

15  
cultural and  
food-and-wine  
itineraries  
in Liguria



# Liguria: a rainbow of emotions

Veirana



Finalborgo

Turn your back to the sea and you will discover a different Liguria. A land full of colours, emotions, history, traditions and unusual flavours, exalted by the masterly combination of local products. A land that man was forced to model, changing its steep slopes into terraces ideal for agriculture. So, you will find vines growing in the most improbable places, patches of ground that demand respect, proud, difficult to reach, but generous in giving up their bountiful fruit: grapes for the excellent red or white DOC wines. More accessible, but rarely flat, are the olive groves, with their minute, wrinkly, black, wholesome olives, wholesome and unique as the extra-virgin oil pressed from the sun and the salt.

An enchanting world, Liguria, a land in which the rocks, streams and woods contend with each other for space and create a contrasting and harmonious whole, that will surprise you every step of the way.

It doesn't take long to discover this Liguria: just take any of the numerous roads leading away from the sea - we will be suggesting fifteen of them in this publication - that plunge into the green hinterland, soon leading you to the amazing silence of ancient villages, rough in their stone and gentle in their soul. The villages in the valley with their characteristic winding alleyways, dominated by ancient castles and lapped by fast-flowing rivers crossed by little stone bridges; or clinging to the rocks, acting once upon a time as sentries along the routes taken by merchants who climbed the mountains to go and sell the rare treasures of the earth and sea beyond the Alps or Apennines: salt, dried fish and that oil so light and delicious that it has always crowned every speciality of fine Ligurian cooking.

Fine cooking that surprises with its harmonious combination of earthy perfumes and flavours; recipes handed down from generation to generation, made from simple things made aristocratic by genius and good taste. Just think of pesto, of all the heterogeneous ingredients that blend together in an improbable, but unmistakable mixture: who would think of mixing together so many totally different ingredients such as garlic, basil, pine kernels, "pecorino" cheese, salt and extra-virgin olive oil? And yet everyone who has tasted it will agree: it's delicious.

And so, we go on and on, village after village, valley after valley, in discovery of ever-new dishes, in which home-made pasta can be dressed with the certain flavour of a new fermented "ricotta", in which mainly white meats are served together with pulses or vegetables, surrendering themselves to the delicacy of the condiment, and accompanied by wines that are sometimes gentle and sometimes decisive.

This is Liguria, a land of the ingenious and the expedient, tortuous and shy, difficult to conquer but easy to love.

# 15

## cultural, food-and-wine itineraries



**LEGEND** - Signs are marked on the maps of the individual itineraries



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DEPARTURE  
AND  
ARRIVAL

# in Liguria



## ITINERARIES

- 1 *Dolceacqua, Isolabona, Pigna, Apricale and Perinaldo*
- 2 *Badalucco, Molini di Triora and Triora*
- 3 *Borghetto d'Arroscia, Pieve di Teco, Pornassio and Nava*
- 4 *Zuccarello, Castelvecchio di Rocca Barbena and Toirano*
- 5 *Finalborgo, Calizzano, Osiglia and Millesimo*
- 6 *Albisola Superiore, Stella, Giovo, Sassello and Altare*
- 7 *Campo Ligure, Rossiglione and Tiglieto*

- 8 *Busalla, Casella, Montoggio and Crocefieschi*
- 9 *Toriglia, Fontanigorda, Rovegno and Gorreto*
- 10 *Leivi, San Colombano, Certenoli, Carasco and Ne*
- 11 *Cogorno, Rezzoaglio and Santo Stefano d'Aveto*
- 12 *Lumarzo, Gattorna, Lorsica, San Colombano Certenoli*
- 13 *San Pietro Vara, Varese Ligure, Sesta Godano*
- 14 *Vezzano Ligure, Calice al Cornoviglio and Brugnato*
- 15 *Sarzana, Castelnuovo Magra, Ortonovo and Luni*

# 1 Dolceacqua, Isolabona, Pigna, Apricale and Perinaldo

*The road of the villages clinging to the hillsides*



## The route

Start:  
Ventimiglia.  
Dolceacqua 9 km,  
Rocchetta Nervina  
15 km,  
Isolabona 23 km,  
Pigna 29 km,  
Apricale 39 km,  
Perinaldo 45 km,  
Finish:  
Bordighera 74 km.

Features: the  
environment,  
history,  
wine-and-food.

Valleys: Nerva.

*Olive groves and vineyards, ancient villages clinging to the hillsides, where the hand of man has succeeded in reaching intelligent compromises with nature. And then again, surprising works of art, and tasty, original typical dishes. The Nerva valley and the Bordighera hinterland are worth a visit that may stretch into a whole holiday.*

Between Bordighera and Ventimiglia, at the bridge crossing the river with the same name, take the road for the Nerva valley. After Camproso we come to Dolceacqua, one of the most interesting villages in Liguria, so much so that it has won the "Bandiera Arancione" (the "Orange Flag") awarded to mark the environmental quality of the hinterland. We are immediately struck by the evocative setting of the medieval bridge - one single span of thirty-three metres, still intact, crossing the river - and the Doria castle, a proud example of military architecture. The castle dominates the old houses of what is called, in dialect "a Téra": a maze of winding streets, archways, solemn arcades and simple houses in exposed stone alternating with noble architecture, like the "palazzo", better known as the "Caminata", with its doorways

decorated with the coat-of-arms of the Doria family. The fifteenth-century parish church of Sant'Antonio Abate is worth a visit. On the other side of the river is the district outside the walls known as "Borgo". Dolceacqua is not only famous for its Rossese wine, but also for the "michette": little double brioches sprinkled with sugar to which the Festival of 16th August is dedicated. Continuing northwards, after a while we take the left turning for Rocchetta Nervina, a quiet, charming little village. The medieval mule-back bridges and historical centre with its strange "Y" layout are worth a visit.

We go down again to the valley floor, climbing the Val Nerva again until we come to Isolabona, a village with a characteristic square castle, which holds some very important artistic, cultural events in the summer. But



what strikes us the most about Isolabona is the octagonal design of the fountain in the historic centre.

As we continue up the valley we come to Pigna, whose name indicates the “bunch-like” layout of its houses along the hill. It has a very interesting urban layout with its main streets designed in concentric circles linked by narrow alleys called “chibi”. There are numerous examples of religious architecture: the church of San Michele Arcangelo strikes us particularly with its majestic facade in the characteristic local black stone dominated by a wonderful rosette in white marble by Giovanni Gaggini. Inside, a polyptych - a masterpiece by Canavesio. Pigna is also home to the famous spa. Descending again to Isolabona and taking a detour we climb up again to the wonderful, intact Apricale, the first village in Liguria to be officially invited to join the association of “I Borghi più belli d’Italia” (The Most Beautiful Villages in Italy) and also

holder of an Orange Flag. Founded around the year 1000, the village has a complex structure, with little streets decorated with numerous murals and paved in sandstone slabs. There are lots of places worth a visit: above all, above the main square, the baroque oratory of San Bartolomeo, supported by arches concealing an ancient drinking trough, today used as a fountain. On the other side is the parish church, rebuilt in 1887 after an earthquake, with a bell-tower built from one of the towers of the destroyed castle.

Going on from Apricale, we reach Perinaldo, crossing an area mainly covered by olive groves. The village stretches along the hillside. Standing out from afar we see the white bell-tower of the baroque parish church of San Nicola, which houses the “painting of the souls”, attributed to the school of Guercino.

A witness to this presence is the Astronomy Observatory, housed in the former Franciscan convent of San Sebastiano.



### A D.O.C. Rossese for Dolceaqua

The “Rossese di Dolceaqua” is a deep red wine, with delicate tinges, that is an ideal accompaniment for the tasty dishes of the valley.

### The White Bean of Pigna

With their characteristic small, white seed, Pigna beans - a recent Slow Food product - have a very delicate taste and very thin skin.

In actual fact, the excellent vegetable is not exclusive to this village, but can be found in the upper Nervis Valley at an altitude of between 300 and 800 metres above sea level. The beans, also known as “from the Alps” are used in numerous dishes, including the most characteristic “goat’s meat with beans”.



# 2 Badalucco, Molini di Triora and Triora

*The charm and mystery of the Argentina valley*



## The route

Start:  
Taggia.  
Bussana Vecchia  
10 km,  
Badalucco 34 km,  
Molini di Triora 47 km.  
Finish:  
Triora 54 km.

Features:  
history,  
art,  
the environment,  
culture.

Valleys:  
Argentina.

*A sunny, Mediterranean plain, rich in works of art and products from the land, gradually gives way to the rugged beauty of a narrow valley, in which rural traditions and ancient legends survive. Everywhere, we are amazed by the hand of man, who has created solemn architecture and works of art.*

The itinerary takes us through an area that still bears the marks of the catastrophic earthquake of 1887. The hamlet of Bussana Vecchia is an example of this, a ruined, very evocative village - only partially recovered and currently inhabited by a group of artists. From Bussana we continue eastwards and then north in the direction of Taggia. Before entering the village, the Gothic church of San Domenico, dating back to the XV century, and the near-by Dominican Convent, currently housing one of the most important Art Galleries in Liguria, are well worth a visit. Stretching along the hillside and encircled by a perfectly intact wall, the village of Taggia is a jewel of history and medieval architecture. Beyond the Pretoria gate, inside the ancient village, via San Dalmazzo and via Soleri, with their buildings of great artistic

value, are worth a visit.

Via Santa Lucia leads us to the oldest part of the village, with the tower building that houses the Town Hall.

From the gastronomic point of view, Taggia is famous for its "ciappe", very thin, crispy slices of bread sprinkled with salt, and for the famous variety of "Taggia" olives.

The itinerary continues along the Argentina valley, hemmed in by rocky walls and thick woods. We arrive at Badalucco, an old village with stone houses. High up on the hill, in the oldest part, is the church of San Nicolò, built on the ruins of the old castle. The most characteristic feature are the numerous works of art along the little streets that make the village a real open-air Art Gallery. The main road continues as far as Molini di Triora - even if we recommend two short detours leading to





Basil

*Bussana Vecchia*

the ancient Montalto Ligure and Carpasio. The name "Molini di Triora" refers to the large number of mills used in the production of the local speciality: the typical, famous home-made Triora mountain bread.

And finally, Triora, known as the "village of the witches" after the trial which, in 1588, sentenced some women accused of witchcraft to be burnt at the stake. References to this can be found in the local Museo Etnografico. Triora is included in the list of the "Borghi più belli d'Italia" and has also been awarded the Orange Flag: its medieval features are almost totally intact.

The castle ruins and the numerous works of art often to be found in the village churches are not to be missed.



Basil

*Bussana Vecchia*

### Typical Triora bread, "Bruzzo" and Taggia olives

In Triora, the visitor can buy the excellent locally-baked bread, in its characteristic round shape: eat this bread accompanied by the excellent cheeses from the meadows of the Upper Argentina Valley, one of which is 'Bruzzo', with a slightly spicy flavour. The Taggia olive is typical of the whole province of Imperia; it is a tiny variety, with a brown - dark reddish colour and an unmistakable flavour. It is very popular both in brine and in olive oil, also as a snack to be enjoyed with an aperitif. A particularly rich oil is produced from this variety using traditional methods and it is known all over the world for its unmistakable aroma and low acidity level.

### Dried cod "alla Baucogna"

Dried cod is one of the protagonists of one of the local festivals most popular with food-lovers that takes place in Badalucco every year in September.

The typical recipe in which this delicious ingredient is cooked is 'alla Baucogna'. It consists in cooking the dried cod that has previously been boiled and cut into large pieces, alternating it in layers with a sauce made from chopped parsley, garlic, onion, softened dried mushrooms and anchovies with pine kernels, hazel-nuts, walnuts and crushed amaretti biscuits. The fish is cooked slowly, in a large casserole, over a very low heat.

# 3 Borghetto d'Arroschia, Pieve di Teco, Pornassio e Nava

## Valle Arroschia: the wine and oil route



### The route

Start:  
Albenga.  
Ranzo 19 km,  
Borghetto d'Arroschia  
22 km,  
Vessalico 25 km,  
Pieve di Teco 30 km,  
Pornassio 36 km.  
Finish:  
Colle di Nava 42 km.

Features:  
history,  
art,  
food-and-wine.

Valleys:  
Arroschia.

*A luxuriant area, ideal for holidays and justly famous for its quality products, including extra-virgin olive oil and Pigato and Ormeasco wines. The history of these frontier places is written in the beauty of their monuments.*

From the Albenga tollgate, head for Villanova and take the SS453 of the Arroschia Valley. Hidden by greenery and surrounded by olive groves and vineyards, Ranzo was the birthplace of two sixteenth-century painters Pietro and Giorgio Guido, whose works can be seen in the village. The most precious treasure of Ranzo and the whole valley is the church of Pantaleo, standing solitary along the road for Pieve di Teco. The XI century apse confirms the late medieval origins of the building. Continuing, we reach Borghetto d'Arroschia, a rural village enriched by its spectacular medieval bridge, with only one arch and surprisingly without any side protections. In one of the most significant hamlets, Ubagga, we can find the 'Maschere' (Masks): unique works created by important contemporary artists based on the legends that populate the Ligurian hinterland. The road goes on as far

as Vessalico, a village founded at the beginning of the XII century when the landowners forced the inhabitants of the area to congregate in one place. Just above the village, in the middle of olive groves, is the Romanesque church of Sant'Andrea, the oldest in the valley. This area is rich in olive groves and vineyards. Vessalico is famous for its garlic that is celebrated at the beginning of July every year with a festival. Pieve di Teco is the ancient capital of the Arroschia Valley. The medieval arcades of corso Ponzone, open their Gothic arcades wide to the elegance of the beautiful stone doorways. Don't miss the Gothic church of Santa Maria della Ripa completely covered in stucco painted in black and white bands. Pornassio, a holiday resort surrounded by thick woods, with its group of five villages spread along the ancient "Salt Route", is where the Mediterranean and



Pieve di Teco

### Along the wine and oil route

Extra-virgin olive oil and wine are the best products of this valley. As far as wine is concerned, the Pigato white is unmistakable. But the most important typical product is Ormeasco, a ruby red wine with an intense perfume and high alcoholic content. The production in the Pornassio area is particularly good and has been classified as "Ormeasco di Pornassio doc". Ormeasco "Sciac - trà" is another top quality variety obtained from vinification into white wine of the same grapes.

alpine environments meet. The Romanesque church of San Dalmazzo, in Villa, with its XII-century bell-tower and facade, frescoes and fifteenth-century portal, is well worth a visit. Above Pornassio the SS28 leads to the Colle di Nava, a wide pass surrounded by meadows and woods on the border between Liguria and Piedmont. The nineteenth-century forts to be found throughout the area bear witness to the strategic position of this area.

### "White" cuisine: "Streppa e caccia là" and "Sugeli con Brusso"

This is the typical "white" cuisine dish that is traditionally cooked in the shepherds' huts of Mendatica, but it can also be tasted in Pornassio and more generally in the district of the colle di Nava.

White cuisine, defined as such because it is colourless, is composed of starchy foods, dairy products, vegetables and fruit that do not have very much colour, such as potatoes, garlic, turnip and wild products gathered along the paths taken by cattle on their way up to the high meadows. The name "streppa e caccia là" comes from the "irregular" shape of the fresh pasta that is cut, or more accurately, "strapata a mano" ("ripped by hand"). Another speciality not to be missed is the "Sugeli con Brusso": a pasta made from flour and water and torn into "gnocchi", dressed in a sauce made from Brusso cheese.



Valle di Arroscia

### Vessalico garlic

Due to the fact that it is produced in such a small area, this product has almost become a "protected species" and certainly deserves to be adopted as one of the Slow Food products. This garlic is white, fairly small and keeps very well. Protagonist of the historical July festival, Vessalico garlic is ideal for preparing the typical agliata (according to some sources, the forebear of pesto). The local agliata uses the classical ingredients pounded in the mortar - garlic, vinegar, bread, dry white wine, salt - with the addition of the yolks of hard-boiled eggs, to emphasise the influence of neighbouring France. The agliata is delicious eaten spread on croutons, best if made from Triora bread.



# 4 Zuccarello, Castelvecchio di Rocca Barbena and Toirano

*Through the Middle Ages, prehistory and nature*



## The route

Start:  
Albenga.  
Zuccarello 11 km,  
Castelvecchio di Rocca  
Barbena 16 km,  
Balestrino 27 km,  
Toirano 33 km,  
Finish:  
Borghetto S. Spirito  
35 km.

Features:  
scenery,  
views,  
history, archaeology,  
food and wine.

Valleys:  
Neva e Varatella.

*A very fascinating route through some of the most characteristic and well-preserved medieval villages of the Ingauno hinterland, surrounded by spectacular, surprising scenery with overlapping or rapidly alternating surroundings typical of the Mediterranean scrub, classical woodlands and mountains. Finally, Troiano with its caves, geological and prehistoric treasures.*

From the tollgate of Albenga, on whose plain violet asparagus, artichokes and courgettes are grown, we follow the SS582 towards the Neva valley through scenery dominated by Mediterranean scrub and olive groves. After Cisano we continue towards Zuccarello. Just a few kilometres later the ruins of the medieval castle announce our arrival in the village, at the bottom of a gorge upstream from the confluence with the river Pennavaira. Founded by the Clavesana family in 1248, two rows of low, austere arcades, that have remained almost intact during more than six hundred years, run right through the village. A path leads us to the castle ruins. Zuccarello is famous, above all, for its medieval mule-back bridge that can be reached, from the centre, by an alley with splendid medieval arches. After Zuccarello we climb up to the village of

Castelvecchio, clinging to the steep limestone cliffs of Rocca Barbena (1142 m). Beyond the "Gothic" gate, the village, watched over by the ancient castle (XI century) of the Clavesanas. The clearing in front of the fortress offers a spectacular view over the valley. The ruins of the towers and fortified houses remind us of their strategic origin. The maze of alleyways, fountains and, outside the walls, the strange heart-shaped cemetery, are very evocative. Baroque renovation work spared the thirteenth-century bell-tower of the Assunta parish church, the oratory in piazza della Torre and the chapels of San Bernardo and San Michele. Not to be missed in June for the young and not-so-young: "Il Paese dei Balocchi, i giochi di un tempo a Castelvecchio" (Toy town, toys of long ago in Castelvecchio). We descend towards the Varatella

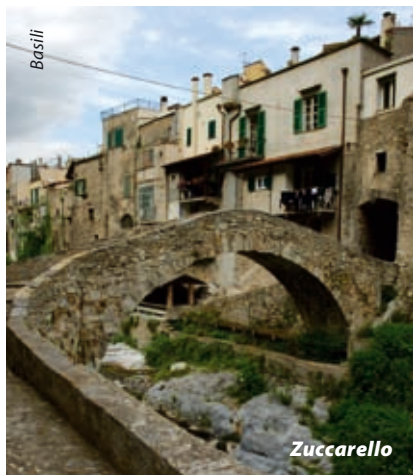


Basilì

Castelvechio di Rocca Barbena

valley, along a twisting, panoramic road. Beyond Balestrino, we come to Toirano, famous for its oil presses, for its San Pietro focaccia, (a kind of sweet bread) and for its caves of

which there are more than 50. The bones of a CroMagnon man and of an Ursus Speleus were found in one of these. The tourist route goes on for more than a kilometre, from the Bàsura (“witch”) cave down to the lower one of Santa Lucia, a cathedral of stalactites and stalagmites. In the upper cave of Santa Lucia there is a fifteenth-century sanctuary. The water that pours out of a spring is considered to work miracles. In the village there is an almost intact medieval three-arched bridge over the Varatella, while the ethnographic museum, set up in the stables of the Del Carretto palace, is not to be missed.



Basilì

Zuccarello

### The wine and oil routes

There are thirteen routes in the area covering the Arroscia, Albenga and Finale valleys, whose main products are Pigato and Vermentino white wines and extra-virgin olive oil.

### An asparagus “protected” by the Slow Food Association

The violet asparagus of Albenga is one of the most famous products of the plain, representing the vegetable garden of Liguria. With its characteristic colour, it stands out with its delicate taste that makes it unmistakable. The best way to enjoy it is just to steam it and eat it simply dressed, perhaps as a side dish with white meat or fish. But it certainly isn't a sacrilege to eat it with Parmesan cheese or with an egg.



### Food-and-wine appointments

Salea is certainly worth a detour along the route: in September there is a festival dedicated to the Pigato wine and the other D.O.C. wines of western Liguria; this is an event that dates back to 1968 and shouldn't be missed.

At the beginning of August, in Toirano, the Festival of the Gumbi, i.e. the olive presses, takes place. Excellent for tasting the typical products of the area, wine and oil, and for visiting the oil presses along a guided food-and-wine route.

# 5 Finalborgo, Calizzano, Osiglia e Millesimo

*A medieval route through chestnut and beech woods*



## The route

Start:  
Finale.  
Finalborgo 2,5 km,  
Calizzano 28 km,  
Bardineto 38 km,  
Osiglia 54 km.  
Finish:  
Millesimo 68 km.

Features:  
scenery,  
views,  
history,  
archaeology,  
sports,  
food and wine.

Valleys: Bormida.

*A route to understand how varied Liguria is: prehistory, geology, views, Mediterranean greenery and chestnut and beech woods.*

*And water, with its streams and lakes.*

*From Finalborgo to Millesimo, in discovery of the Middle Ages.*

Finale has a very ancient history. The archaeological finds discovered in the numerous caves and exhibited in Finale town museum are proof of the presence of man from prehistory. The Arene Candide, Fate, rocca di Perti and Rio caves are famous, especially the biggest ones, namely the Pollera or Pian Marino. The group of limestone cliffs with 80-metre high walls, ideal for rock climbers, are to be admired. Just a couple of kilometres from the coast we come to Finalborgo, a village that deserves its place among the "Borghi più belli d'Italia", capital of the Marquesses of Del Carretto di Castello Gavone, with their residence built on the hillside in 1191, of which today we can still see the elegant Diamante tower as well as the undamaged town walls of the XIII century. The itinerary along the SP490 proceeds as far as colle del Melogno, a splendid and panoramic

ridge between the coast and the hinterland. We proceed in the very green shade of beech, chestnut and oak trees, now with our backs turned to the Mediterranean. Soon we reach Calizzano, resting in a bright green, relaxing dell. A detour to the neighbouring Bardineto is also recommended. The route retraces its steps onto the colle del Melogno, and continues upwards as far as the intersection for Bormida. A place people just tend to pass through, certainly, but its Municipality has the highest percentage of green areas in the whole of Italy. A record it has gained thanks to its thick broad-leaved forests, a place of silence and tranquillity. We are immersed in this paradise as we descend to Osiglia (637 m), a pretty resort famous for its attractive artificial lake. A part of the village that was flooded when the dam was built is under water. Lake sports



and fishing in the fishing reserve are the holiday-makers' favourite pastimes. The road that leads from Osiglia to Millesimo runs alongside the Bormida, through thick greenery. We are in a karstic area, of caves and dolines, and tourists can take the Bric Tana path or discover the valley of the Tre Re (Three Kings). Millesimo, also one of the "Borghi più belli d'Italia", is a medieval triumph, with the Ponte della Gaietta dominated by the watchtower on which the village flags fly. The Palazzo dei Del Carretto is sumptuous, with one of the most beautiful and intact sundials in the whole of the north on its facade. Millesimo is the "home of the truffle", to which a National Festival, held every year in September, is dedicated.



### The "fazzini" of the Val Bormida

I.e. soft little potato cakes with a hollow in the middle for the condiment. Tradition has it that they must be cooked on a wood-burning stove. They are also excellent "on their own", but better if accompanied by a leek and onion sauce, or with pesto. Something that you must taste in the area is the rice and leek pie or the frizzo: a salami made from pork liver and sausage meat and seasoned with juniper berries.

### Calizzano and Bardineto, the surroundings and mushrooms

Every year the traditional "Festa del Fungo d'Oro" (Golden Mushroom Festival) takes place, in which its precious ingredient is used in a wide range of delicious recipes.

### Dried chestnuts in the "tecci" of Calizzano and Murialdo

In the woods between Calizzano and Murialdo we may well come across strange, tiny dry-stone buildings with shingle roofs, i.e. small wooden hand-cut beams. These are known locally as "tecci".

In autumn the "Gabianna" variety of chestnuts, with its characteristic small, sweet fruit - are arranged inside the buildings on a wooden grid (called 'graia') a couple of metres off the ground, at a safe distance from a low fire, produced by burning the wood obtained after pruning the chestnut trees. A small hole made in the roof allows the smoke to go out slowly and this gives the dried chestnuts their particular, typical flavour. This traditional method of smoking in the "tecci" is one of the Slow Food projects.



# 6 *Albisola Superiore, Stella, Giovo, Sassello and Altare*

## *Artistic crafts and art dedicated to nature*



### The route

Start:  
Albisola Superiore.  
Stella San Giovanni  
10 km,  
Il Giovo 14 km,  
Sassello 22 km,  
Pontinvrea 32 km.  
Finish:  
Altare 53 km.

Features:  
art - crafts,  
scenery,  
views,  
history, archaeology,  
sports,  
food and wine.

Valleys: Sansobbia.

*The best of artistic craftsmanship in the Savona area can be seen in the ceramics of Albisola and the glass of Altare; a route through green, changing scenery, opening out onto surprising views over the Ligurian coast. Sassello is an oasis in the Beigua park and is famous for its numerous gastronomic specialities.*

Known as the home of artistic ceramics, the two Albisolas (Superiore and Marina) have Roman roots, as the finds of ancient Alba Docilia prove. The Ceramics Museum and the various artisan workshops are worth a visit; in these you can watch all the phases of ceramic production and admire the subjects dedicated to the local landscapes made in the characteristic "ancient Savona blue and white" style. A stroll along the "Passeggiata degli Artisti", that joins the two Albisolas is well worthwhile. Travelling along the Provinciale 334, we come to Stella, composed of five hamlets surrounded by the Mediterranean scrub and by beech and chestnut woods; in the hamlet of San Giovanni we can visit the house where Sandro Pertini was born. We can also buy the typical cheese. We climb up to the Giovo pass, characterised by the massive Napoleonic for-

tifications: we are on the "Alta Via dei Monti Liguri" (Upper Ligurian Mountain Way) and this section can also be travelled on foot or by mountain bike.

After the Giovo Pass we reach Sassello. Nestling in an area of meadows and woods, is the first, historic "orange flag" of Italy. One of the most important cultural centres in the Savona hinterland, Sassello houses the archaeology and local history Museum in palazzo Perrando. The village has many seventeenth-century buildings decorated with frescoes and Baroque churches, while the churches of the Concezione and San Giovanni contain sculptures by Maragliano. The Saraceni tower dominates Bastia Soprana while the fifteenth century village of Bastia Sottana preserves the ruins of a castle. From the gastronomic point of view, Sassello is famous,





above all, for its “amaretti” (almond biscuits) and mushrooms, both dried and in oil. Sassello is located in the European Geopark of Beigua and has a visitors centre in Palazzo

### The Stella “formaggetta” (cheese)

A cows or mixed milk cheese (cow and sheep, cow and goat), with the typical cylindrical shape, about 12 cm. in diameter. The external colour ranges from pale yellow to a darker yellow depending on how long it has been left to mature. Its consistency ranges from soft to crumbly depending on how mature it is; its taste can be delicate or strong, with a characteristic, slightly acidic aroma.

It is often eaten cut into thin slices and just sprinkled with extra-virgin olive oil and pepper, with the addition of Taggia olives. Often, this type of cheese is preserved in oil.

### “Amaretti” and “amaro” from Sassello

This tasty delicacy was first produced in Sassello in 1869. The bakery that made these special biscuits soon became a popular meeting place. “Amaretti” - the recipe is still the original one - are made from a stiff, soft, highly scented mixture. Sassello also has its own sweet liqueur (about 25° in strength), caramel in colour, that faithfully follows the original recipe: this is the “Amaretto” di Sassello.

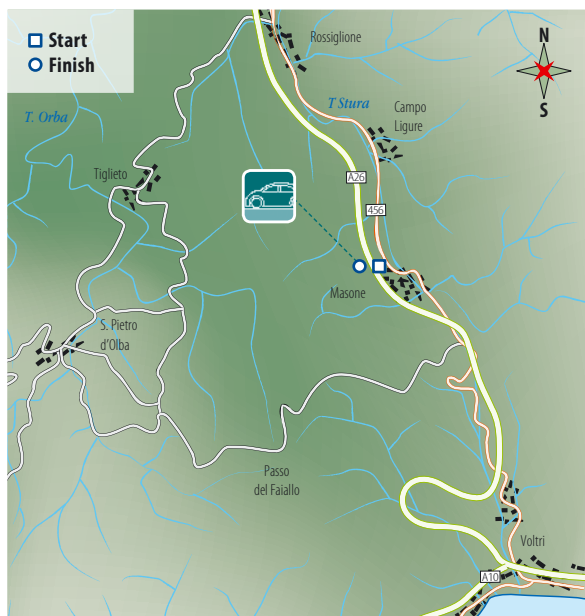
Gervino. The “parco del Beigua” with its 8,700 hectares, is the largest in Liguria, with a 500-kilometres long network of paths.

We return to the Giovo pass and pass through Pontinvrea and then through Altare, resting in a woody dell. It would appear that as far back as the XI - XII centuries, the forests of this extraordinary area were exploited to provide the fuel necessary for producing glass. In fact, it was here, in 1495, that the Glass University was founded. You can visit the Glass Museum, in the splendid villa Rosa, a shining example of Liberty architecture.



# 7 *Campo Ligure, Rossiglione and Tiglieto*

## *In the milk valleys*



### The route

Start:  
Masone.  
Campo Ligure 5 km,  
Rossiglione 8 km,  
Tiglieto 20 km,  
Passo del Faiallo  
42 km.  
Finish:  
Masone 55 km.

Features:  
scenery,  
views,  
history,  
culture.

Valleys:  
Stura e Orba.

*The thick greenery of the Stura and Orba valleys, guardians of artisan traditions such as filigree and iron-working skills.*

*Local products range from milk to berries.*

*And in the ancient villages, the charm of the Middle Ages and art.*

From the Masone tollgate we head towards Campo Ligure. The road runs alongside the consortium of the Genoese valleys, where fresh milk and dairy products are produced. After a few kilometres, we arrive in the capital of filigree, an art that consists in processing very fine threads of precious metal to produce objects with a delicate, sophisticated design. The best designs coming from every part of the world are exhibited in the Campo Ligure museum, while the annual exhibition, which starts on the first Sunday in August, celebrates the artisan tradition and production.

Behind the church, the renovated Spinola Castle stands out, open for concerts and cultural events. Lower down, beside the provincial highway, our attention is drawn to the old bridge over the river Stura, while the main square is embellished by the splendour of

Palazzo Spinola, with its spectacular painted facade. In the parish church, a painting by Bernardo Strozzi, an artist who was born in Campo Ligure, can be seen. Finally, at Christmas, the Oratory of Saints Sebastiano and Rocco hosts an evocative mechanised crib scene. Campo Ligure is surrounded by luxuriant greenery. Visitors can choose one of the numerous paths or visit the Pratorondanino Botanical Mountain Garden.

Continuing along our itinerary we come to Rossiglione, composed of two small villages (Inferiore and Superiore) (Upper and Lower) that have grown into one. The ancient village of Rossiglione is full of characteristic narrow alleys and low arcades supported by strong pillars. The path through the Gargassa valley is very interesting, passing through a canyon bathed by the waters of the river and domi-



nated by the Rocce Nere forming an evocative scene of dark brown earth and rocks. Continuing along the Gargassa river, through sometimes very wild vegetation, we arrive at Tiglieto: a world of greenery and woods, mainly the lime, as the name of the village suggests. Tiglieto is particularly well known for its Abbey, the first Cistercian abbey in Italy. It dates back to 1120 and was built over a former Benedictine monastery. To reach it, you have to proceed beyond the main hamlet, towards Urbe. The Abbey includes the church, the convent and the refectory that encloses three sides of the cloisters. It was the presence of the monks that developed agriculture in the area. Continuing beyond Badia, we

pass through Martina and arrive at San Pietro d'Olba. Before entering the village, we follow the detour to the left for Passo del Faiallo. When we reach an altitude of 700 metres, on the divide between the Stura and the Orba, the surprising view that opens up before our eyes really makes the half-hour journey by car from the Masone tollgate worthwhile. Gentle hills, green meadows speckled with yellow daisies and red poppies; and then a truly unique view over two valleys as far as Monviso whose peaks can be seen beyond the plain. It really seems as if we are in Switzerland or rather in one of those imaginary bucolic places that we see in TV adverts for chocolate. The last stage of our journey is Masone, not far from the nineteenth-century Forte Geremia. After passing through the Passo del Turchino we come to Masone, once well-known for its iron producing craft. The "hermitage" of Santa Maria in Vezzulla, a church dating back to the XII century and today a monument to the partisans who died for freedom, is important from the artistic-architectural point of view.

**The "Valli del Latte" itinerary**  
 Careful rearing techniques and high quality fodder: these are some of the reasons why the Stura and Orba valleys are the capitals of top quality milk. A quality that also derives, above-all, from respect for nature and tradition; visitors can bear witness to this, personally, along a route that takes them from the meadows to the cowsheds and dairies.

**Revzora**  
 This is a "focaccina" made from corn meal, oil, water and salt and is typical of the Valle Stura. It is baked in trays in a wood-burning oven and the result is a very tasty, crumbly product. It is usually eaten together with the typical local salami.



# 8 Busalla, Casella, Montoggio and Crocefieschi

*Through the holiday resorts popular with the Genoese*



## The route

Start:  
Busalla.  
Casella 7 km,  
Montoggio 14 km,  
Crocefieschi 29 km.  
Finish:  
Busalla 36 km.

Features:  
scenery,  
hiking,  
culture.

Valleys:  
Scrivia

*In the historical resorts popular with Genoese holiday-makers, to discover traditions, good flavours and tranquillity. A placid, green area, to be enjoyed slowly, perhaps on foot, along classical paths. Or by walking along the streets of the ancient villages, where history seems to have stood still.*

The Scrivia valley is home to the historical resorts loved by Genoese holiday-makers. A tradition emphasised by the presence of villas and little houses that epitomise architectural styles ranging from Liberty to the Sixties. The vacation tradition now belongs to the past, but a trip through these areas allows us to re-discover places, traditions, flavours and artistic treasures.

From the motorway tollgate of Busalla we head towards Savignone, arriving at Casella, the terminus of the characteristic little train of the same name. The narrow gauge railway was inaugurated in 1929 and starts from Piazza Manin in Genoa. Anyone enjoying train journeys can take the little train and go down to Sant'Olcese. Near this place, famous for its delicious salami, we find the botanical Ciaè path along which thirty different species of

trees that are typical of this area grow. Instead, from Casella you can climb up mount Maggio, dominating the resort that once belonged to the Fieschi family. The presence of the feudal lords can still be seen today in the noble palace, with its tower and inner courtyard, looking out over the village square. The parish church of Santo Stefano contains painting by Fiasella and De Ferrari. Seven kilometres separate Casella from Montoggio, another beautiful, classical holiday resort. Montoggio is the birthplace of Giovan Battista Perasso, known as Balilla, the boy who started the Genoese revolt against the invaders by throwing a stone against a group of Austrian soldiers in December 1746. Famous for its "formaggette", white potatoes and historical recipes based on pears and chestnuts, the holiday resort was once a favourite of



noble families. Montoggio has many works of art, some kept in the picture gallery of the parish church of San Giovanni Decollato. Local culture, in the form of an ex-voto, characterises the Santuario delle Tre Fontane, from which several routes depart. It is from here that we can reach the val Noci lake to climb up to Monte Bano at an altitude of one thousand metres. We can guess something about the history of Crocefieschi, also located along the old Salt Way, from its name. The two buildings looking out onto the square of the town hall once belonged to the Fieschi family. The parish church houses eighteenth-century works of art and some wooden sculptures of the Maragliano school.

Crocefieschi is very well-known by hikers. The path towards the Reo Passo rocks (an iniquitous pass), and the Carrega del Diavolo, start from here. The paths are not excessively difficult for expert hikers who take due care.



### Chestnuts and pears

This is an old typical summer recipe from Montoggio that is well-worth rediscovering: dried chestnuts, left-over from the winter, are boiled and when half-cooked whole pears are added. The “pejette da esté” (small summer pears) are used because of their sweet taste.

### The “quarantina” potato

The white “quarantina” potato, in celebration of which Montoggio holds the oldest festival in the Genoese hinterland, is ideal to accompany “trenette al pesto”, for making “gnocchi” and potato “focaccia”, that is delicious eaten with the “formaggette” (local cheese) from Crocefieschi and Montoggio.

### Rose syrup

Syrup-rose growing was very wide-spread years ago and today is rare. Rose syrup, a refreshing, thirst-quenching beverage is protected by the Slow Food Association. The syrup is obtained from rose petals, left to infuse in boiling water, filtered and then boiled again with the addition of sugar and lemon juice.



# 9 Torriglia, Fontanigorda, Rovegno and Gorreto

## The mountains rich in history



### The route

Start:  
Torriglia.  
Propata 15 km,  
Montebruno 28 m,  
Fontanigorda 39 km,  
Rovegno 47 km.  
Finish:  
Gorreto 53 km.

Features:  
scenery,  
the environment,  
hiking,  
food and wine,  
culture.

Valleys:  
Trebbia.

*The green of the meadows, woods and mountains, the blue of the rivers and Lake Brugneto. This is the idyllic setting of the val Trebbia, a world dotted with characteristic villages where it is lovely and relaxing to live, or just to spend your holidays. A land of woods, mushrooms and wholesome products, the Val Trebbia offers fine raw materials for delicious, simple dishes.*

The Val Trebbia is accessed from Torriglia, one of the most classical holiday resorts for the Genoese - because of its greenery, tranquillity, healthy air and its "canestrelletti" biscuits. The charming hamlet of Pentema is called the "crib - village" both because of its characteristics and because, every year, it has a crib that represents, in the clothes of the figures and the settings, rural life and activities of long ago. Torriglia offers the possibility of numerous excursions, the most important of which is the ascent of monte Antola (1597 m) at the centre of the regional nature park with the same name, from the peak of which you can enjoy a 360° view, from the port of Genoa to the Pennine Alps.

The road for Propata has wonderful views over the meadows and Lake Brugneto, an artificial reservoir inaugurated in 1959 and

the main water resource for Genoa. In its simplicity, the village hides important artistic treasures: the parish church of San Lorenzo preserves a wooden sculpture by Maragliano. From Propata we continue the spectacular "ring road" of Brugneto. Those preferring direct contact with nature can skirt the banks of the lake following the very beautiful ring route, rich in surprises, especially in autumn when it is not unusual to see deer.

Beyond Retezzo the road comes out onto the SS45. From here we arrive at Montebruno, guardian of local customs and traditions: the Museum of Peasant Culture, set up in the Augustine convent, preserves objects from pre-industrial civilisation, set out according to topics and working cycles. One of the most important monuments is an ancient four-arch stone bridge and the fifteenth-century sanc-



Calzia

Lake of Brugneto

tuary of Nostra Signora di Montebruno. Another classical holiday resort is Fontanigorda, whose name reveals the richness of the streams and the presence of 13 fountains. The Bosco delle Fate can be found in this area, mentioned by the poet Giorgio Caproni who chose the val Trebbia as his adopted homeland. There are numerous beautiful excursions starting from Fontanigorda some leading to the Val d'Aveto.

Nestling in a dell of the upper val Trebbia, Rovegno and its hamlets offer numerous possibilities for excursions over a thousand metres. The numerous abandoned mines remind us that this was once a mining area. The

presence of prehistoric man is documented by various findings, including a dolmen located in the hamlet of Poggio and also known as the "Stone Altar".

The main monument of Gorreto, a medieval fortress town, is the thousand-years old church of Santo Stefano, located near the cemetery of the hamlet of Fontanarossa. A path climbs from the same hamlet to the meadows of Pian della Cavalla, that in May become a carpet of blossoming narcissi. But there are many routes starting from Gorreto, for example up the 1,640 metres of mount Carmo or the 1,651 metres of mount Alfeo, already in the province of Piacenza.

### The "Canestrelletto" of Torriglia

Many villages in the hinterland of Genoa claim to be the home of this traditional biscuit. The "canestrelletto", made from short crust pastry, with its characteristic shape of a flower with six petals, can, however, rightly be said to come from Torriglia. Here, in the middle of May, the Canastrello Festival is celebrated, an appointment not to be missed for pastry lovers.

### Mushrooms and potatoes

Cep mushrooms and potatoes are the main products of the area, products that are delicious eaten together, cut into slices and cooked in a pan with oil, flavoured with bay, salt and garlic. Bake this dish in the oven to enjoy the combination of flavours and to make the potatoes crisp.



Basilii

Torriglia

# 10 *Leivi, San Colombano, Certenoli, Carasco and Ne*

## *Between the sea and the mountains*



### The route

Start: Chiavari.  
Leivi 6 km,  
San Colombano  
Certenoli 11,5 km,  
Carasco 14,5 km,  
Ne 21 km, Borgo di  
Cassagna, Ponte di  
Nascio, miniere di  
Gambatesa.  
Finish:  
Lavagna 30 km.

Features: scenery,  
the environment,  
hiking, geology,  
culture.

Valleys:  
Val Graveglia.

*A short but very varied route through some of the resorts of the hinterland of Tigullio takes the visitor in rapid succession from the world of the olive tree to that of the chestnut, discovering ancient mining activities and admiring the splendour of small, very old villages.*

Leivi, a village between the sea and the mountains.

In fact it is situated astride a ridge that gives a splendid view of Tigullio on one side and of Fontanabuona to the north. Spectacular features that are also reflected in the typical production of extra-virgin olive oil. It is not by coincidence that Leivi has been defined as the "oil village" and here, every year, a prize is awarded to the best extra-virgin olive oil of Tigullio. But up here, hazelnuts are also gathered, the protagonists of an August festival. Leivi is reached climbing up from Chiavari. There is another spectacular, healthy and inviting path, an alternative to the car. This is the "path of the five towers". Four of these towers are bell-towers and the fifth was built to sight enemy ships. It takes three hours to walk up the path. By car, the road is six

kilometres long. The local churches are all in Baroque style.

From Leivi the road descends steeply towards the valley floor in Fontanabuona, known for its slate quarries and production. We take the SS225, that crosses the valley and, in the municipality of San Colombano Certenoli, we follow the sign for Carasco, a village located at the confluence of the rivers Lavagna and Sturla and, subsequently, an important cross-roads. This is a characteristic that has been more of a disadvantage than an advantage for Carasco. Proof of this is the destruction of the ancient castles built on the Paggi hill, of which only traces of their foundations remain, and of the Fieschi castle in the Rivarola district.

From Carasco, following the road for the Val Graveglia, we plunge into the municipality of





Ne; a town with many hamlets, whose land is furrowed by rivers and modelled by meadows and woods. It is a land that gives excellent products, starting from the white "quarantina" potato that is one of the most popular in Liguria (it is also used in the preparation of the local "baciocca" pie) and some good wine productions, including Ciliegiole, Bianchetta and Vermentino as well as the very striking flavour of Zerli.

The manganese mines in Gambatesa are one of the reasons why the valley, with its thick network of paths for hikers - is so interesting. These can be visited on a small train that the miners used to use. The mine is still in opera-

tion, while the mining museum was opened only recently.

The hamlet of Cassagna has an interesting medieval centre but is particularly interesting because of the spectacular Cambiaso bridge, along the road that links Cassagna to Nascio. Built with only one arch in the seventeenth century, the bridge overlooks an impressive drop of about 50 metres.

Returning to Carasco, at the end of the itinerary, we can easily reach the motorway toll-gate of Lavagna.

### The special flavour of Zerli

This is a very special wine, whose preparation (it requires Vermentino, Bianchetta, Pignola, Moscato d'Asti and Fragola bianca) seems more like a rite.

The seeds are removed from the grapes by hand. Then the grapes are pressed and left to ferment for just 24 hours. The liquid is then filtered and pressed, through "bag filters". The clear juice is then poured into a demijohn and decanted every month, at new moon.

The operation is repeated from October to March, the month when the wine is bottled. It can be drunk, cold, starting from the following spring, but only for a short period. In fact, already by autumn, the Zerli will start to lose its flavour. Obviously, production is limited, usually to about 100 bottles.



# 11 Cogorno, Rezzoaglio and Santo Stefano d'Aveto

## Slate and other peaks



### The route

Start:  
Lavagna.  
Cogorno 3 km,  
Borzonasca 17 km,  
Rezzoaglio 44 km.  
Finish:  
Santo Stefano d'Aveto  
52 km.

Features:  
scenery,  
nature,  
history,  
geology.

Valleys:  
Sturla,  
Aveto.

*In the hinterland of Tigullio, a rich world, full of ancient abbeys, slate quarries, mountain lakes, ski resorts and typical products ranging from mushrooms and honey to potatoes and chestnuts. This is an unexpected Liguria that reaches and exceeds one thousand metres in altitude, a region close to the coast and far from the traffic.*

The name Lavagna (in Italian it also means "blackboard") is not accidental. Slate, on its way to Genoa, used to be loaded in its port. Slate that justifies an itinerary of discovery and knowledge: from the Lavagna tollgate, proceed towards the hinterland. After just a few kilometres we come to San Salvatore di Cogorno, or San Salvatore dei Fieschi, home of the basilica with the same name commissioned by Pope Innocenzo IV (a Fieschi): a medieval corner in an area surrounded by little olive groves, that also includes the palace of the same Genoese family. The Romanesque-Gothic church has a large rosette and the portal a pointed arch and a frescoed lunette. The bell-tower is enormous while the interior is in slate. The circular slate route starts from the basilica, leading to the old quarry area of mount

San Giacomo. This was the route taken in the Nineteenth century by the slate carriers who took the sheets of slate down from the quarries to the port of Lavagna. The entrances to several quarries are marked along the path, while there are numerous examples of the use of the black stone in the rural architecture. At the end of the excursion we proceed northwards, taking the SS225, then the SS586 for Santo Stefano d'Aveto, arriving in Borzonasca, with its historical centre and, in particular, the nearby Abbey of Borzone, that was one of the first Benedictine settlements in Italy. The buildings, in Gothic-Romanesque style, have an imposing huge bell-tower. The Abbey is surrounded by greenery, and nature lovers will also appreciate, in this area, Lake Giacopiane. Not far from the Abbey, sculpted in the



Basilii

Chiavari

Rocca di Borzone, is the “face of Christ”, the largest Palaeolithic rock sculpture in Europe, seven metres high and four metres wide.

Beyond Borzonasca the road climbs 700 metres to Rezzoaglio, that lies at the feet of Mount Aiona (1692 m), in the Aveto Regional Natural Park. After the town, an asphalted road leads from the hamlet of Magnasco, a detour on the right, to the beautiful morainic Lake Lame, whose waters mirror the surrounding trees. Higher up, the Agoraie reserve, closed to the public, with the “Lago degli Abeti”, the Lake of Firs, on the bottom of which the fossil remains of the silver fir, dating back to 2,600

years ago, can still be seen. A request must be made to the region’s Forestry Commission in order to visit this area.

Finally we return to the main road to reach Santo Stefano d’Aveto, awarded an orange flag for the extraordinary beauty of its scenery and for its excellent tourist accommodation. Today Santo Stefano is a rare skiing resort in Liguria, where in summer the mild, fine air invites the visitor to take a walk or more demanding hikes, considering that the Parco dell’Aveto includes some peaks around 1,500 metres high: mounts Penna, Maggiorasca, Aiona, Zatta and Groppo Rosso.

### San Sté, Sarasso and Baciocca

With its characteristic slightly bitter after-taste and improved if heated on a slate slab, San Sté cheese is the main speciality of the val d’Aveto.

A land of meadows on which alpine and cabannina cattle graze, also guaranteeing another excellent product, Sarasso, a creamy, delicate ricotta cheese obtained from the San Sté whey and then salted and left to mature.

Many other products are made in this area, however.

The white quarantina potato is special, featuring in the local baciocca, the main speciality of the area, a savoury pie made from eggs, Parmesan cheese, lard and garlic. Its taste is enriched by its special method of baking using a terracotta bell called a testo and a layer of chestnut leaves placed under the mixture.



Calzia

Lake of Firs

# 12 Lumarzo, Gattorna, Lorsica, San Colombano Certenoli

*Along the slate way*



## The route

Start: Genova.  
Galleria Ferriere 12 km,  
Passo della Scoffera  
12 km,  
Lumarzo 14 km,  
Gattorna 19 km,  
Cicagna 26 km,  
Lorsica 32,5 km,  
Cicagna 39 km,  
Isolona di Orero 41 km,  
San Colombano  
Certenoli 48 km,  
Carasco 51 km.  
Finish: Lavagna 55 km.

Features:  
history, geology

Valleys: Fontanabuona

*A valley that extends parallel to the Tigullio coast, so close to the sea that it enjoys its mild climate.*

*This is Fontanabuona, the slate valley. This is where the black stone used to be and is still mined, used for building, billiard tables, furniture and ornaments.*

Coming from Genoa, through the Scoffera tunnel, the district of Lumarzo (from the ancient Locus Martius, Field of Mars) is the gate to the Val Fontanabuona. In Pannesi there is the sixteenth-century sanctuary of the Madonna del Bosco. The little Romanesque church of San Martino del Vento, in the hamlet of Tasso, documented since 1240, is also of artistic significance.

The road from the bottom of the valley goes up to Moconese, from which two important hiking paths leave: the Colombian path to Genoa - Quinto leaves from the house that belonged to the forebears of Christopher Columbus, at Terrarossa; the Feudi Fliscani path leads to Torriglia through the estate of the noble family. The sanctuary of san Giacomo, with a fifteenth-century polyptych attributed to Andrea Semino, is located at Gattorna.

From the "Colombian" Moconesi we arrive at Cicagna, considered the capital of the valley because of the presence of various slate industries. The Sanctuary of the Madonna dei Miracoli, with its ancient bell-tower, is in the centre. Cicagna is an important leg in the slate eco-museum that is one of the main reasons for visiting the Val Fontanabuona: one single building contains the historical-archaeological and the slate museums.

Beyond Cicagna, in the hamlet of Monleone, a detour uphill leads us to Lorsica, where some companies continue the artisan production of damasks. At the top, at 1,115 metres, is the hamlet of Barbagelata, home to the highest parish church in the Ligurian Apennines. Slate triumphs in Chiapparino di Cicagna, still along the SS225 heading towards the east: overlooking the road, there is an ancient



structure for working slate that has been perfectly restored and houses an exhibition room and visitors centre.

The slate way continues through evocative scenery as far as Isolona di Orero, where slate quarries can be visited. On the clearing in front of the quarry we find the "baracùn", with the old machinery for obtaining slate slabs.

San Colombano Certenoli is composed of various hamlets: at the end of August, Càlvàri hosts the Expo Fontanabuona, dedicated to local crafts and typical products. An area from which paths depart towards the surrounding peaks, while some of the most important typical local products are chestnuts (used for historic recipes such as the local versions of the chestnut cake), hazelnuts and cheeses. At the end of July, in the hamlet of

Romaggi, they celebrate the festival of meat "in s'a ciappa", cooked on slate slabs.

From San Colombano we continue as far as Carasco and then head for the Lavagna motorway tollgate.

### From the "panella" to the "castagnaccio"

Some typical restaurants in Fontanabuona today offer the classical castagnaccio, a typical autumn cake. The panella, most popular in the mountain areas and more generally in the Tigullio and Genoese hinterland, is the simplest version of it, starting from the ingredients: chestnut flour, salt, water and oil. The mixture is put into a testo heated by a wood-burning fire and covered with the classical bell that allows the dish to cook. Once upon a time the panella was a substitute for bread, and, depending on the occasions, the mixture was enriched with other ingredients, such as pieces of sausage.



# 13 San Pietro Vara, Varese Ligure, Sesta Godano

## The organic valley



### The route

Start:  
Sestri Levante.  
Castiglione Chiavarese  
10 km,  
San Pietro Vara 23 km,  
Varese Ligure 28 km,  
Sesta Godano 42 km,  
Finish:  
Carrodano 54 km.

Features:  
nature,  
history,  
the environment,  
food and wine.

Valleys:  
Alta Vara.

*Only one waterway in Liguria can truly be called a river: the Vara. Its waters cross an area of thick green vegetation, while the higher altitudes are characterised by meadows, where excellent products are made. The charm of nature is combined with the skill of man, who designed the villages with their rare style and unique features.*

From the tollgate of Sestri Levante we take highway 523 first of all driving across a plain alongside the river Petronio and then climbing more and more steeply: the district of Castiglione Chiavarese goes from 271 to the 1094 metres of mount Alpe, from the peak of which we have a spectacular view as far as the marble white Apuan Alps. Beyond Castiglione we climb up to San Pietro Vara, a hamlet of Varese Ligure, surrounded by green vineyards. After just a few kilometres we come to Varese Ligure, one of the most characteristic "round villages" of the val di Vara. The fact that it was awarded an orange flag confirms a vocation that made it the first municipality in Europe to receive environmental certification, thanks to the respect it has shown for nature. Its historical centre, called the Round Village, seems to be closed in upon itself, and

each of the facades painted in different colours and looking out onto the central square enhances, with colour, the style of the architectural shapes. The village is surrounded by the natural moat of the Vara and protected to the north by the beautiful stone castle. Not far from the village centre is the Grecino bridge, with its characteristic simple design. Such an urban jewel exalts the surrounding nature, a high-altitude nature (it is not far to the Cento Croci Pass, at one thousand metres), with its thin air and meadows. Organic agriculture and animal rearing are the characteristic activities of Varese Ligure, governed by the canons and rules of wholesomeness and quality. An ideal area for unadulterated products such as beef, milk and dairy products that have chosen Varese Ligure as the capital of the organic valley. An area appre-

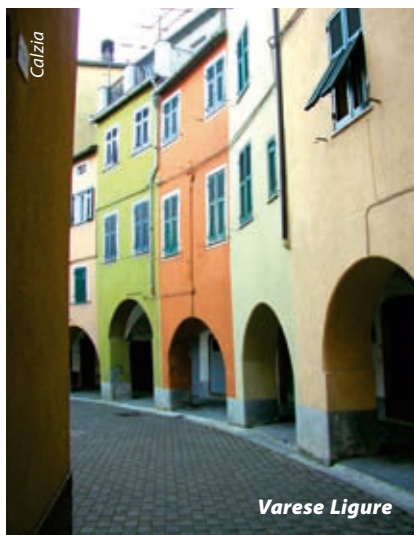


ciated by hikers: a path leaves from Varese leading up to the Alta Via and the Passo di Cento Croci. Just beyond this, we can descend through the meadows, to Caranza and return to Varese by bus.

The route ends at San Pietro Vara, therefore it includes the detour to Sesta Godano, another inviting village in the val di Vara, composed of two main centres (Sesta and Godano) and some interesting hamlets. One of these is Gropo, with its ancient fortified houses that have reached the third millennium intact. Of great interest in this area, as in other places in the Val di Vara, are the apotropaic heads, ancient examples of heads or masks sculpted into the outer walls of the houses. Godano has the remains of an octagonal castle tower. The path that leads up to the 1,650 metres of Mount Grottero is very well-known and popular. For those preferring to remain lower down, on the other hand, there is the river Vara, popular for river sports such as rafting and canoeing.

As well as sports, the river is also the source of gastronomic traditions such as the trout

festival that is celebrated in July. The easiest way to end the itinerary, from Sesta Godano, is to head for the motorway tollgate of Carrodano, along the A12.



### Chestnut flour

Chestnuts, whose trees cover these hills, are the main ingredient of many traditional dishes. In Varese Ligure, the classical "farinata" made from chickpea flour, a unique dish in Ligurian tradition, is also made from top quality chestnut flour. But chestnut flour is the basis of so many recipes: "castagnaccio", "tagliatelle", "cordelle", fritters and pan martin.

### "Corzetti" from eastern Liguria

Until 1923 Varese Ligure belonged to the province of Genoa. This is proved, for example, by the presence of "corzetti", recalling a Genoese tradition, little discs of pasta, 5-6 centimetres in diameter, onto which coats of arms or floral motives were stamped. They are dried before cooking and are excellent with a sauce made from mushrooms, gathered here in Val di Vara.

# 14 *Vezzano Ligure, Calice al Cornoviglio and Brugnato*

## *Around the river Vara*



### The route

Start:  
La Spezia,  
Santo Stefano Magra.  
Vezzano Ligure 4 km,  
Calice al Cornoviglio  
25 km,  
Borghetto Vara 41 km.  
Finish:  
Brugnato 43 km.

Features:  
history,  
scenery,  
food and wine.

Valleys:  
Bassa Magra,  
Media Bassa Vara.

*An itinerary that is designed by the path of the river Vara that passes, not far from its banks, some uncontaminated, admirably preserved villages. And others have climbed high-er up, onto the mountains and rocks, seeking shelter from raids and sieges. An environment to be discovered step by step, atmospheres to be breathed in and flavours to be savoured.*

A medieval village, clinging to a steep rock, Vezzano Ligure gives an idea of its impregnability. To reach the village, leave the motorway at La Spezia - Santo Stefano Magra and follow the highway to the main town. After taking the exit for Vezzano we come to the first of the two villages that form it, Vezzano Inferiore, and then the ancient village of Vezzano Superiore that dominates the huge plain where the river Vara joins the Magra.

There are many signs of the Middle Ages in the lower part of the village where we can see the still intact pentagonal tower and the arch of San Giorgio. Renaissance buildings look out over the central street of the upper village. The sanctuary of Nostra Signora del Soccorso, built after the plague epidemic is of the same period. Vezzano Ligure holds a Grape Festival every third Sunday of Sep-

tember, to celebrate the grape harvest. The Festival also includes the Palio dei Rioni when the different districts of the village compete against each other for the *strazo*, the trophy. The road between Vezzano and Calice al Cornoviglio is mainly flat and crosses Follo. A detour on the way up leads to Calice al Cornoviglio, dominated by a superb castle overlooking the medieval village. The Genoese families of the Fieschi, Doria and Malaspina have shaped the history of this village. Inside the Castle, where the village's cultural events are held, we find the Bee-keeping Museum. The woods around Valice are a prelude to the Alta Via dei Monti Liguri (The High Way of the Ligurian Mountains) that almost reaches the 1,162 metres of mount Cornoviglio. After our visit we descend again to the Vara plain. As well as the evocative village of





Rochetta Vara, we can also visit Brugnato, recently awarded the orange flag for its historical centre. The village sprang up around a Benedictine abbey, presumably founded in the VII century. The village is a jewel, with its medieval gates (Soprana and Sottana) still intact, a parish church with Palo Christian origins, dedicated to Saint Peter, the Bish-

ops' Palace built beside the cathedral (dating back to the XI century). Outside the walls, sacred buildings such as the seventeenth century Sanctuary of Nostra Signora dell'Ulivo, nestling on a hillside, dominate the village, crossed by ancient paths, with mills. The calm Vara runs along the valley floor inviting us to take a trip in a canoe.



