

Romanesque

Landscape Itineraries

EN



LANGHE
MONFERRATO
ROERO

The Home of BuonVivere

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The Home of BuonVivere.

Langhe Monferrato Roero: a series of hills which rise uninterruptedly up to the Ligurian Apennines, among valleys and ridges, castles and towers, art and history, great wines and excellent products. A fairytale landscape that alternates rows of vines neatly combed like gardens with truffle groves, hazelnut groves and the pastures of the Alta Langa. A unique feature that UNESCO has rightly recognized as a World Heritage Site specifically for this cultural landscape which has been persistently created by mankind over centuries of hard work.

A landscape with subtle but significant nuances meant to enhance these itineraries, confident that every corner of this magic territory deserves attention, with eyes able to understand it and feet ready to tread it.

An unhurried journey which, *en passant*, will tell the great story of Piedmont along with the various minor stories collected by the singers (poets, writers and storytellers) of these lands, which were once very poor and harsh, always on the margins of big politics and, at the same time, at the centre of the routes of merchants and pilgrims who moved from the sea to the plains.

These routes will lead you to discover some minor hamlets, often treasure troves of great art, and enchanted villages with just a few houses, extraordinary viewpoints and remote 1000-year-old country chapels, through endless ridge paths like the long hills of the Langa, winding ups and downs among the thousand waves of the Monferrato hills, steep paths in the “canyons” of the Rocche



del Roero and unexpected shores of a sea which disappeared millions of years ago, and yet, still provides fossils and memories.

A journey, as it should be, through one of the most renowned cuisines of the Bel Paese, one of the few that truly succeeds in combining rustic, frugal and cheap dishes with noble wines - red, white and sparkling - which are

the genuine ambassadors of Italian oenology worldwide. A cuisine where the White Truffle, the ultimate gift of a perfectly happy nature, also reigns supreme, the magic that delights gourmets all over the world and that is revealed not through a magic wand but thanks to the generosity of the dog that finds it, and thus confirms itself as man's (and the cook's) best friend.





Romanesque in and around San Damiano d'Asti.

San Damiano d'Asti, founded in 1275, is by far the most outstanding example of *villa-nova* in Asti (i.e. the new extra-feudal settlements founded by the free municipality of Asti, which for centuries controlled a very large area called Astesana). The grid plan of the old town, chessboard-shaped, is divided into ten blocks, most of which are still enclosed by the ramparts, and it is full of surprises with its palaces, churches and works of art (see itinerary San Damiano d'Asti, a chessboard on the Borbore). However, the surrounding area is even more interesting: there are numerous hamlets which alternate castles (Torrazzo and Lavezzole) with palaces and villas with historic gardens and churches of Romanesque origin (San Giulio and San Pietro); of course, the whole hilly landscape of hard-working mixed farming is particularly attractive.

This peculiar village of the Asti area shares with nearby Canale (see itinerary Roero of Canale) the fertile Borbore Valley. You start with the village of **Antignano**, with its small Romanesque church in the cemetery, then comes **Revigliasco**, already overlooking the Tanaro river, and **Celle Enomondo**, literally “the pure wine cellar”. You pass by the Asti “ventine” (hamlets) of **Vaglierano** and **Variglie**, both scenic and wooded, as well as **Revignano** where Fabrizio De André spent his childhood and it is not by chance that many of his most beautiful songs are dedicated to these rural memories. Next, you will reach the scenic village of **Tigliole**, a papal fiefdom which was ceded only in 1741, probably the last Piedmontese

territory to fall into the hands of the Savoy family. The centre is home to the LIPU Oasis; here a must-see is the beautifully restored country Church of San Lorenzo (11th-12th century), now a venue used for exhibitions and concerts.

This Romanesque church is part of a heritage of more than 80 religious buildings, built between the years 1000 and 1300, mainly in the open countryside or in cemeteries. They mainly consist of simple gabled architecture where the soft sandstone, the two-tone stone and brickwork, the circular apses, the small hanging arches, the splayed single lancet windows, the zoomorphic sculptures, the slender columns and the historiated capitals





become a constant building and decorative feature, to be found here and in future itineraries (see itineraries Romanesque in and around Castelnuovo Don Bosco and Romanesque in and around Montechiaro d'Asti). Now we are along the Via Francigena: a series of alternative routes from Canterbury and France to Rome. These routes were often managed by the major orders (Franciscans, Dominicans and Cistercians, but also Hospitallers and Templars) where, between one convent and another, rural churches served as guides and accommodation for pilgrims.

