.

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

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—separation 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

Departure from Torino.

Arrivederci!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast