

Travel notes



Valle d'Aosta
Vallée d'Aoste

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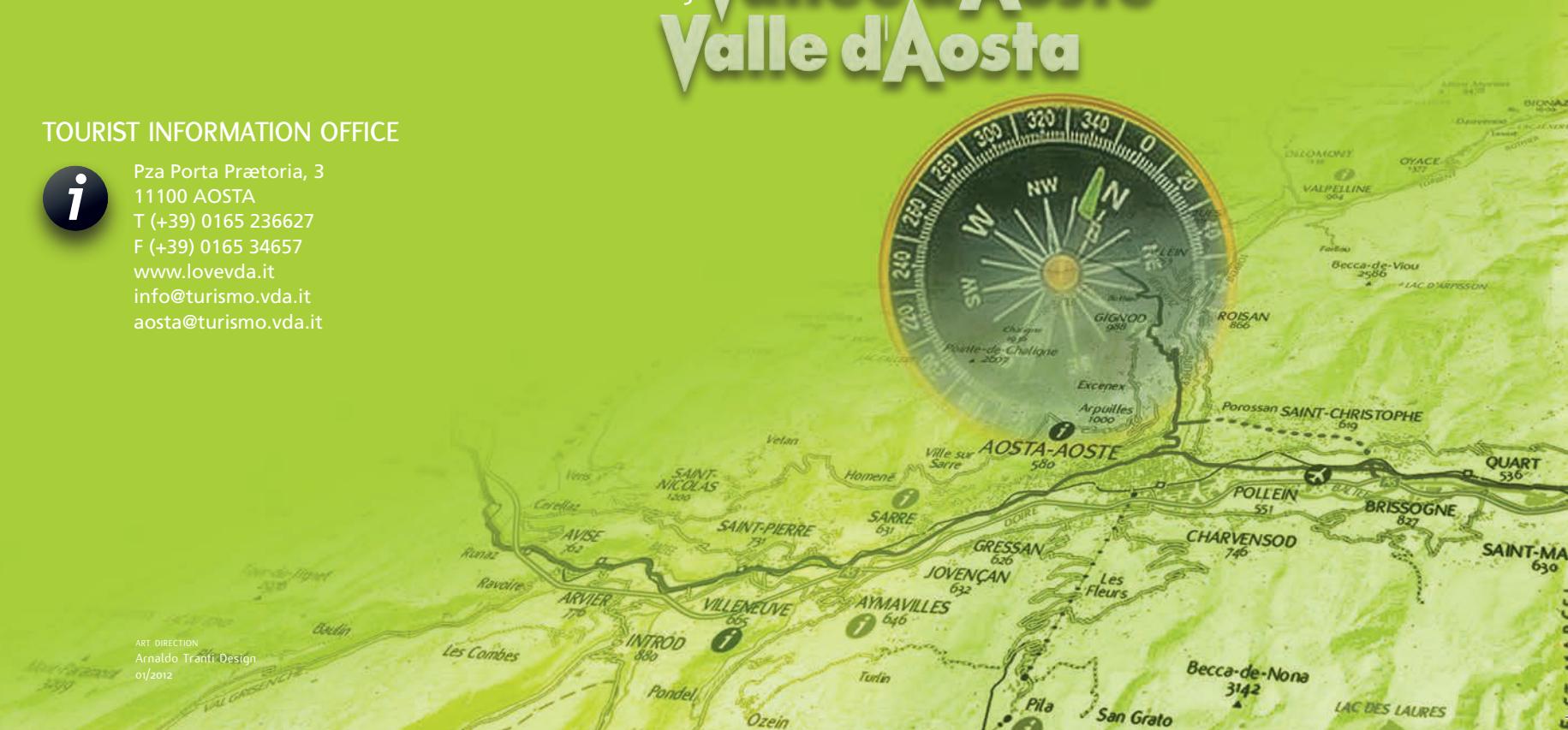
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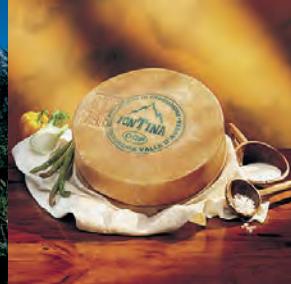


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Distances

Amsterdam: 1050 km	Frankfurt: 626 km	London: 1057 km	Oslo: 2019 km
Basl: 300 km	Geneva: 134 km	Luxembourg: 628 km	Paris: 668 km
Berlin: 1174 km	Genoa: 247 km	Madrid: 1495 km	Rome: 759 km
Bruxelles: 865 km	Hamburg: 1112 km	Milan: 186 km	Stockholm: 2066 km
Cologne: 790 km	Helsinki: 2565 km	Moscow: 2927 km	Stuttgart: 540 km
Copenhagen: 1419 km	Lausanne: 147 km	Naples: 947 km	Turin: 114 km



How to get here

aeroplane

Direct flights from
Fiumicino airport, Rome – "Corrado Gex" Airport, Aosta

AIRVALLEE spa

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Distance from airports:

Milan Malpensa: 168 km
 Turin Caselle: 121 km
 Geneva Cointrin: 151 km
 Bergamo Orio al Serio: 227 km

train

Rail links with
Turin and Milan (via Chivasso)

car

Motorway **A5 Turin – Aosta – Courmayeur**

Milan: 186 km
 Turin: 114 km
 Genoa: 247 km

From France via:

- **Mont Blanc Tunnel** - Chamonix: 57 km
- **Little Saint Bernard Pass** (summer only)

From Switzerland via Martigny via:

- **Great Saint Bernard Tunnel** - Martigny: 76 km
- **Great Saint Bernard Pass** (summer only)

coach

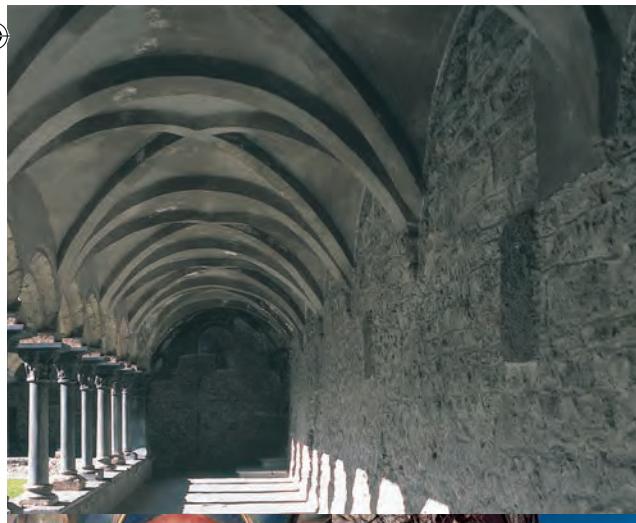
Links with:
Milan (Lampugnano) · **Turin** (Corso Castelfidardo)
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A small Valley with a great history

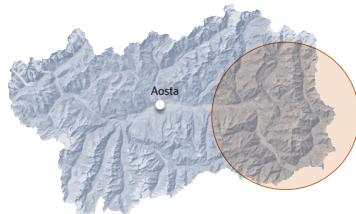
Aosta Valley is Italy's smallest region. Surrounded by **Europe's high peaks** it is made up of a central valley furrowed by the **River Dora** from which branch 13 side valleys hollowed out of glaciers and mountain streams. At present linked to France via the Mont Blanc tunnel and the Little St. Bernard Pass and to Switzerland via the Great St. Bernard Pass and Tunnel, since ancient times it has been an important crossroads in the Western Alps. Settled as far back as prehistoric times, the Valley was later occupied by the **Salassi**, a **Celtic/Ligurian** population defeated by the **Romans** after a century of fighting in the 1st century BC. The Romans occupied the region founding **Augusta Praetoria** in 25 BC. The Valley then passed under the control of the **Burgundians, Longobards and Carolingians** until the establishment of the House of **Savoy**. In 1191 Thomas I of Savoy granted the "**Charter of Franchises**" which recognised political and administrative autonomy and this was maintained until 1770. The Valley had the benefit of political self-government with its own laws and was presided over by the Assembly of States General and from 1536 by the "**Conseil des Commis**", a type of executive government made of 24 members.

Napoleon, during his Italian campaign, crossed the region in 1800 bringing in his train revolutionary ideas, generating sympathy or hate, admiration and fear, legends and stories which still stir feelings in the Valley today. With the constitution of the Reign of Italy the region's centuries-old autonomy was often subject to dispute, at least until 26th February 1948 when the **Special Statute** was definitively granted guaranteeing Aosta Valley special legislative and administrative autonomy and giving both the French and Italian languages equal importance. Today the region's economy is based on tourism, cattle farming, the production of cheese and milk products, DOC wines, electrical energy production and traditional craft activities.

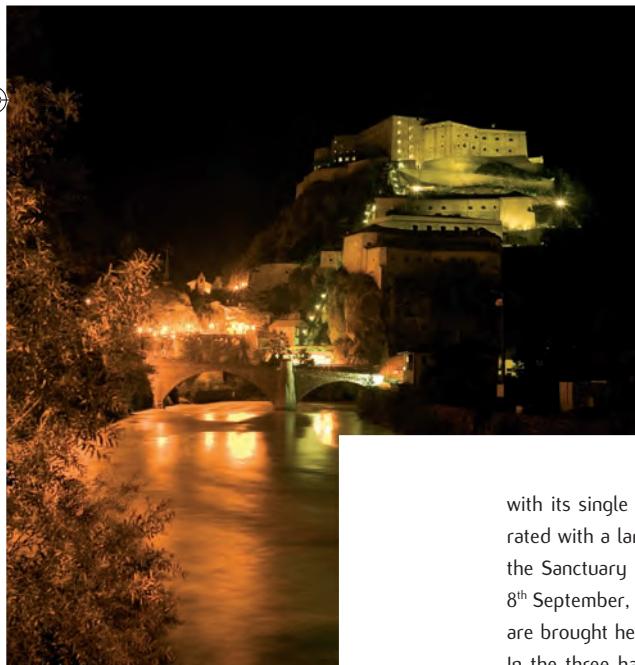




The Gateway to the Valley



- **Pont-Saint-Martin**
- **Perloz**
- **Donnas**
- **Bard**
- **Hône**
- **Pontboset**
- **Champorcher**



• *Bard Fortress*

A journey to the heart of the Alps



Visitors coming from the Po Plain first meet Aosta Valley at **Pont-Saint-Martin** (345 m), where two low spurs mark its entrance giving way to the bed of the Dora Baltea and the access roads.

The village's most famous monument is its spectacular Roman bridge (1st century BC): this impressive construction bears witness to the ancient consular road of the Gauls which passed here and which, until 1831, was the only route for travellers bound for the Valley. A famous historical Carnival is held here featuring costumes and figures of the Roman age: the classic chariot race, the parade with historical figures in costume and the spectacular devil's bonfire where popular tradition has it that the devil built the bridge after losing a challenge with St. Martin. The landscape is dominated by the remains of the ancient castle of the Lords of Bard, dating back to 1200, standing on a hillside at the entrance to Gressoney Valley

and by the Neo-gothic castle of Baraing.

Pont-Saint-Martin offers opportunities to spend pleasant hours in the open air, surrounded by countryside, centuries-old chestnuts and birches at Bousc Daré, or on the banks of the Lys mountain stream. Several excursions are open to you: Suzey (Ivery), with the ruins of an ancient castle, the Nature Reserve of the pond at Holey, and Monte Parassone (1799 m), with its splendid view over the whole of the central valley.

A few kilometres away from Pont-Saint-Martin, going up Gressoney Valley, you meet **Perloz**, a small village at 660 metres altitude, in a sunny position and surrounded by dense chestnut woods and orchards. In the village there are two manor houses with cross windows and coats of arms. Of particular interest is

the early 17th century parish church of San Salvatore with its single aisle made up of three crown vaults. The façade is decorated with a large fresco depicting the Last Judgement. You can also visit the Sanctuary of Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde, built in 1605. Its feast day is 8th September, the nativity of the Virgin Mary, when traditionally children are brought here to be blessed.

In the three hamlets of Marine, Miocha and Derbellé you can see some "Grehe", two-storey buildings once used for drying chestnuts.

During the Second World War the area suffered several reprisals. In 1943 a group of partisans from Perloz carried out the first armed resistance



The Gateway to the Valley

to the regime in Lower Aosta Valley and at Marine, the “Partisan’s Bell” monument was raised in their memory. In this hamlet there are two gastronomic festivals: the Chestnut Festival in Autumn and on the last Sunday in July, the “Fehta dou Pan Ner”, a bread-making competition where brown loaves are baked in an ancient oven.

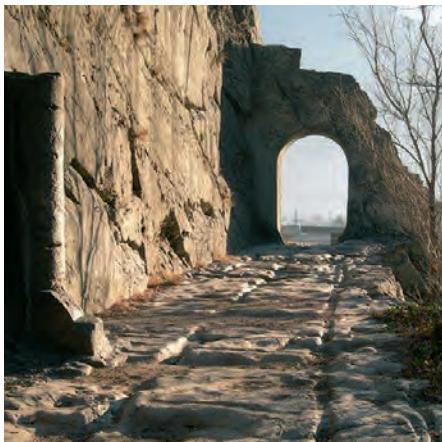
In Héréraz, for over twenty years now, every November there are the regional finals of the traditional “Bataille de tchevre”, battle of the goats, where to the sound of head butts goats fight for the “Tchambis”, hand-carved goat collars in maple and walnut, bearing the typical bell.

Going back to Pont-Saint-Martin and taking the state road towards Aosta, you come upon **Donnas** (322 m), an old village along the axis of the consular road of the Gauls, of which you can still see a 200-metre-long paved stretch and a typical Roman Arch cut out of the rock, which has become the village’s symbol.

The village bears several traces of the Middle Ages, including houses with cross and mullioned windows and an ancient gateway which, still today, allows access to the historic centre. Near the railway station there is the richly-frescoed Parish church of San Pietro in Vincoli, with an impressive 18th century main altar in marble and a 13th century square bell-tower. The village is surrounded by chestnut woods and magnificent terraced vineyards which produce the well-known “Donnas” red DOC wine which you can sample in the “Caves Coopératives de Donnas”. In Autumn there is the “Sagra della castagna”, Chestnut festival, and the “Sagra dell’uva” a festival where numerous local wine-growers compete for the “Grappolo d’oro”, or golden bunch of grapes.

Near the Town Hall there is the Museum of Wine and Wine-growing; original tools used in vineyards and for wine-making are on display and the various phases of grape growing and wine production are illustrated.

There is the traditional date with the Wood-Carvers’ Fair, normally held on the penultimate Sunday of January along the main street of the medieval village. The Friday evening before the Fair, the village cellars are opened to celebrate the “Veillà”, an opportunity to sample traditional local dishes and wines. In summer there are relaxing walks along the Fer mountain stream, whose well-known natural water pools attract canyoning enthusiasts, or go to Cignas wood, the favourite spot of the Count of Cavour when he stayed at Bard during the construction of the Fortress. Continuing towards Aosta you meet the promontory of **Bard** (381 m). Thanks to its strategic position it has always been a bulwark against invasions and so there have been fortifications there since remote times. The medieval village has several historical houses of great architectural interest, some restored, with mullioned or cross windows. The 15th century



• Consular road, Donnas



The Gateway to the Valley

"Casa Challant" is of particular interest, featuring traces of fresco on the façade and architectonic details similar to those in Issogne Castle. The fortress, completed by King Charles Albert in 1838, is the most formidable example of military architecture in Aosta Valley and was built on the same site of the early fortifications of the Salassi, then the Romans, and where since 1034 there stood the castle of the Lords of Bard, powerful feudal vassals of the House of Savoy until 1242, when the fief was definitively confiscated by the Count of Savoy who took over direct control. In 1800 during Napoleon's Italian campaign the ancient castle was the seat of a long resistance thus obliging the French general to slow down his march towards Marengo. In the end when the castle was forced to surrender Napoleon ordered it to be razed to the ground. After recent detailed restoration it has become a leading cultural centre housing the Museum of the Alps and other cultural and museum spaces, as well as hosting temporary and permanent exhibitions.

Of particular interest is the geo-site facing the village, characterised by the "giants' cauldrons", caverns shaped in the rock by the erosive force of the sub-glacial waters. In this zone you can also see Iron Age rock carvings and the "ladies' slide", a rubbing probably linked to an ancient propitiatory rite.

Two ancient paths leading to Albard of Bard and Albard of Donnas allow you to observe the village and fortress from unusual viewpoints. The interesting "Barmet path" leads to six "Barmet", traditional constructions below the rocks exploiting the shelter offered by the enormous rocks at Bard, Donnas and Perloz.

Not to be missed are traditional events such as the patronal festival on 15th August with historical pageant, the "Marché au Fort", market of traditional local products, and Christmas Eve with the living

Crib and the chance to visit the private cellars in the village's tiny streets. At Bard you cross a humpback bridge to reach **Hône** (364 m), the start of the wild **Champorcher Valley**. Going up you encounter **Pontboset** (780 m), a centuries-old village surrounded by chestnut woods. From here there are pleasant excursions to discover the beauties of nature such as the Gorge of Ratus, the "giants' cauldrons" along the course of the Ayasse mountain stream, the six-bridges walk which crosses three mountain streams, the walk towards the village of Barmelle, reached by following a old path with stone steps, as well as the walk towards the



- *Bard Fortress
Museum of the Alps*



The Gateway to the Valley

Sanctuary of Retempio. The waters of the Ayasse mountain stream are ideal for kayak enthusiasts.

At the top of the valley is **Champorcher** (1427 m). The houses sprang up around the castle of the ancient local lords – only a crenellated tower remains of the castle. Around 1400, on the ruins of the castle, the church of San Nicola was built. Inside there are precious wooden altars richly decorated in gold. Just after the church, a gentle walk takes you towards a panoramic viewpoint over the waterfalls created by the Ayasse mountain stream as it plunges into the gorge below.

In the 19th century the valley was a favourite spot with King Victor Emanuel II who owned a hunting reserve at Dondena. From here the valley opens majestically on to a vast punch bowl dominated by the Rosa dei Banchi (3164 m) and ending with Lake Miserin, one of the most attractive lakes in the Graian Alps. Facing the Lake is the Sanctuary of Notre-Dame des Neiges, an ancient oratory, reached by a procession every year on 5th August. In the summer there are several events featuring local traditions:

during “Artigiani al lavoro” old traditions and trades are revived whilst during the “Festa del pane nero” you see the brown rye bread being made as well as dishes of yesteryear being prepared using maize flour or dried chestnuts, all cooked in the village ovens. The bread is then stored on special wooden racks called “ratelè” and when dry can be cut using a typical tool called “Copapan”. At Chardonney pay a visit to the Eco-Museum of hemp, whilst at the “Lou Dzeut” Co-operative admire the hand-made hemp cloth woven on a wooden loom. Ideal for excursions, Champorcher offers beautiful walks in the Mont Avic Nature Park, the only regional Valdaostan park, or in the valley of Alleigne, with its wealth of exceptional alpine flora. High Path, number 2 begins at Dondena; this excursion trail winds at various altitudes and crossing the Gran Paradiso National Park leads to Courmayeur.

In winter the area of Champorcher, with its modern ski-lift facilities, offers downhill skiing tracks spreading for 21 kilometres over the slopes of Cimetta Rossa, a panoramic balcony over the basin of Dondena, and on the peaks of Rosa dei Banchi (3164 m) and Mont Glacier (3185 m). For cross-country skiing enthusiasts there is an easy hillside track and a longer one in the village. Ski-tourers have a wealth of paths to choose from.

- Roman bridge
Pont-Saint-Martin
- Champorcher





Monte Rosa



- **Lillianes**
- **Fontainemore**
- **Issime**
- **Gaby**
- **Gressoney-Saint-Jean**
- **Gressoney-La-Trinité**



- *Village of Biel
Gressoney-La-Trinité*

Discovering the Walser culture and nature

ressoney Valley is the first valley you meet when coming from the Po Plain to Aosta Valley. It begins at Pont-Saint-Martin and penetrates a narrow corridor which opens before Monte Rosa, a spectacular mountain with 28 peaks over 4,000 metres high, the natural frontier with Switzerland.

The valley was also called "Krämertal" or "valley of merchants" because of the trading activity carried out by the "Walser", its ancient inhabitants. The "Walser" were a population of Germanic origin, from nearby Valais, who came to live on the southern side of Monte Rosa during the 11th and 12th centuries. They founded several villages including Gressoney, Issime and Niel, where you can still see "stadel", wooden edifices balanced on wooden "mushrooms" with round stone caps. One of the oldest stadel, dated 1547, can be seen in Gressoney-Saint-Jean, in the hamlet of Greschmatto, and used to house the law courts and prison.

Thanks to the frequent trading links with their native land, over the centuries the Walser have kept their own traditions; for example the splendid ladies' costumes with the precious gold filigree bonnet worn on special occasions, and the Alemannic dialect still spoken by part of the population.

Going up the valley, the first village you meet is **Lillianes** (665 m). An attractive 4-arched medieval bridge stands out in the landscape. This leads to the church of San Rocco, with its 15th century stone bell-tower. Surrounded by wide, dense

chestnut woods, Lillianes is known as the chestnut village and is its main Valdaostan producer. Every year, on the last Sunday in October, the region's oldest chestnut festival is held here. There are several excursions if you want to discover some of nature's curious aspects: Bec Fourà (1830 m), with its "pierced" peak, and Plan des Sorcières (1800 m), where you can see evidence of ancient witchcraft rites.

Among the events to remember is one held on 26th December when "Rouotta" is played, an ancient game of bowls where the jack bears the curious name of "cochon" (pig).



Monte Rosa

Continuing upwards you reach **Fontainemore** (760 m). There are two theories as to the origin of its name which probably comes from an ancient fountain, the "Fontaine de Saint-Maur". One version states that the water became phosphorescent from the presence of luminous insects; the other derives the name of this source to "Fontaine de la mort" due to the presence of arsenic in its waters. Entering the village you can see the ancient medieval humpback bridge with its single 22-metre arch. This leads to the parish church of Sant'Antonio. Inside, as well as carved wooden choir stalls, there is a valuable 17th century sculpted wooden portal. The architectural group of the church and bridge, straddling the Lys mountain stream in this particularly turbulent point, together with the majestic backdrop of the mountains, make this an impressive picture. If you want to enter the rural spirit stop at Pra-du-Sas and visit the "Ecomuseum della media montagna" where traditional objects and furniture are on display. Just past the village there are the "Gouffres de Guillemore", a very deep gorge excavated by the Lys mountain stream, with a breathtaking drop. Going up from Colombit you reach the **Mont-Mars Nature Reserve**, with its wealth of lakes and peat-bogs. At Capoluogo visit the Reserve's Visitors Centre and look at the reproductions of natural habitats, photographs and interactive features. A path crosses this area along which, every five years, there is a votive Procession to the Black Madonna of the Sanctuary of Oropa.

From Fontainemore there are excursions for all levels and, for canyoning enthusiasts the Pacoulla mountain stream offers unforgettable descents. Still going up Gressoney Valley, on a plain, between meadows and woods you come upon **Issime** (953 m), "Eischeme" in the Walser dialect, the first Walser centre, where they still speak a language with clear Germanic roots, called "toitschu". In the village centre the parish church of San Giacomo Maggiore (16th century) is famous for the fresco of the Last Judgement on its façade. Opposite the church there are fifteen small chapels inside which have been painted the Mysteries of Jesus, whilst within there is the interesting 17th century Baroque main altar and the Museum of Sacred Art.

During the winter Issime combines a peaceful stay with the proximity of large skiing resorts, whilst in summer it's an ideal starting point for several interesting excursions, including the one to the narrow valley of San Grato with its votive chapel dedicated to Santa Margherita. The frescoes inside narrate the legend of the valley being populated by 6666 demons,



- Queen Margherita of Savoy in Gressoney
- Walser costumes

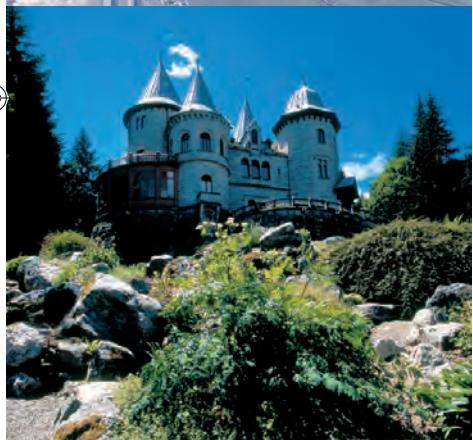


Monte Rosa

liberated thanks to the saint's intercession.

After Issime and then the Sanctuary of Voury dedicated to the Madonna delle Grazie with its impressive Via Crucis, made up of triangular pillars above the Sanctuary, you arrive at the 1047 metres of **Gaby**, a franco-provençal linguistic island within the Walser territory and a favourite spot of Carducci. As almost everywhere else in the valley, there is a flourishing handicraft production; this village is well-known for the making of cloth slippers called "sock". From the village you can go up to the typical Walser village of Niel, and a short walk leads to the splendid waterfalls with their 28-metre drop. Continuing upward the road reaches **Gressoney-Saint-Jean** (1385 m), a favourite tourist resort of Queen Margherita of Savoy who spent her summer holidays here. The village is on a vast plain full of vegetation, surrounded by dense woods facing Monte Rosa and the Lys glacier which are reflected in the waters of the small Gover Lake, just outside the centre of the village.

The historical centre is characteristic; some perfectly preserved Walser houses are grouped around the church of San Giovanni Battista, dated 1515, with its attractive bell-tower crowned with a copper cusp. Outside the church you can see the Via Crucis featuring frescoes by a "gressonaro" artist. Of particular interest is Villa Margherita (housing the Town Hall), with its wealth of spires, balustrades and heavy grey granite balconies. Built at the end of the 19th century by an old local family, it often gave hospitality to Queen Margherita of Savoy. Just a few metres from Villa Margherita there is the "Alpenfaunamuseum", the Beck Peccoz alpine natural history museum, which houses a rare and rich collection of hunting trophies, ancient weapons, pictures, books and publications concerning mountain wild life. Surrounded by woods in the "Belvedere" panoramic area stands the Savoy Castle, built by King Humbert I for Queen Margherita and finished in 1904. The queen spent her summer holidays here until 1925. The castle is made up of a central nucleus to with 5 attached small cuspidate towers. The Queen's apartments occupy the sunniest position: from the window of the small lounge, in the northern tower there is a magnificent view of Monte Rosa and the whole valley. At the foot of the castle a botanical garden has been created with alpine flowers which in summer are at their best. Lovers of gastronomic specialities can try, in the numerous local restaurants, the excellent butter and "toma di Gressoney", a tasty cheese often used to flavour polenta. In summer, in Gressoney you can choose between gentle walks, trips to high mountain pastures and mountain huts, mountain excursions and trekking, thanks to some ski-lifts still operating during the summer. There are also equipped mountain trails, practice walls, a 9-hole golf course, sportfishing and horse-riding.



• *Savoy Castle
Gressoney-Saint-Jean*



Monte Rosa

You mustn't miss the traditional events: on 15th August there is the Festival of the Mountain Guides and on 24th June the patronal feast of San Giovanni. On the evening of the 23rd there is the ritual lighting of bonfires whilst on the following day after Mass there is the procession with all the Gressoney villagers wearing the typical Walser costume.

During the winter Gressoney-Saint-Jean offers snow-shoeing, ice-climbing, skiing tracks for cross-country skiers as well as a 23-kilometre track which winds through woods with magnificent views of the glaciers. The "Monterosalau", an international cross-country skiing competition, is a yearly event. For downhill skiing, Weismatten offers some high-level tracks as well as a snow park for children.

The valley's topmost village is **Gressoney-La-Trinité** (1627 m). In the centre stands the parish church of Santissima Trinità, dating back to 1671, and built on the foundations of a 15th century building. The bell-tower has a particular onion-shaped cusp, crowned by a copper ball and cross. Visit the adjacent Cemetery to look at the beautiful old hand-made tomb stones, the work of local sculptors and stone masons.

A starting point for ascents to the Monte Rosa peaks as well as a well-equipped winter sports resort, Gressoney is situated at the heart of the Monterosa Ski area, which with its 180 kilometres of tracks link it to Ayas Valley to the west and the Piedmontese resort of Alagna to the east. Staffal, at the top of the Valley, is the gateway to more exciting off-piste

descents and ski touring, from the 4554 metres of the Regina Margherita mountain hut, Europe's highest mountain hut, to the 4559 metres of Punta Gnifetti. In the summer Monte Rosa is the ideal backdrop both for short walks as well multiple-day trekking such as High Path, number 1, an excursion itinerary which winding at high altitude links Gressoney to Courmayeur, the Tour del Monte Rosa crossing Italy and Switzerland in a circle around Monte Rosa, and the Grande Sentiero Walser which retraces the path followed by the Walser populations during their migration. There is also Via Alpina, an international excursion itinerary which covers the whole alpine chain and which in one of its variants - the blue itinerary - descends the whole of Gressoney Valley to Verrès and continues on to the Mont-Avìc Park area.



• Village of Alpenzù
Gressoney-Saint-Jean



Monte Rosa



- **Arnad** • **Issogne**
- **Verrès** • **Champdepraz**
- **Montjovet**
- **Challand-Saint-Victor**
- **Challand-Saint-Anselme**
- **Brusson** • **Ayas**



• *Issogne Castle*

An itinerary around castles and traditional architecture

T

his itinerary begins at **Arnad** (375 m), a small village surrounded by vineyards and chestnut woods and rendered famous by the DOC wine it shares with Montjovet, and its unique lard. This tasty and fragrant delicacy bears the DOP label; seasoned with salt, spices and mountain herbs, it is a must on the board of typical Valdaostan starters, often accompanied by warm buttered chestnuts or with brown bread and topped with honey. For the last thirty years, on the last Sunday in August, the "Fehta dou lard" has been held, an opportunity for producers to display and guests to taste the lard prepared by the family. At the entrance to the village stands the interesting parish church of San Martino, a small Romanesque jewel whose façade dates back to the late 15th century. Inside the church, the left-hand nave loft is decorated with a cycle of late Gothic frescoes. Behind the village, at a distance of 3 kilometres and hidden in the chestnut woods, is the narrow valley of Machaby. Here you'll find the Sanctuary of the Madonna delle Nevi (easily reached on foot) whose origins go back far in time. In the square in front there are some statues sculpted in pot stone.

Dating back to the Middle Ages, on the other hand, is the stone bridge of Echalod, and the three castles watching over the village from the surrounding hillside. Just outside the village there are practice rock faces, very popular with free-climbing enthusiasts. Going towards Aosta on your left is the village of **Issogne** (387 m) with the castle, built in its present aspect at the end of the 15th century by Prior Giorgio di Challant. On the outside it looks more like a lord's manor house than a castle as it is completely without defence elements. Particularly noteworthy are: its octagonal fountain with wrought-iron pomegranate tree, the seven lunettes, painted frescoes under the portico of the courtyard, depicting scenes of life and crafts of the time, the magnificent baronial hall with its painted walls and the chapel.

Opposite Issogne, crossing the River Dora, you reach **Verrès** (391 m), dominated by an imposing castle built in the second half of the 14th century by Ibleto di Challant. This is an enormous stone cube, each side measuring 30 metres, refined by mullioned windows, arched doorways, the monumental flight of stairs and its colossal fireplaces. At Carnival time the castle relives the splendour of the noble house of Challant, the chief



Monte Rosa

figure being Countess Caterina di Challant surrounded by counts, armed guards and captains all in period costume. For four days there are balls, festive historical pageants and the theatrical drama "A chess game" by Giuseppe Giacosa. Visit the 11th century collegiate church of Saint-Gilles in the centre of the village, as well as the attached parish church of Sant'Egidio, built on a pre-existing Romanesque church.

You mustn't miss the "Mercatino verreziese dello scambio e dell'occasione", selling old and new, held every Sunday from May to September. In a particularly picturesque spot lies the "Borna di Laou" arboretum, with scenic small squares and signs indicating the botanical name of the trees.

Not far from Verrès there is **Champdepraz** (523 m) home to the **Mont Avic Nature Reserve**, the only Valdaostan regional park, famous for its wide variety of flowers, its many lakes and the largest forest of mountain pines (*pinus uncinata*) in the Alps. The Park was set up in 1989 to preserve the natural resources in the valley of the Chalamy mountain stream, a canyoning paradise. At Covarey there is the Park's Visitors Centre and a natural

history museum describing rocky habitats, wetlands and the Park's forests, attracting visitors with its interactive features.

The old village of **Montjovet** (402 m) strategically placed along the Roman way of the Gauls is dominated by the 11th century castle of Saint-Germain, of which you can still see an attractive tower and some remains of the bailey. Returning to Verrès go up the wide and sunny Ayas Valley, which climbs for 32 kilometres following the edge of the Evançon mountain stream. The first village is **Challand-Saint-Victor** (765 m) where you can see the remains of the 10th century Villa Castle, whose area is inserted within the Villa lake reserve, a

low-mountain, lacustrine-peat basin characterised by a sharp contrast between the marsh environment of the lake and the dry surrounding area. The Evançon mountain stream runs narrowly between high rock faces creating a picturesque waterfall at Isollaz.

On reaching an altitude of 1000 metres you'll see the Sanctuary of Sant'Anna which announces the village of **Challand-Saint-Anselme** at 1036 metres. At Ruvère there is the Mill; used in the past for grinding grain and making walnut oil it has been completely restored and now houses displays and exhibitions. A particularly beautiful car drive, across **Col Tzecore** (1607 m),



- Park's Visitors' Centre
- Mont Avic Natural Park



Monte Rosa

reaches first **Emarèse** and then descends to Saint-Vincent.

For handicraft lovers on the first Sunday in August there is the "Travail di veillâ", an exhibition-fair of typical Valdaostan craftwork.

The plain of Arcesaz marks the beginning of the village of **Brusson** (1338 m). You immediately notice the ruins of Graines Castle built on top of a rocky spur. The castle is a significant example of primitive Romanesque architecture, with tower, chapel and wide bailey. The village, surrounded by meadows and conifer forests, enjoys a mid climate, thanks to a sunny exposure, and is particularly popular with family holiday-makers. The mountainside, with its wealth of springs and lakes, is within easy walking distance. The banks of the artificial lake of Völlon have excellent facilities, ideal if you want a relaxing day. In the winter Brusson is perfect for cross-country skiing enthusiasts and hosts important international competitions. There are 30 kilometres of tracks of varying difficulty which wind through the village and 15 kilometres higher up, at Estoul, there are the ski-lifts of the Palasinaz skiing area.

- *Graines Castle, Brusson*
- *Verrès Castle*



Ayas is the last village of the ancient valley of the Challant family, situated in a splendid punch bowl dominated by Monte Rosa. The mountain chain, on the Swiss border, extending from Théodule Pass to the Pass of Monte Moro in Valle Anzasca, includes a number of 4,000-metre peaks. Among the most famous are Breithorn (4165 m), Polluce (4092 m), Castore (4228 m), eastern Lyskamm (4527 m) and western Lyskamm (4480 m).

Among the principal glaciers

there is Verra glacier, the source of the Evançon mountain stream.

Ayas is not one specific village but a number of smaller villages, the most well-known being Antagnod, Lignod, Champoluc, Frachey, Saint-Jacques and Crest.

Antagnod is at 1710 metres altitude in an attractive scenic position. The late 15th century parish church of San Martino, with its unusual bulb bell-tower is of particular interest. Inside the church you can admire a precious painted and gilded Baroque altar in carved wood, with a wealth of statues, the portal and the magnificently-sculpted choir stalls. Also



Monte Rosa

worth visiting is the parish museum of sacred art set up in the cemetery chapel. In the historical centre there are some typical buildings, including the Maison Fournier, a house with a long wooden balcony side by side with a cylindrical stepped tower which has a permanent exhibition of traditional Valdaostan craftwork. In winter several easily-reached downhill tracks and a well-equipped play park for children make this village ideal for families and sun worshippers.

Following the panoramic road which crosses Antagnod and then passing on the other side of the Evançon and arriving at Champoluc you enter the reign of the "Rascard", typical wooden constructions placed on stone or wood mushroom-shaped supports which keep them raised from the lower part in masonry.

Champoluc (1568 m) is in a wide and sunny punch bowl, characterised by the glaciers in the background closing the valley. It is Ayas Valley's most famous tourist resort, popular with holidaymakers both in summer and winter. With the Crest telecabin and the Fracheby chair lift you can reach

the Monterosa Ski skiing area, 180 kilometres of tracks for all levels of skiers, served by modern ski lifts which, across the Bettalforca Col, are linked with nearby Gressoney Valley and with Valsesia (Alagna). For the more demanding athletes, Champoluc offers itineraries for both off-piste and ski-touring. Here, in fact, every two years the Mezzalama Trophy is held, a ski-touring race which, leaving from Cervinia, crosses Monte Rosa rising several times over

4.000 metres, until you reach Gressoney-La-Trinité.

In summer Champoluc offers several leisure activities, from free-climbing to horse-riding, from easy walks towards small lakes and typical architectural Walser villages, like Cunéaz and Mascognaz, to trekking towards the passes with the neighbouring valleys of Gressoney and Valtournenche. Along the way you'll often come across votive chapels, the whole territory is literally scattered with them. Built in past centuries by the inhabitants of the various villages some are large and ornate with frescoes, others smaller and more linear. All are expressions of a more



- *Blu Lake*
- *Monte Rosa*



Monte Rosa

“popular” faith, linked to the need for protection and to ward off misfortune and catastrophe. Particular attractive and interesting is the Via Crucis made of slabs of sculpted “lose” or slate; this begins above the sanctuary of Barmasc and goes to the peak of Monte Zerbion where there is a 7-metre-high statue of the Madonna. Barmasc is also the starting point for a pretty walk coasting the “ru” Courtod. This is the region’s longest “ru”, built at the beginning of the 15th century to carry water from the glacier of Monte Rosa to the dry hillsides of Saint-Vincent. Aosta Valley has a wealth of “ru”. These are irrigation canals built between the 13th and 15th centuries to bring water to farming areas, above all to the southerly-exposed mountainside. Many “ru” are still in use, even if they are progressively becoming piped. Some, fortunately, are still visible and can be followed on foot, by mountain bike or on a horse along easy paths.

It must not be forgotten that this area is famous for its handmade “Sabots”, typical wooden clogs used by Valdaostans all the year round as

they always keep feet warm and dry. Since remote times whole families have dedicated themselves to their production, above all during the winter.

Continuing beyond Champoluc the road finishes at **Saint Jacques** (1670 m). The houses of the old village are grouped around the small church. Mule tracks begin here for some mountain huts including Mezzalama, the starting point for climbing some of Monte Rosa’s most important peaks.

If you want to return to the bottom of the valley a different way, go back down as far as **Brusson** and then take the panoramic road on the right which rises to **Col de Joux** (1640 m) and then descends

to Saint-Vincent. At the col you can stop for lunch in one of the local restaurants or take a walk in the woods.



• Skiing area Antagnod





The Matterhorn



- **Saint-Vincent**
- **Châtillon** • **Pontey**
- **Antey-Saint-André**
- **La Magdeleine**
- **Torgnon** • **Chamois**
- **Valtournenche**
- **Breuil-Cervinia**

Prestige and elegance in a snow paradise

In a hillside, in a punch bowl sheltered from the wind,

Saint-Vincent (575 m) presents important historical remains.

There are the imposing ruins of the Roman bridge - a bearing wall is left giving an idea of its ancient majesty, and the Roman traces in the basement of the church of San Vincenzo. The Romanesque parish church, built by Benedictine monks in the 11th century, has a particularly interesting crypt with decorated capitals and a museum of sacred art where rare and precious objects are on display.

This is a town with a modern look which enjoyed a period of great celebrity at the beginning of the 1900s when the "Fons Salutis" was in full activity; its waters are still taken today for their therapeutic properties. Since 1947 Saint-Vincent owes its fame to the Casino, one of the few authorised in Italy. The casino promotes major events such as the "Premio

Saint-Vincent" for journalism, the "Premio **Saint-Vincent**" for TV fiction and the "Premio Internazionale Donna dell'Anno" for the Woman of the Year.

At Carnival time children become all important in Saint-Vincent: a child Mayor together with an "ad hoc" Council and Aldermen, symbolically assume the

demanding task of "running" the town. During the summer you can take short walks between the various villages on the nearby hillsides and observe mountain life at first hand, or else climb to **Col de Joux** (1640 m) following one of the region's most scenic roads, your gaze sweeping over the central valley. The Col is ideal for walks, horse-riding or mountain-bike trips. In winter there is a small skiing resort with a modern snow park ideal for those who want to spend a pleasant day with the family or go snow shoeing.

Next to Saint-Vincent is **Châtillon** (549 m), almost at the centre of Aosta Valley. It extends over a wide basin on the two sides of the Dora Baltea and the Marmore mountain stream, with Monte Zerbion (2720 m) to the north and Barbeston (2483 m) to the south.

The centre has a nucleus of 16th and 17th century houses. In some villages you can still see well-preserved rural houses and several medieval towers



- *Saint-Vincent*
- *Casino de la Vallée*



The Matterhorn

(Conoz, Néran, La Tour). The original monumental Roman bridge spans the Marmore mountain stream with its single 15-metre arch. Three castles mark the Châtillon landscape: Passerin d'Entrèves Castle and Baron Gambaro Castle, immersed in large parks with monumental centuries-old trees, and Ussel Castle on the other side of the Dora. Built by Ebalo di Challant in 1350, this is an example of feudal military Valdaostan architecture and has been carefully restored and is at present an exhibition area.

The town is built around the entrance to **Valtournenche** which rises to the foot of the Matterhorn, on the border with Switzerland. The Matterhorn is the symbol of Valtournenche and protagonist of this valley's history and tourist development. The first village you meet is **Antey-Saint-André** (1080 m) in a sunny position sheltered from the wind. From Antey there is a beautiful view of the Matterhorn which, with its majestic size, appears wedged between the valley walls, a sight which struck the imagination of intrepid travellers as far back as the 19th century. You can see the parish church of Sant'Andrea with an attractive Romanesque bell-tower and



- *Torgnon*

the remains of a tower of Cly Castle. From Grand Moulin there are the remains of the "ru du pan perdu", an ancient 16th century aqueduct, its majestic arches leaning on the mountain, which carried water from the Marmore mountain stream towards the fields of the middle valley.

In summer try the itineraries on foot or by mountain bike. Attractive paths lead to Torgnon, Chamois and La Magdeleine passing old picturesque villages and small pretty churches. Antey also has open air sports facilities, an adventure park with aerial sportive-pleasure courses for children and adults and a modern climbing practice wall. You mustn't



The Great Saint Bernard

huts and bivouacs. An alternative route for the Valley of the Great St. Bernard could be the panoramic road which from Valpelline rises up towards Doues and Allein and then goes to Étroubles. **Doues** (1176 m) is a small village sited on a wide moraine terrace facing Valpelline from which you can reach the basin of By in the high valley of Ollomont. At **Allein** (1253 m) it's worth visiting the carnival museum of the "Coumba Frèide" set up in Maison Ayez, a 15th century house-monument with some valuable windows in stone worked with the characteristic upturned keel motif. This Carnival is one of the most picturesque: the typical costumes, "le landzette", are very colourful and decorated with embroidery and small mirrors, most probably inspired by the uniforms of Napoleon's soldiers who crossed the Great St. Bernard Pass in May 1800. In September there is the "Feta di Trifolle", the potato festival, an opportunity to taste dishes made exclusively with this flavoursome tuber. Going back to State Road 27 towards the Col of the Great St. Bernard and the frontier with Switzerland, the first village you meet is **Gignod** (988 m), characterised by its picturesque church with gothic portal. In the village every August is held the "Sagra del Teteun", featuring a local speciality: salted and spiced cow's udder served in slices. At Arsenières there is a 9-hole golf course, on a natural slope where golf lovers can practice in splendid scenic surroundings.

Gignod rises on the trace of the ancient Via Francigena, recently restored for excursionists who wish to follow the ancient paths once followed by the Romans and Medieval pilgrims on their way to Rome. Punta Chaline (2607 m), which can be reached from Buthier (1370 m), is very popular with excursionists and lovers of ski-touring.

Continuing upwards towards the Great St. Bernard, at 1270 metres you meet **Étroubles**. This medieval village is an open air museum; walking along the small streets you can admire sculptures, frescos and paintings by world famous artists. In summer the "Veillà" is not to be missed, a revival of ancient traditions and crafts with tasting of local dishes. A few kilometres from the frontier you pass **Saint-Oyen** (1373 m), a small village with beautiful houses in Valdaostan style, completely restored and splendid in the summer with their balconies full of flowers. At the foot of the main



- "Coumba Frèide" Carnival
- "La Vapeleasantse"



The Great Saint Bernard

village stands Château Verdun, the attractive hostelry of the canons of the Great St. Bernard and the Regina Pacis convent. Every first Sunday in August Saint-Oyen hosts the "Jambon alla brace" Festival, featuring slightly smoked ham cooked over embers on enormous spits, continually basted with a special sauce. It's also worth seeing the ancient herbals at the local library and the nearby "gîte des chevreuils", an enclosed area where you can admire deer and roe-deer. In winter Saint-Oyen becomes a paradise for children with its Snow park and for cross-country skiing lovers there is an 18-kilometre track linking the three villages of the upper valley. The last village on the Italian side is **Saint-Rhémy-en-Bosses** (1632 m) famous for its delicious DOP raw ham, the "Vallée d'Aoste Jambon de Bosses", a real gastronomic rarity celebrated each year on the second Sunday in July with a big festival.

In winter an attractive skiing area covers the sunny slopes of Testa di Crévacol with 22 kilometres of tracks for all levels. This zone is particularly popular with lovers of ski touring as there is a wide choice of itineraries

which can also be followed in summer on foot or by mountain bike, when you can observe the flowers and animals. Among the interesting treks is the one from Colle del Malatrà, along the course of High Path number 1, as well as the excursions to the Citrin and Serena Cols.

At Saint-Rhémy-en-Bosses the motorway link leading to the International Great St. Bernard Tunnel (open all the year round) begins. Inaugurated in 1964, it is 5854 metres long, unites Italy and Switzerland and was the first traffic tunnel through the Alps.

Before entering the village, turn right and take the road which in 10 kilometres leads to the Great St. Bernard Pass (2473 m). The Pass, has had, since ancient times, a vital role in relations

between the north and south of Europe. The Celts, the Romans, the troops of the Emperor Charlemagne and Frederick Barbarossa all passed here. The most famous crossing, however, was that of Napoleon, which took place in May 1800. Near the pass you can admire the century-old statue of St. Bernard (patron saint of mountain climbers), a small mountain lake, the Plan de Jupiter archaeological area and, crossing the Swiss frontier for a few metres, the famous hospice founded just after the year 1000 where St. Bernard dogs are raised and where you can visit an interesting museum.



• Great Saint Bernard lake.



Mont Blanc



- **La Salle**
- **Morgex**
- **La Thuile**

Among nature's 1000 colours

M

Mont Blanc, Europe's highest mountain, marks the boundary with France and with its 50-kilometre-long bastion dominates the upper part of Aosta Valley, offering visitors a matchless view.

The orographic left side of the valley, exposed to the north, is covered with conifer woods and there is the magnificent waterfall of the Lentenay mountain stream; whilst on the sunny south side, there is a wide hillside area covered with Europe's highest vineyards whose grapes produce the famous DOC white wine "Blanc de Morgex et de La Salle".

La Salle (1001 m) is the entry point of the Mont Blanc Valley. On a slope, among vineyards and orchards it enjoys a sunny exposure. The village has been almost completely restructured respecting the pre-existing architecture. From La Salle there is an exceptional view of the Mont Blanc chain in an extremely scenic natural context. The parish church of San

Cassiano with an attractive Romanesque mulioned bell-tower, completely rebuilt at the end of the 19th century, houses a small museum of sacred art. Of particular interest is the old Maison Gerbollier, seat of summer concerts and events. Just outside La Salle on the hillside, in a slightly raised zone there is the cylindrical tower of Châtelard Castle (13th century). You must also visit the Ethnographic Museum of Cheverel. In the area near the small dam lies the "Marais" wetland area, a haven for migratory birds such as the purple heron and grey heron.

The surrounding areas offer many walks and excursions with spectacular views. Sports lovers can practice horse riding, tennis, rafting and mountain bike. In winter there are several ski touring itineraries as well as snow shoe excursions.

On the road to Courmayeur stands **Morgex**.

This old town is sited in a wide flat area at 923 metres altitude, surrounded by a lovely circle of mountains including the Grivola, Mont Crammont and entirely crossed by the course of the River Dora on which lovers of rafting and canoe try their skills. In the town you can still see the remains of towers and fortified manor houses including the square-shaped Tour d'Archet,



- *Châtelard Castle,
La Salle*



Mont Blanc

10th-11th century, which in the past hosted the Count of Savoy when he came to Aosta Valley for the General Audiences. The parish church is dedicated to Santa Maria Assunta and inside there is a noteworthy Baroque altar and valuable frescoes. Also of note is the bell-tower with its copper cupola. The mountain lakes of Arpy, Pietra Rossa and Licony are only some of the many destinations for walks and excursions.

From Morgex **Colle San Carlo** (1971 m) is easily reached by following a road which, through magnificent woods, leads to Arpy, a tiny hamlet with a choice of cross-country skiing tracks for all levels of skier. Just before the Col, at the picnic area, a 15-minute walk takes you to Tête d'Arpy (2011 m), one of the most beautiful panoramic views of the Mont Blanc chain. Continuing along the road you reach La Thuile, in a splendid and vivid scenario.

La Thuile is situated at 1441 metres altitude in a wide basin protected by dense forests and dominated by the imposing presence of Rutor and its glacier, on the road which, via the Little St. Bernard Pass, leads to France.

It has always been an important strategic point, the village was a stopping place on the Roman road of the Gauls and in the 17th and 18th centuries was often sacked by passing French troops.

At the end of the 1920s this small village became a mining town for the extraction of coal and now is a well-known summer and winter holiday resort.

La Thuile, together with the French resort of La Rosière, is part of an international skiing area. With 150 kilometres of runs, using a single ski pass valid on both sides of the frontier, it is one of the region's largest skiing areas. You can also practice heli-ski

on the Rutor and Miravidi glaciers and various cross-country skiing circuits complete the tourist winter offer.

In summer La Thuile is a favourite spot for relaxing in a beautiful natural environment, mountain bike rides with cross-country itineraries, down hill and free ride and excursions. Particularly scenic are those in the zone of Les Suches (also reached by chair lift) and Monte Belvedere, or Lake Verney (tourist fishing reserve) or the three beautiful waterfalls formed by the waters from the Rutor glacier. High Path number 2 also passes La Thuile which, going down from the Defeyes



• Verney lake, La Thuile



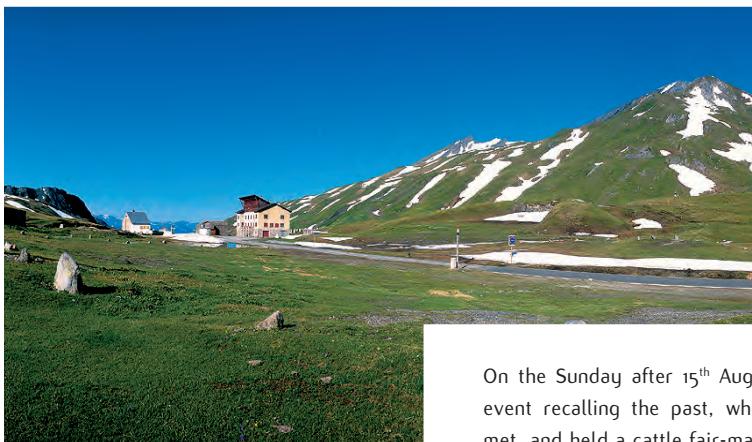
Mont Blanc

Mountain Hut and crossing the narrow Chavanne valley, leads to the Elisabetta mountain hut and then to Courmayeur.

The **Little St. Bernard Pass** (2188 m) which links Italy and France in the summer, witnessed in the past the passage of several Roman emperors, Burgundian and Longobard kings. At the col, on the Italy-France border line, there are the remains of a proto-historic cromlech: an ellipse of 46 widely-spaced stones, 72 metres in diameter, which can be dated perhaps to the Bronze Age. There are also traces of two Roman "Mansiones" which served as storehouse and lodgings for travellers and soldiers. On the geographical summit of the Pass stands the "Colonna di Giove", four and a half metres high, with a statue of St. Bernard on top, replacing a statue of Jove which, according to legend, was demolished by St. Bernard who had come to the pass to demolish the symbols of paganism. Just beyond the frontier there is the "Chanousia" Botanical Garden. Founded in 1897 by Abbot Chanoux, it was abandoned in 1942 during the Second World War and rebuilt in 1976. The garden

has around 1,600 species of alpine plants and there is also a laboratory and small museum. You can also visit the hospice, founded in the 11th century by St. Bernard and repeatedly destroyed by war and fire. It was abandoned after World War II because of the heavy bombings it had suffered and its reconstruction began in 1993. At present you can visit the Museum of the History of the Pass, Valdigne and Savoy.

On the Sunday after 15th August there is the "Fête des Bergers": an event recalling the past, when Savoyard and Valdaostan cowherds met, and held a cattle fair-market. This meeting has been transformed into a big event, with a small market of typical Valdaostan and Savoyard products and exhibitions by folklore groups, a festive event in which inhabitants from both sides of the pass and tourists participate. On the same day there is also one of the eliminatory contests of the "Bataille de reines."



- *Cromlech.
Little Saint Bernard-Pass*



Mont Blanc



- **Pré-Saint-Didier**
- **Courmayeur**
- **Val Ferret**
- **Val Veny**

Well-being and travelling among the skies of Mont Blanc

C

Continuing the itinerary towards Courmayeur, it's worthwhile stopping at **Pré-Saint-Didier**. The town, on the confluence of the Dora of Verney with the Dora Baltea, is at 1001 metres altitude. A few steps away from the centre admire an impressive natural spectacle: the Gorge, a very narrow, deep gully created by the rushing waters of the Dora of Verney. At the side of the waterfall there are two thermal water springs gushing out of the rock at 22° and 36° degrees and these supply the Spa. The hot waters are rich in iron and were already well-known and appreciated by the ancient Romans who began exploiting them. But it was in the mid-17th century that these waters became the centre of a flourishing spa tourism. Today the Spa park proposes a blend of relaxation and natural surroundings with hot water pools enjoying a splendid view of Mont Blanc.

The parish church of San Lorenzo is worth a visit for its 17th century main altar crowned by a large 15th century crucifix. The adjacent Romanesque bell-tower is believed to be one of the oldest in the Valley. Ideal for visitors of all ages, Pré-Saint-Didier is an excellent starting point for a number of excursions and for rafting enthusiasts who can try the descent of the Dora Baltea. In Plan du Bois, accessible by car or a 15-minute walk, there is the Adventure Park equipped with aerial sporting-recreational courses of various levels of difficulty and

adapted for all levels. **Courmayeur** (1224m), at the foot of the gigantic Mont Blanc (4807 m), is the oldest mountain resort in Aosta Valley, homeland of several world famous mountain guides. The mementoes of their most celebrated expeditions are conserved in the Duca degli Abruzzi Mountain Museum. Growing around the ancient church of Saints Pantaleone and Valentino, Courmayeur, since the 19th century can be considered the capital of mountain climbing and mountain excursions, even if at that time spa tourism was more important.

The town is surrounded by numerous villages which maintain intact



- *Pré-Saint-Didier, Spa*



Mont Blanc

the characteristic architecture of the traditional houses: La Saxe, Dolonne with its ancient bread oven and Entrèves, the summer venue for the characteristic antique market of Santa Margherita. From here you reach the Mont Blanc Tunnel, 11,600 metres long, a grandiose engineering feat, which goes through the Mont Blanc chain, leaving from the foot of the Brenva glacier arriving in France at the foot of the Bossons glacier, a spectacular flow of perennial ice.

Just after Entrèves, from La Palud, the "Funivia dei ghiacciai" leaves, a cableway divided into six sections which allows you to reach Chamonix during the summer. The ascent offers various intermediate stops in order to admire Mont Blanc from different viewpoints: at the first stop there is the Saussurea botanical garden, the highest in Europe, which has over 800 botanical species from Mont Blanc and mountain areas the world over, whilst from the panoramic terrace at Punta Helbronner (3462 m), the view is spectacular and ranges from the peak of Mont Blanc to Aiguille Blanche, from Dente del Gigante to the

Grandes Jorasses. You can also visit the permanent exhibition of crystals, an absolutely unique collection of the minerals of Mont Blanc.

From Punta Hellbronner the Panoramic cable cars depart, suspended for 5 kilometres over imposing glaciers, they reach the French station of Aiguille du Midi (3842m) to then descend to Chamonix.

From Punta Hellbronner there are two spectacular off-piste runs: the "Toula", 6 kilometres of vertical descent down to the Pavillon station and the "Vallée Blanche", a crossing of 24 kilometres along the Mer de Glace, for good skiers, from January to the end of April, in a magnificent scenario, facing Mont Blanc. The mountains surrounding Courmayeur offer everything the excursion enthusiast

or mountain climber could want: from gentle walks at lower altitudes towards mountain huts or lakes, to the high paths, the tour of Mont Blanc and the more demanding ascents.

The valleys Ferret and Veny, due to the multiplicity of sports practised,



• *Miage Lake*



Mont Blanc

are popular with sports and mountain enthusiasts both in summer and winter. In **Val Ferret**, dominated by the Grandes Jorasses, there is a 9-hole golf course whilst in winter there is a winding 20-kilometres cross-country skiing track. In **Val Veny**, whose road is closed during the winter, you must visit the Sanctuary of Notre Dame de la Guérison which, in 1816, was demolished by the relentless advance of the Brenva glacier. Only the statue of the Madonna miraculously survived intact. The Sanctuary was built in 1867 and became a popular shrine thanks to the healing fame of the Virgin.

Winter sports lovers find in Courmayeur a varied and quality offer, from heli-ski to ski touring, from snow shoeing to cross-country skiing. The skiing areas of Chécrouit and Val Veny, linked up on high, offer downhill runs for all levels of difficulty.

Several typical restaurants offer a wide assortment of regional wines and dishes. In winter and summer Courmayeur offers visitors a vast choice of events including: on 15th August the Festival of the Guides,

Easter Monday the Pâquerette Fair, fair of typical craftwork, and the "Noir in Festival", a well-known appointment for lovers of films "noir" which, together with the feast of the Immaculate Conception on 8th December, opens the winter season.

At the Forum Sport Center, a quality sports venue, increasingly popular with national

teams of various Olympic disciplines for their training, ice-skating galas and several important events are also held.



- Mont Blanc from the Val Ferret



Gran Paradiso



- Sarre
- Aymavilles
- Cogne

- Sarre Castle

Fauna, flora, tradition and a great Park



Gran Paradiso (4061 m) is the heart of the **Gran Paradiso National Park**.

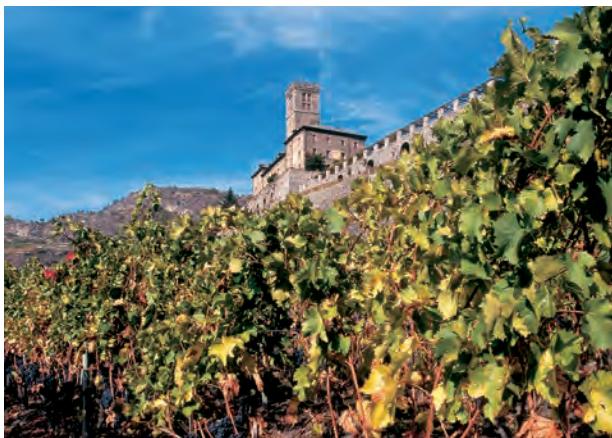
Once the hunting reserve of the House of Savoy, it was Italy's first reserve, set up in 1922 to protect the ibex from extinction. The park can be visited in all seasons, a dense network of paths winds through marvellous panoramas and permits curious meetings with the local wild life, much easier in Spring, when chamois goats and ibexes come down the valley looking for the first blades of grass. In winter you can go cross-country skiing or snow shoeing in the woods in search of traces of animals. On the Valdaostan side the park covers a zone which includes three valleys: Cogne, Valsavarenche and Rhêmes.

The first valley you meet as you leave Aosta for Courmayeur is that of Cogne. Before going up the valley you pass through a farming area full of vineyards, orchards and castles. Perched high on the right is the

castle of **Sarre**, purchased by the House of Savoy in 1869 and furnished as a hunting lodge, as witnessed by the hundreds of chamois goat and ibex horns decorating the trophy room. Opposite stands the castle of **Aymavilles** with its four medieval angular cylindrical towers and baroque loggias. The village can be found at the entrance to Cogne valley, at 646 metres altitude, in an ideal position for the flourishing wine-growing activity, famous for the production of DOC red and white wines such as Petite Arvine and Torrette, to be sampled at the "Cave des onze communes" wine co-operative. Along the road admire the church of Saint-Léger with its trompe-l'oeil frescoed façade. You then reach Pont d'Aël, whose Roman aqueduct-bridge of the year 3 BC is one of the most original and spectacular monuments of Aosta

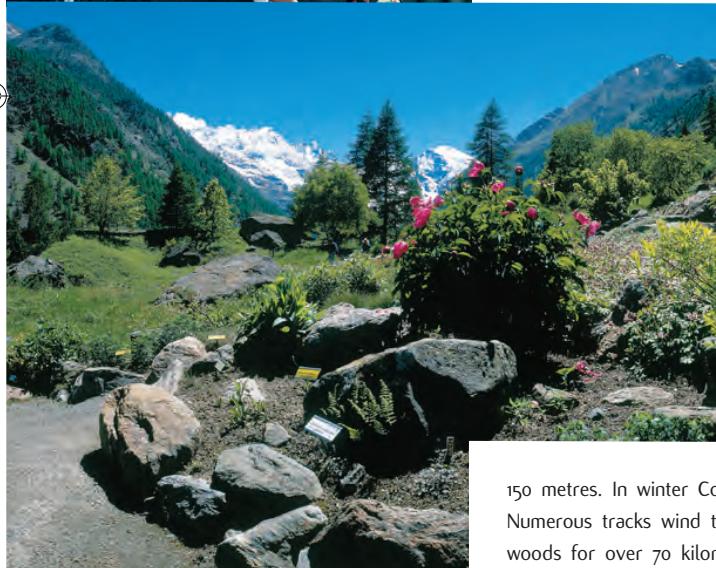
Valley, built to cross a deep ravine of the Grand Egya mountain stream and carry water towards the plain of Aosta.