### The "caciotta" and "mozzarella" cheeses of Brugnato

Both are produced from cows' milk.

The "mozzarella" is famous for its freshness and unmistakable quality, so much so that the production that started about thirty years ago has now become a tradition.

It is excellent eaten on its own or added to other recipes.

The caciotta, soft, fresh and mild - or more highly flavoured and strong, if left to mature - is a more classical cheese.

### A soft canestrello

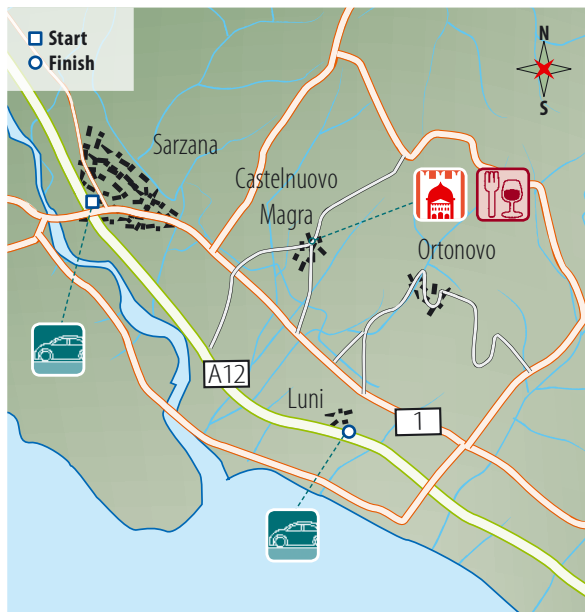
The soft "canestrello" of Brugnato is very different from the one made in the Genoa hinterland. In fact, it is a soft biscuit with a delicate taste. Aniseed gives the "canestrello" a particularly pleasant flavour. It is excellent eaten on its own or dipped into red wine. Another dessert can also be prepared from the same mixture, the "cavagnettu" (little basket), a biscuit in the shape of a little basket.

### The sweet rice pie

This typical Vezzano dish, prepared during the Festival of the Assumption, in the middle of August, is a "torta d'riso doza" (a sweet rice pie). The pastry is prepared with flour, oil, eggs, wine, sugar and water. An aniseed-flavoured liqueur is added to the cooked, drained rice together with sugar, lemon peel, milk and eggs. The pie is baked in a wood-burning oven in a copper pan. It keeps for several days.

# 15 Sarzana, Castelnuovo Magra, Ortonovo and Luni

## Lunigiana, a millenary land



### The route

Start:  
Sarzana.  
Castelnuovo Magra  
9 km,  
Ortonovo 22 km.  
Finish:  
Luni 30 km.

Features:  
history,  
monuments,  
art,  
archaeology.

Valleys:  
Magra.

*An area of great strategic and commercial importance.*

*Once and still the crossroads between Liguria, Tuscany and Emilia, in which important historical and archaeological traces reflect the tormented events of a land that often found itself in the centre of very bitter conflicts.*

The fortress of Sarzanello, that dominates the town from on high, mirrors the history of Sarzana. Referred to as *Castrum Sarzanae* in 963, becoming *Castruccio Castracani* in the fourteenth century, the fortress was extended in the Fifteenth century by Laurence the Magnificent to become a citadel that gave to the current building, its impressive appearance, with its round towers and huge moat. The cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta (XIII century) is home to a crucifix painted by Mastro Guglielmo (1138) and works by Fiasella; the Romanesque parish church of Sant'Andrea is even older: The fourteenth century tower-house of the Buonapartes, forebears of Napoleon, stands out among the noble palaces of the centre. Sarzana is also well-known for the craft of wrought iron, for its antique shops and restorers and for the "spungata", an exquisite cake.

Only a few kilometres separate Sarzana from Castelnuovo Magra. The village, on which the orange flag waves, became the seat of the bishops in the thirteenth century, with the Palazzo desired by the bishops of Luni in 1274 to extend the old castle of Santa Maria; it preserves sections of the town walls and two corner towers. It was here, in 1306 that Dante Alighieri made peace with the bishop of Luni on behalf of the Malaspina family. The parish church of Santa Maria Maddalena contains the "Calvary", attributed to Bruegel the Young. Surrounded by vineyards and olive groves, Castelnuovo is the home of quality wines such as the Vermentino dei Colli di Luni, an excellent accompaniment to the typical "panigacci", and the Rosso dei Colli di Luni. Founded after the year 1000, Ortonovo still preserves amazing remains of its town wall,



but above all it is its circular layout that emphasises the need of the town to defend itself. A Renaissance tower remains of the fortress and has been transformed into a bell-tower.

The Ethnographic Museum, situated in the former olive press of the Colombera, fully restored in 1990, is well-worth a visit. The district of Casano also should not be missed, with its Romanesque parish church of San Martino, in the area of the cemetery. The archaeological site of Luni, dating back to the Roman period, is located near Ortonovo. The Roman port of the old town of Luni still exists today, about two kilometres from the sea. The archaeological site can be reached along a road leading off the Aurelia. The Museum contains one part of the remains, while the site route leads to the theatre, the frescoes house, the mosaics house and the Paleo-Christian Basilica, probably built onto the first bishops' palace of Luni. There is a very well preserved amphitheatre in another secluded area.



### The "panigacci" of Castelnuovo

"Panigacci" is a dish typical of the Lunigiana area. They are made from a simple mixture of water, flour and salt poured into earthenware "testi", previously heated over the fire. "Panigacci" can also be made from chestnut flour, and the ideal, classical condiments are oil and Parmesan cheese, mushroom sauce or pesto, but they are also eaten with cheeses and salami.

### Castelnovese ham

Castelnovese ham, produced by a family of salami producers in Castelnuovo, has an unmistakable taste that is full of flavour and delicate at the same time. The best way to enjoy it is to eat it with a good homemade bread and a glass of full-bodied "Rosso dei Colli di Luni" wine.

### "Vermentino dei Colli di Luni"

The grapes used for this wine are picked in the vineyards of the hills that surround the land of ancient Luni. A product with a fine, dry taste, "Vermentino" is ideal as an aperitif or to accompany fish or vegetables.

### Sarzana "spungata"

The spungata from Sarzana is a short-crust pastry tart with a rich filling made from hazelnuts, almonds, candied peel, walnuts, pine kernels, currents, quince jam, flavoured with white wine, cognac, nutmeg and cinnamon.

**For information:**



**Liguria Regional  
Tourism Promotion Agency**  
Palazzo Ducale - Piazza Matteotti, 9  
16123 Genova  
tel. +39 010 530821  
fax +39 010 5958507  
info.inliguria@liguriainrete.it  
www.turismoinliguria.it



**Apt Riviera dei Fiori - itineraries 1, 2, 3**  
tel. +39 0184 59059  
aptfiori@rivieradeifiori.org  
www.rivieradeifiori.it



**Apt Riviera delle Palme - itineraries 3, 4, 5, 6**  
tel. +39 0182 64711  
aptpalme@inforiviera.it  
www.inforiviera.it



**Apt Genova - itineraries 7, 8, 9**  
tel. +39 010 576791  
aptgenova@apt.genova.it  
www.apt.genova.it



**Apt Tigullio - itineraries 10, 11, 12, 13**  
tel. +39 0185 29291  
infoapt@apptigullio.liguria.it  
www.apptigullio.liguria.it



**Apt Cinque Terre e Golfo dei Poeti - itineraries 13, 14, 15**  
tel. +39 0187 770900  
info@aptcinqueterre.sp.it  
www.aptcinqueterre.sp.it

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**Texts:** Fabrizio Calzia, Sara Caviglia and Simona Finessi

**Photographs:** Enrico Basili, Fabrizio Calzia and Paolo Veirana

**Translation:** InterCultura di Jacqueline Tschiesche

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