We pass by **Baldichieri d'Asti** to reach **Castellero**, immersed in chestnut and hazelnut woods, with its beautiful castle with a rare rhomboidal tower,

the cemetery of San Pietro del Bosco and the hazelnut, a local speciality celebrated in a single monument and in the murals "I Muri d'Arte del Borgo della Nocciola" (The Art Walls of the Hazelnut Village). From here you can take a detour to **Villafranca d'Asti**, with the parish Church of Sant'Elena del Castellamonte and the Church of Madonna delle Neve, and **Cantarana**, and then continue on to the small villages of **Maretto** and **Roatto** (a beautiful private Castle, together with an old watermill). They are all rural villages in the pleasant countryside and they are also the favourite places of palaeontologists, who have made exceptional finds here, as in Pianalto and Vigliano (see itineraries Monferrato of Costigliole and San Damiano d'Asti, a chessboard on the Borbore).

The next village of **Monale** offers us two castles, both private: the white one with the soaring tower, “la Bastita”, and the solid and imposing red one, known as “degli Scarampi”, right at the top of the old town’s concentric structure. The village is worth a visit on foot, amidst narrow uphill streets and historic houses; and for those who want to take a plunge into fantasy, a stop at MuBuM - Museo dei Burattini (Puppet Museum) is a must. The landscape is now a bit “wilder” and gives us an idea of how the Monferrato appeared to medieval wayfarers, amidst dangers and popular superstitions. In the nearby village of **Cortandone**, then, have been founded the skeletons of a fin whale and a dolphin of the Pliocene era, now visible at Museo dei Fossili - Parco Paleontologico Astigiano (Fossils Museum - Astigiano Palaeontological Parc) in Asti (see Asti, Urban Itineraries).

The pilgrims, in order to find their bearings and remain under the protection of the saints, had to climb the first hill and, from there, catch sight of a country church or a priory or perhaps a castle, i.e. their next stop. Further on, we find **Cortazzone**, a medieval village with a beautiful castle, to be explored only on foot, with the Mongigietto hill and the Church (today rural) of San Secondo, one of the greatest Romanesque masterpieces in the Asti area.

The church was the only parish church in the village until the 18th century and has preserved an image-rich narrative of “talking stones”. San Secondo is, in fact, a grandiose celebration of nature and life: fish, mermaids, rabbits, birds, fertility symbols are found along the three naves and on the external façades (particularly the right one), recalling ancestral rites and beliefs of clear pagan heritage. The hill on which it stands, long before the advent of Christianity, probably saw the Celts, Ligurians and Romans celebrate the same sacredness, which is still perceived today somewhere in-between a magical and a spiritual dimension.

The neighbouring small villages of **Soglio** and **Viale** feature private castles and enchanting landscapes where a thousand other Monferrato hamlets appear through the wooded ridges.

Then there is **Montafia**, which owes its name to one of the many noble families of Asti, and whose mighty castle has only some ramparts left today. The village is ready to welcome us with two Romanesque cemeterial gems. The Church of San Martino, with a couple of frescoes of the saint (15th-16th century) and half of the building is still intact, the rest is a later extension and originally planned to look like San Secondo di Cortazzone. But the real surprise is San Giorgio in





the hamlet of Bagnasco, where you will also find a city gate and the castle ruins. This is the second masterpiece, the church is impressive: with three naves and three apses, it is lit only by natural light coming from a few single-lancet windows, the exposed trusses of the gabled roof, while some frescoes of later date decorate parts of the apses and increase its charm. Upon entering, one physically returns to eight centuries ago, to a building that is bare and poor, if not for the palpable presence of God; while some frescoes of later date decorate parts of the apses and increase its charm.

Next, you pass through **Capriglio**, a tiny village famous for its “heart-shaped” pepper. Here was born Margherita, Don Bosco’s mother, and today you

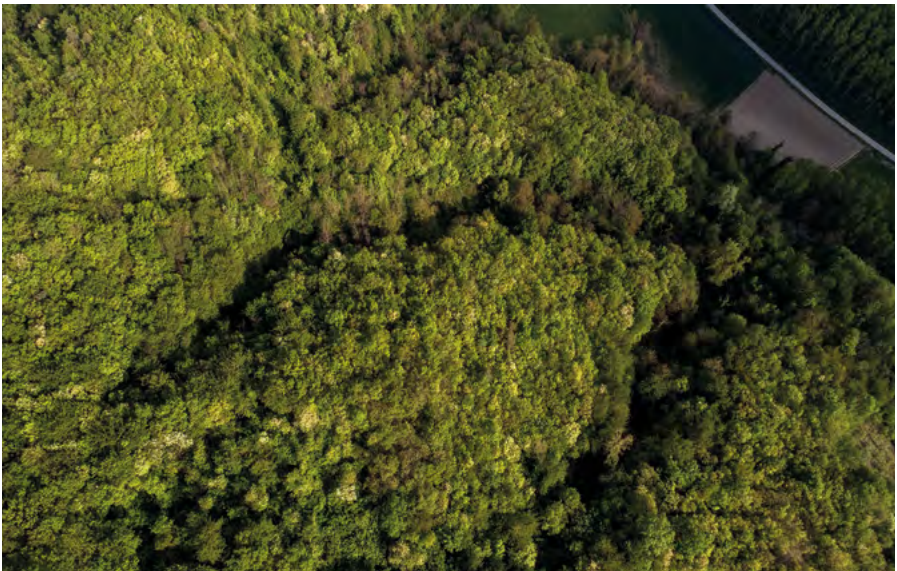
can find a little Museum dedicated to her life. Both Churches of San Martino (parish church and cemetery) still retain some Romanesque traces. But when it comes to Don Bosco, the huge Church of the Salesians on the hill of the same name cannot be ignored, as it can be seen not far away in the middle of the dense woods: it is the birthplace of the Saint and one of the most visited centres by religious tourism in Piedmont (see itinerary Romanesque in and around Castelnuovo Don Bosco).

Almost unexpectedly, we find ourselves in the plain and reach **Buttigliera d’Asti**, because as we ascend the last slope, we are now on the Pinalto, the Asti plateau which was part of the morainic plateau of

Turin and the beach of the Adriatic proto-sea about 5 million years ago. Today, instead of the seabed, there are the rolling hills of Monferrato. This area is rich in fossils, including the famous mastodon, an ancestor of the elephant, which can be seen at the Museo dei Fossili - Parco Paleontologico Astigiano (Fossils Museum - Astigiano Palaeontological Parc) in Asti (see Asti, Urban Itineraries). Here all the villages are located exactly on the shore of this imaginary sea: the route is even more charming if you keep this evidence in mind. In Buttigliera d'Asti there is another beautiful Romanesque cemeterial Church, dedicated to San Martino once again, as well as the Church of San Michele Arcangelo, designed by Vittone, and the 52-metre bell tower by his disciple

Quarini. Several stately palaces show the wealth of the *villa-nova* astigiana, created with all the other neighbouring villas in the mid-13th century to seal the borders of Astesana after the victory over Biandrate.

One after the other, you pass by the villages of **Crivelle**, home of the famous "blond hen of Villanova", **San Paolo Solbrito** with its significant parish Church, the romantic fortified village and the mastodon jawbone preserved in the council chamber, **Dusino San Michele** with the Romanesque remains of the parish Church of San Michele and its two castles, and finally **Valfenera** with its beautiful "*Ciuchè Mocc*" (the bell tower), a medieval vestige on which you can climb to enjoy a stunning view.





Everywhere here in the fishponds, among the cornfields, behind the farmhouses, the Tinca Gobba Dorata (Golden Tumped Tench) of the Pianalto di Poirino is bred, an appreciated PDO (24 municipalities between Asti, Cuneo and Turin) and an authentic 'farmhouse fish' to be enjoyed fried or in *carpione* (soused in vinegar).

Just behind this imaginary beach lies **Villanova d'Asti**, a small village already entirely on the plain, with its charming old town. The impressive parish Church of San Martino, in Lombard Romanesque style, is very rich, with finely carved altars, a wooden statue by Moncalvo, Piedmont's foremost painter of the Counter-Reformation. Not to miss also the Romanesque but much rebuilt Church of San Pietro, with a beautiful fresco of the Giotto school and two other paintings by Moncalvo. The former Franciscan Monastery, later known as Palazzo De Robertis, alternates the convent porticoes with a neo-Gothic counter-façade. The Torre Civica (Civic Tower), a symbol of the town's identity, stands out on the grid of the old town (now partly

pedestrianised), just as the two curious "Bissoche" (abandoned watchtowers) have watched over the town from the open countryside for seven centuries. Palazzo Ricchetta, then, hosts the Museo dell'Industria e della Tradizione (Museum of Industry and Tradition), with useful information to discover the everyday life of the area.

Set amidst the cultivated fields we find the ancient village of **Corveglia**, once a powerful provosty, later turned into a castle, then into a farm and finally restored to its former glory in the 1990s of the last century. The privately owned Castle and the graceful bell tower that alternates bricks and stones are also noteworthy, as is the surviving structure.

From Valfenera on our way back to **San Damiano d'Asti** we pass straight through **Ferrere** (see itinerary Roero of Canale) with the already mentioned Churches of San Pietro and San Giulio. Once again, we have descended into the "proto Adriatic", which nowadays is a sea of beautiful hills.

Top Art and Culture

- Buttigliera d'Asti - Cemeterial Church of San Martino
- Capriglio - Museum Mamma Margherita
- Castellero - Hazelnut Monument
- Castellero - Murales "The Art Walls of the Hazelnut Village"
- Castellero, Chiusano d'Asti, Cortandone, Monale, Settime - Murales "Street Art on the hills of the sea"
- Cortazzone - Church of San Secondo
- Monale - MuBuM Puppet Museum
- Montafia - Church of San Giorgio di Bagnasco
- Montafia - Church of San Martino
- San Damiano d'Asti - Church of San Giulio
- Soglio - Castle
- Tigliole - Church of San Lorenzo
- Valfenera - Civic Tower "*Ciucchè Mocc*"
- Villafranca d'Asti - Church of Madonna della Neve
- Villanova d'Asti - Bisocca di San Martino
- Villanova d'Asti - Bisocca di Supponito
- Villanova d'Asti - Museum of Industry and Tradition

Top Nature

- Antignano, Isola d'Asti - Rocche di Antignano Nature Reserve
- Asti, Isola d'Asti, Revigliasco - Stagni di Belangero Nature Reserve
- Capriglio - Palaeontologic geo - site
- Tigliole - LIPU Wildlife Recovery Centre
- Valfenera - La Rocca Park

PLEASE NOTE:

The opening times of the sites listed in this itinerary may be subject to change. Keep updated and please check www.visitlmr.it

Romanesque Hill Network

Itineraries through ancient villages, woods, parish churches and abbeys. A circuit of small churches and Romanesque parish churches between Basso Monferrato and Turin area: this is the thematic route designed to enhance these millenary places of inestimable cultural value. Right here, where history and legend often overlap, visitors can take a trip back in time, totally engrossed in a landscape full of charm.





Romanesque in and around Castelnuovo Don Bosco.

Castelnuovo Don Bosco is somewhat of a reference point for the whole Alto Astigiano, that is to say that upper area of the higher peaks rising above the Pianalto (see itinerary Roero of Canale) which orographically join the Turin hill. Actually, in this area there are three provinces which merge, just as in the past three armies, the ones of Asti, Savoy and Monferrato used to fight each other on these intangible borders.

The Castelnuovo Don Bosco area is surrounded by several valleys (Versa, Rilate, Traversa) which make geography as complex as orientation; and there are also large wooded areas, including the area known as Muscandia, which, while being a paradise for hikers, make secondary roads more challenging. The rich religious evidence of the Romanesque period is hidden in this landscape.

The old town of Castelnuovo Don Bosco lies at the foot of the hill of the Rivalba lineage, long-time local gentry, but today, what is left of their mighty castle is just the tall Tower, right beside the Sanctuary of the Madonna del Castello. On the way down, beyond the parish Church of Sant'Andrea, among palaces which are now baroque and art nouveau styles, we find the charming San Bartolomeo, which today hosts exhibitions and events. It has to be said that, with all the fortifications gone, there is still a major religious heritage here: these are the "Lands of the Social Saints", the birthplace of many nineteenth-century members of the Turin Church who have been social workers. From the very first Sebastiano Valfré from Verduno, through Giuseppe Cottolengo from Bra, we come to

Giovanni Bosco, the founder of the Salesians, and his followers Giuseppe Cafasso, Giuseppe Allamano and Domenico Savio; the last of this long tradition is Giuseppe Marellò, from San Martino Alfieri. This is why the area is so rich in houses, churches, relics and shrines. An example is the Colle Don Bosco with its Museo Etnologico Missionario (Missionary Ethnological Museum).

Castelnuovo Don Bosco already shows us the first examples of Romanesque architecture along this path: from the big Church of Sant'Eusebio, just outside the village, to the tiny Church of Santa Maria di Cornareto, in a splendid panoramic scenery, perhaps one of the most romantic places in Monferrato.





Our route leaves the village towards the cool valley of the Traversa stream, just below the other side of Cornareto; you can walk to the tiny church from the hamlet of Freis. Then we reach the well-known sulphurous spring (there are plenty in this area) and the ancient Serra stone mill at the foot of the former Castle of Pogliano, and, finally, you get to **Moncucco Torinese**, the far end of the province on the border with the Chieri area.

And if Castelnuovo Don Bosco is about Malvasia, produced both still and sparkling, Moncucco Torinese is about Freisa. Freisa, an ancient Asti vine, first cousin of Nebbiolo, is produced both still and sparkling, whereas the semi-sparkling version, a legacy of past tastes, is less common.

The village is literally overlooked by the huge Castle, which also houses the beautiful Museo dei Gessi (Plaster Museum), the traditional and elaborate interior decoration of ceilings and floors, in use between the 16th and 19th centuries in the Roero and Monferrato areas. The neoclassical parish Church of San Giovanni is also worth a mention, with its high altar (moved from a Turin convent), which is the work of the genius of Filippo Juvarra.

Berzano di San Pietro already awaits us on the next hill, where the hitherto prevailing vineyards fade into the upper wooded Valley of the Traversa river: it is another small hilltop rural hamlet, a true balcony overlooking Monferrato from which our next stops

are well in view. Worth a visit the beautiful small country Church of San Giovanni with its intact Romanesque apse, resting on an isolated panoramic hill. It is interesting to note that all these old churches are “oriented”, i.e., the façade faces east and the apse faces west, as was common at the time.

Now it is time to climb up to **Albugnano**, which with an altitude of 550 metres is also the peak of the itinerary. The village has a pleasant atmosphere, a stunning panoramic viewpoint, the Remembrance Belvedere, with trees planted in memory of the fallen of the Great War. To be mentioned some remarkable architecture, such as the 15th-century parish Church of San Giacomo, which was clearly rebuilt

later, and the Romanesque cemetery Church of San Pietro, whose beautiful apse and perimeter walls date back to the year 1000; the bare, austere interior is also impressive. The village also gives its name to the only Nebbiolo produced in the province of Asti, a full-bodied and elegant wine whose aromas are perhaps more reminiscent of the “Nebbiolo wines of the north” (such as Ghemme and Gattinara) than those of the Langhe area. We can taste it in the local Enoteca Regionale (Regional Wine Centre). The view from the Albugnano belvedere is by far one of the best in the whole of Monferrato, and this land of rolling hills, medieval villages, woods and vineyards, towers and castles, the legacy of ancient disputes, unfolds before your eyes like in a Tolkien tale.







The nearby **Abbey of Santa Maria in Vezzolano** (which was never an abbey, it was a “regular parsonage”) is the most important monument in the province and one of the gems of Piedmont. It has been awaiting wayfarers for perhaps 1,000 years, resting in an enchanting hollow where legend has it that Charlemagne was hunting: three skeletons appeared before him and, frightened by the vision and helped by a local hermit, he decided to build a church there. Actually, the oldest records date back to 1095 and the Carolingian legend follows a 13th-century French stylistic pattern with the “*contrast between the three living kings and the three dead kings*”, a cultural reference for all the later “*macabre dances*” throughout Europe.

Vezzolano should be worthy of a book, starting with its façade which is Romanesque but has nothing in common with the simplicity of the other churches: based on the three classical orders, built of sandstone and terracotta, and decorated with small columns, is reminiscent of Lombard and Tuscan influences; the lunette with Mary among the angels is delightful, as is the whole of the main gate, which is decorated and sculpted. Its interior is astonishing: primarily because of the presence of the sculpted “pier” (a structure that separated the clergy from the people) at the end of the central nave; is entirely carved and painted with 35 figures (Christ’s ancestors) and scenes from the *Dormitio*, Ascension and Coronation of Mary, a masterpiece of medieval

polychrome art second to none. It is supported by five Burgundy-style pointed arches which ideally separate earthly life from eternal life. Next, in the beautiful two-tone apse, is the altar, embellished with a 15th-century polychrome terracotta triptych, and, on either side of the central window. Two extraordinary painted bas-reliefs dating from the 12th century. Furthermore, there are the frescos (a 14th-century cycle of the highest quality), which are all concentrated in the surprising cloister which has taken over the right-hand nave of the church itself. From here you can access the chapter house, exhibition rooms and guest quarters; furthermore, just behind the building, there is a real orchard which reveals all the harmony of this ancient place.

Longobard, even before Frankish, influences can be found in several toponyms, especially those ending in -engo or -asco, because it is thanks to them that we have this multitude of entities which today are communal but were once feudal, a typical feature of Monferrato.

Here comes **Aramengo**, the village where the colloquial expression for “bankrupt” comes from. The origin of such word is often being discussed: perhaps there was a tax collector’s office here or perhaps debtors were put on trial here. Aramengo is another village surrounded by woods and cultivated land and surrounded by a multitude of hamlets: Gonengo with its Sanctuary, Marmorito with the ruins of its fortress and Masio with the





Romanesque Church of San Giorgio. The place itself is not known for its important medieval remains, because the castle was lost and the last traces of it were wiped out in the 19th century, but it offers much more: the genius and talent of the Nicola Family, owners of Italy's most famous restoration laboratory, which has been handed down from father to son and is a veritable treasure trove of skills and knowledge; paintings, panels, tapestries, even mummies... everything here is cared for and brought back to life.

Next, we climb up to **Moransengo-Tonengo**, with the small Romanesque country Church of San Michele in a secluded position and with a beautiful Castle with an art park. We continue to reach **Robella**, where we find another

Castle and century-old park, the lovely hamlet of Cortiglione and the small Church of the Macagnone Bric. Finally, the itinerary reach **Cocconato**, the former capital of the ancient imperial fief of the Radicati, the lords who ruled these lands until the arrival of the Savoy family.

The village, known locally as the "Riviera del Monferrato", is very pretty, with its lower square used for trade and the old uphill road leading to the medieval quarters with the late-Gothic Palazzo Comunale (Town Hall), the old Casa Martelletti, the 17th-century parish Church of Santa Maria, hosting works by Moncalvo, Clemente and Bonzanigo, the Church of the Santissima Trinità, equally rich in works of art, the Watchtower, which

was rebuilt but it is still panoramic, here in winter you can see Milan. Cocconato, as well as for its wines, is famous for its robiola cheese, salame cotto monferrino (cooked salami from the Monferrato area) and the peculiar Donkey Palio, where, unlike in Alba, donkeys are not ridden but they are pulled and pushed, always with the same amusing result.

In the extensive countryside, it is worth visiting the hamlet of Tuffo with its Palazzo Bottino, the Sanctuary of the Madonnina, with a rediscovered 15th-century fresco, and the ancient Pieve Madonna della Neve, which is high up on a hill between two cypress trees: it dates back to the year 1000, but it has undergone numerous reconstructions, while still being evocative.

From the little village a steep descent leads to the provincial road to Casalborgone and then, from here, we arrive to the hermitage of **Cerreto d'Asti**, the "village of roses", a long, narrow village that was once fortified. There is also an interesting late 16th-century parish Church whose façade has been "turned around"; the presence of a small astronomical observatory is quite curious. Another must-see is the small, splendid Sant'Andrea in the hamlet of Casaglio (11th century) which, for once, surprises us not with

its apse but with its façade. Casaglio sits on a hill between Cerreto d'Asti and **Passerano Marmorito**, our next destination, where you can already see the huge size of the Radicati Castle with its park, private, which is definitely the best-preserved structure in Monferrato. The village lies at the foot of the castle, and a walk here is almost compulsory: beyond the city gate, along the cobblestones, there is the old Mint, the Church of Santa Maria del Castello, the towers, the gardens and even dragon-shaped friezes - everything is a feast for the eyes.

Here, every hill has a different story to tell, whether it is towards Marmorito, with the rests of the castle, or up to the fortified villages of Primeglio, with another castle surrounded by the park and the rests of the Chapel of San Michele, and Schierano, with its Tower. On top of it you can enjoy the view over the Muscandia Woods, which surround the small, romantic castle villages of **Pino d'Asti** and Mondonio, our last stop before returning to **Castelnuovo Don Bosco**. From Mondonio there is one final diversion to reach the tiny, ancient Church of Santa Maria di Rasetto, which still evokes emotions, and it is another evidence of the history and religious faith tied to the Monferrato of wonders.

Top Art and Culture

- Albugnano – Abbey of Santa Maria di Vezzolano
- Albugnano – Cemeterial Church of San Pietro
- Aramengo – Church of San Giorgio
- Berzano di San Pietro – Church of San Giovanni Battista
- Berzano di San Pietro – Church of San Pietro de Fenestrella
- Castelnuovo Don Bosco – Colle Don Bosco: Basilica, San Giovanni Bosco's Birthplace, Museum of 19th-century Rural Civilisation and Missionary Ethnological Museum
- Castelnuovo Don Bosco – Church of Santa Maria di Cornareto
- Castelnuovo Don Bosco – Church of Santa Maria di Rasetto
- Castelnuovo Don Bosco – Church of Sant'Eusebio
- Castelnuovo Don Bosco – House of San Domenico Savio
- Castelnuovo Don Bosco – Rivalba Tower and Chapel of the Madonna del Castello
- Cerreto d'Asti – Astronomical Observatory
- Cerreto d'Asti – Church of Sant'Andrea di Casaglio
- Cocconato – Parish Church of Madonna della Neve
- Moncucco Torinese – Grisella Castle and Plaster Museum
- Moransegno - Tonengo – Church of San Michele
- Passerano Marmorito – Old Mint
- Robella – Castle





Top Wine and Gastronomy

- Albugnano - Regional Wine Centre of Albugnano

Top Nature

- Castelnuovo Don Bosco - Basso Monferrato Astigiano Ecomuseum
- Cocconato - Alberone Park

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Big Benches

The small idea with giant effects.

Climb aboard and look at the world through the eyes of a child. You feel so small in the presence of such beauty of nature, these are the emotions ready to pervade you once you have climbed up. A circuit of over 100 giant benches, created by the American designer Chris Bangle who is in love with the Langhe region, and that are just waiting to be discovered and experienced.





Romanesque in and around Montechiaro d'Asti.

Montechiaro d'Asti is a *villa-nova* founded by Asti on 13th March 1200 in place of three smaller villages (Piesenzana, Mairano and Maresco) and still retains much of its medieval fortifications. However, unlike the other *ville-nove* in the Asti area, it is a hilltop village, lying between the Rilate and Versa Valleys, so as to have control over both. It is surrounded by a crown of castellated villages which are the essence of the Monferrato landscape.

The ancient city gate with its imposing 13th-century Torre Civica (Municipal Tower) is still the perfect entrance to explore the village, where churches and medieval remains are found in abundance. Worth noting are the Municipio (Town Hall), housed in a fortified house, and the Church of San Bartolomeo, dating back to the 15th century, albeit renovated, whose parish registers claim that Pope Francis' ancestors were baptised here, while the Parish Church of Santa Caterina is in the Baroque style, although it looks simple. There are also three small gems: the Confraternity of Sant'Anna, that of Santissima Annunziata and the Chapel of Sant'Antonio Abate, all in the Baroque style. The impressive Church of Sant'Antonio da Padova stands out in a panoramic position.

Outside the old town we find the two oldest churches: Santa Maria Assunta in Piesenzana, to the north, one of the earliest in the area, perhaps dating back to before 1000, which still preserves part of the small rural cemetery; the second one is the parish Church of San Nazario e Celso, which is, by far, one of the masterpieces of Romanesque architecture in the Asti area. It is located in an isolated position to the north-east, overlooking the Versa Valley from the gentle Mairano hill, surrounded by pastures for cows: it is very small, hardly more than a chapel, but flanked by a tall bell tower with elegant double lancet windows which almost seems to crush it (it is similar to the one in Piani in Neive, see itinerary Langa of Barbaresco). The delightful chromatic effect of the building is created by alternating sandstone and terracotta blocks. The details and decorations on the façade are valuable, while the interior is mostly bare, with 18th-century stucco work and a fragment of a late 15th-century fresco of Santa Caterina d'Alessandria. In summer, classical concerts are held in the churchyard and the place becomes truly magical.

Next, we go to the nearby village of **Villa San Secondo** which, with the neighbouring villages of Corsione and Cossombrato, is a bit like the eastern border of the Romanesque itineraries. In Villa San Secondo, the village centre is charming and still follows the old

town pattern where the Baroque parish Church has replaced the castle: the square below, with the Town Hall and the neo-Gothic Madonna delle Grazie, is harmonious.

Corsione is another small rural village: it is worth paying a visit to the small country Church of Madonna dell'Aniceto, of Romanesque origin, a panoramic viewpoint through the vineyards. **Cossombrato**, on the other hand, preserves the imposing Pelletta Castle (privately owned) of medieval origin with 18th-century parts. The countryside here is truly unspoilt and it is wonderful to drive along the minor roads to enjoy the relaxing view.

Once past the Val Rilate we reach **Chiusano d'Asti** where we find again elements of Romanesque architecture in the small rural Church of Santa Maria, surrounded by vineyards. Next, we head towards **Settime**, a village which has preserved its ancient Roero Castle (privately owned) in the classic horseshoe shape. The castle was refined in the 18th century by adding an Italian-style hanging garden and a covered staircase. We also find fragments of apsidal frescoes, dating back to the 14th and 15th centuries, both in the small Sant'Antonio Abate and in the cemetery Church of San Nicolao, a fine example of Romanesque architecture mainly visible in the apsidal stone decorations.



Still on the ridge, we reach **Cinaglio**, the “village of canestrelli”, the traditional wafers baked in a clamp mould. It’s another pretty rural village where the Church of San Felice, just before the cemetery, is a pleasant surprise: in addition to the now well-known Romanesque architecture, this 12th-century chapel has preserved remarkable 15th-century frescoes with a splendid Christ in an almond-shaped frame above the twelve Apostles. Interesting fact: there is a small Zen monastery in the village.

From Cinaglio you can enter the Valle Andona, Val Botto e Val Grande Nature Reserve (see itinerary Parks of Monferrato Area), with the unusual equipped area of Gorghì, where natural

pools are used to macerate hemp, or you can continue towards **Camerano Casasco**: here nature is wilder and more pristine amidst rocks of yellow sand and scented acacia woods.

The double name of the municipality combines two villages. The one of Camerano, that preserves a 17th-century Residence: here lived Cesare Balbo, and here was hosted the patriot Silvio Pellico returned from Spielberg, and it was here that he started writing “Le mie prigioni”. There is also a very interesting public oven still standing in the walls of the former castle. The other hamlet is Casasco, a timeless place dominated by the imposing Castle of the Asinari family, which has a great visual impact. The elliptical

Church of San Paolo is also worth seeing, as well as the ancient Church of San Bartolomeo, nestled in the woods towards Cortazzone, where there are Romanesque traces.

From Casasco we can turn towards Soglio (see itinerary Romanesque in and around San Damiano d'Asti) or reach the fortress of the Roero di **Cortanze** (of the Roero family) guarding the watershed of the Rilate Valley. The very scenic V-shaped manor house is characterised by two round cantilevered towers and a massive fortified tower almost closing off the open courtyard. The parish Church, with its fine Baroque *boiserie* (wood panelling) inside, contains a precious ex-voto dating back to 1643 to

celebrate the end of the plague of the 1630. In the nearby rich Confraternity of Santissima Annunziata, the austere brick façade conceals an unexpected 14th-century origin, with Gothic vaults and fragments of frescoes in the apse segments.

After a few bends, the road winds its way through wheat fields and pastures towards **Piea**, a small village dominated by an enormous 18th-century Castle, which is privately owned today. The Park is beautiful, with a delightful geometric garden; the pumpkins, the gastronomic glory of Piea, are delicious. The route then continues towards the "land of mint", **Piovà Massaia**, whose name honours Cardinal Guglielmo





Massaia, who was legendary missionary in Ethiopia but also an engineer, doctor and diplomat. The name of Benedetto Alfieri, one of the Piedmontese Baroque architects together with Guarini and Juvarra, stands out in the architecture here. He designed the imposing parish Church dedicated to Santi Giorgio e Pietro, in the form of a Greek cross, with a splendid bell tower and interiors full of style and grace. Opposite, in the coeval Palace of the Ricci counts, the Associazione San Guglielmo presents exhibitions focusing on local memory. The walls of the important Church of San Martino di Castelvero, very rare, with a double apse, are preserved at the entrance to the village, although today there are only a few remains left.

From Piovà Massaia, passing through Carboneri, we head towards the rolling slopes of Valle Versa, one of the most unspoiled places in the province. The gem of the route awaits us, i.e., the “village of the sundials”: **Montiglio Monferrato**. An articulated village spread out on a hill, almost crushed by the huge size of its castle, private, a complex piece of architecture that epitomizes many of Monferrato’s military events. Of thirteenth-century origins, it was almost entirely rebuilt in the fifteenth century and converted into a mansion in the eighteenth century. Inside we find sumptuous halls, scary dungeons and the Chapel of Sant’Andrea with some of the most interesting paintings of the

14th century in Monferrato, among which the cycle on the life of Christ. High overhanging scarp, staircases, terraces and a delightful maze planted with boxwood and laurel all contribute to the building. All around the village, which is well worth a leisurely stroll, the sundials (57 in all) are everywhere, each one different with its own Latin motto: an open-air museum meant to celebrate the talent of gnomonist Mario Tebenghi, the creator of these sundials, a true artist of “time”. To be mentioned also the Church of Sant’Emiliano in the hamlet Scandeluzza, witness of the rich Romanesque rests of the area. But the masterpiece is to be found in the village cemetery, where the Pieve of San Lorenzo has stood since the 12th

century. The church is bare and, at the end of the 19th century, instead of the three naves, a series of chapels were recreated to support the daring barrel-vaulted roof, replacing the original trusses. Despite this, the church is truly magical and retains an ancient charm that permeates every single sandstone. Like in Cortazzone (see itinerary Romanesque in and around San Damiano d’Asti), the finely sculpted capitals describe, in ancient proto-Christian symbols, the celebration of Nature and the authentic medieval “thirst for God” in all its manifestations. Over the last few decades Montiglio Monferrato has also incorporated other independent villages that are worth a visit like Colcavagno,





Scandeluzza and Rinco. First, however, we walk along the ridge that runs from Montiglio Monferrato to tiny **Cunico**, an archetype of many medieval units now incorporated into larger areas. Only the dungeons of the Castle are left today; to be mentioned also the *crocin*, used in the past to store foods. Alongside the Baroque churches are the cemetery Church of Santa Maria Assunta and the isolated Church of San Martino, the only vestige of the former village of Ponengo, both with Romanesque traces on structures of a later date.

But now let's visit the old villages now hamlets of Montiglio Monferrato: Colcavagno, with a castle and the

Romanesque Church of Santi Vittore and Corona, Scandeluzza, the village of the sculptor Alessandro Lupano, where the Romanesque Church of Santi Sebastiano and Fabiano houses beautiful 15th-century frescoes in its apse, and Rinco, featuring two castles, a tower dating back to the year 1000 and a dreamlike intimate village.

The loop takes us back along the provincial road to the hamlet of Reale, from where we climb up towards **Montechiaro d'Asti**: the bell tower of San Nazario already appears through the folds of the hills and we can already perceive a "homely" atmosphere.

Top Art and Culture

- Camerano Casasco – Church of San Bartolomeo
- Castellero, Chiusano d'Asti, Cortandone, Monale, Settime – Murals
“Street Art on the Hills of the Sea”
- Chiusano d'Asti – Pieve of Santa Maria
- Cinaglio – Church of San Felice
- Corsione – Country Church of Madonna dell'Aniceto
- Cunico – Church of San Martino
- Montechiaro d'Asti – Church of Santa Maria Assunta in Piesenzana
- Montechiaro d'Asti – Church of Santi Nazario e Celso
- Montiglio Monferrato – Cemetary Church of Santi Vittore e Corona
- Montiglio Monferrato – Church of Santi Sebastiano e Fabiano
- Montiglio Monferrato – Pieve di San Lorenzo
- Montiglio Monferrato - Sundials
- Piea – Castle
- Settime – Church of San Nicolao



Top Nature

- Asti, Camerano Casasco, Cinaglio, Settime - Valle Andona, Val Grande e Val Botto Nature Reserve
- Montechiaro d'Asti - Educational Truffle Ground
- Montiglio Monferrato - Parc Lago di Codana and Falconry Centre Hieramatra

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LANGHE MONFERRATO ROERO

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Concept by:

Serviceplan Italia

Design and Print:

PUBLIALBA - Comunicazione • Grafica • Stampa digitale

Edition:

March 2023



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