A brief detour takes you to Ozein, typical rural village with a magnificent view of the Grivola and Mont Blanc. It's also noted for its "Favò" a soup of broad beans, the star of the summer event in its name. From Turlin there is a convenient country road, ideal for mountain bikers, which allows you to reach the resort of Pila, winding for around 5 kilometres of gentle slopes in the wood. Continue up towards **Cogne** (1534 m), considered the "capital" of the Gran Paradiso National Park, which blends the character of a typical





Gran Paradiso



• *Botanical garden
"Paradisia", Cogne*

mountain village with high level hotel and accommodation facilities.

An important mining centre, it boasts a past full of history, culture and traditions: from the valuable pillow lace, to be admired at the "Les dentellières" co-operative, to wooden craft objects and to the "veilla", an evening reliving the life and trades of the past. Among the typical dishes you mustn't miss the "seupetta di Cogne", a soup made with rice and Fontina cheese, and "méculin" a particular type of rich bread ideal accompanied by the special Cogne "crema". The old miners' village today houses the National Park's Visitors' Centre which offers new and stimulating venues and itineraries. The Gérard-Dayné Maison de Cogne is one of the major examples of traditional Valdaostan architecture, where ethnography and the heritage of the mountain civilization are widely highlighted. The international natural history documentary film festival "Lo stambocco d'oro", held every 2 years at the end of the summer, attracts naturalists to Cogne from all over the world. From the village you can go up by cable car to Montseuc (2333 m)

a Belvedere with a splendid view over the valley of Cogne and the mountain of **Gran Paradiso**, the only entirely Italian 4.000-metre peak, a popular objective for mountain climbers and paradise for ski tourers. A few kilometres from the village centre lies **Valnontey** with its wealth of paths which bring you into contact with ibexes, chamois goats and marmots. The "Paradisia" alpine botanical garden is a treasure chest of the most beautiful and rare mountain flowers. There is also a seed-bed for exchanges with other alpine gardens.

In **Lillaz** on the other hand, you can admire the striking waterfalls with 3 drops from the Urtier mountain stream for a total height of

150 metres. In winter Cogne is the ideal centre for cross-country skiing. Numerous tracks wind through the wide Prato di Sant'Orso and conifer woods for over 70 kilometres. Here large international competitions are held, such as the Marciagranparadiso which takes place on a 45-kilometre circuit. But these beautiful views can also be appreciated without skis, by walking along the footpaths alongside the tracks, or with excursions in horse-drawn sleighs. On the slopes of Montseuc there is space for downhill skiing, with some medium level runs, whilst the more daring can try ice-climbing: the over 150 waterfalls of Lillaz and Valnontey every year attract climbing enthusiasts.



Gran Paradiso



- **Saint-Pierre**
- **Saint-Nicolas**
- **Villeneuve**
- **Introd**
- **Valsavarenche**
- **Rhêmes-Saint-Georges**
- **Rhêmes-Notre-Dame**
- **Arvier**
- **Arise**
- **Valgrisenche**

Walks in Paradise along ancient villages

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The Gran Paradiso area includes, as well as the valley of Cogne, also **Valsavarenche** and the **Valley of Rhêmes**, included in the National Park, and **Valgrisenche**.

These are valleys with a wealth of traditions which can boast splendid natural scenery and an as yet unpolluted nature. To reach the first two you have to go along the central valley passing first **Saint-Pierre** (731 m) and then Villeneuve. In the first village you can admire two castles, the medieval one of Sarriod de la Tour, used for exhibitions, and that of Saint-Pierre with its fairy tale aspect, which houses the Regional Natural History Museum and which, together with the church below and its attractive Romanesque bell-tower, make an attractive pictorial ensemble. For lovers of craft work and local products you can visit the "Pain de Coucou", the "Cofruits", where apples are collected and stored and "la Grolla", a centre for wood turning.

At 1200 metres altitude, just at the edge of a small grassy basin there is the village of **Saint-Nicolas**, in a very sunny position, ideal for family holidays. In the area of Bois de la Tour there are easy guided paths to help you discover the mountain eco-system and the Belvedere opening on to the vineyards of Arvier, the Grivola and Rutor. This village is the seat of the "Centre d'Études Franco-Provençales" created to safeguard and enhance the patois, Valdaostan dialect of franco-provençal origin. In winter you can practice cross-country skiing here and kite-skiing in Vétan (1700 m).

Villeneuve (665 m) is at the entrance of the two valleys of Valsavarenche and Rhêmes. Crowned by the church of Santa Maria and the remains of Châtel-Argent castle, so called because money was minted there. This village, which in the past had an important strategic-military position, today has developed as a centre for sports with a thriving activity of rafting on the Dora and an adventure park with paths winding through poplar, pine and chestnut woods.

At 880 metres altitude stands **Introd** with its 13th century castle and the adjacent "Ola" farmhouse, one of the most beautiful examples of traditional architecture. **Les Combes**, often chosen by Pope John Paul II and



• *Saint-Pierre Castle*





Gran Paradiso



• Village of Tignet
Valsavarenche

his successor for their summer holidays, offers various excursions. In the centre of the village, in a restructured building a Museum has been set up dedicated to John Paul II. In Villes-Dessus you can visit the "Parc Animalier", an animal park where you can admire examples of animals typical of the mountain area in their natural habitat, and the workshop "Les amis du bois", featuring typical wood handicrafts of the region. You mustn't miss Maison Bruil, a large building with a covered inner courtyard, one of the major examples of rural architecture of Gran Paradiso, housing the Museum of Mountain Nutrition. Of additional interest is the bridge, a real architectural masterpiece, built during the First World War over an 80-metre-deep abyss.

Just after Introd the road branches and rises on the left into Valsavarenche and to the right into the Valley of Rhêmes. **Valsavarenche** in the heart of the park is an ideal place for naturalists as there are plenty of unpolluted mountain habitats, small lakes, streams and pine and larch forests. As you go up you can glimpse picturesque villages:

Chevrère, Molère, Bois de Clin, Rovenaud. It's worth visiting Nex and Tignet, typical examples of rural architecture. Where the valley becomes a little wider there is Dégioz (1540 m) which houses the Visitors' Centre of the National Park and also a small ethnographical museum. The last village is Pont, at around an altitude of 2,000 metres. From here the paths begin which lead to the peak of **Gran Paradiso** (4061 m) and to Col del Nivolet, linking Valsavarenche to Ceresole Reale and the province of Turin. An ideal starting point for itineraries towards mountain huts or for walks through the woods and mountain pastures, following ancient tracks built for

the family of the Royal House of Savoy who came hunting here. In winter Valsavarenche offers attractive cross-country skiing tracks and several itineraries for ski-touring and snow-shoeing.

Here too, as in almost all the other valleys, in summer there are festivals and markets dedicated to local products.

Parallel to this valley there is the Valley of Rhêmes, at the bottom Granta Parey (3338 m) with its unmistakable profile stands out.

At 1218 metres lies **Rhêmes-Saint-Georges**, a tranquil village where you can take numerous excursions on foot or go horse riding, following splen-



Gran Paradiso

did itineraries in the surrounding woods.

Continuing along you meet **Rhêmes-Notre-Dame** (1725 m) situated in a vast meadowed basin, surrounded by woods and high peaks which create a particularly fascinating scenario. The parish church, in the village's main square, rebuilt in the 18th century, is dedicated to Santa Maria Assunta. The bell-tower has 15th century origins and it is said to have the loudest bells in all Aosta Valley. The village has maintained unchanged, over the centuries, its typical rural architecture. Here on the penultimate Sunday in July the "Rencontre des artisans de la Vallée" is held, an occasion for all the craftsmen of the Valleys of Gran Paradiso to get together.

The interesting Visitors' Centre of the Park at Chanavey, is a perfect teaching instrument to promote knowledge and respect for the wild life heritage. The permanent exhibition entitled "Bentornato Gipeto!", narrates the history of the extinction and return of the lammergeier, Europe's largest bird.

In summer Rhêmes-Notre-Dame is an ideal starting point for numerous



- *Rhêmes-Notre-Dame*

excursions by mountain bike, on a horse or on foot: here, in fact, it crosses High Path number 2 which winds between Champorcher and Courmayeur. In winter skiers have before them picturesque tracks for cross-country skiing and downhill runs winding through the woods. Here you can also practice Piolet-Traction, a sport which involves climbs with crampons and ice axe on spectacular ice waterfalls.

Returning to the central valley you can follow a scenic alternative course, which crosses the col of Introd and reaches first **Arvier** and then **Avise**. This ancient village sited high on the orographic left of the Dora is at 762



Gran Paradiso

metres altitude, and dominated by the important remains of three medieval castles: the fifteenth century one of Avise, the 12th century Blonay castle and the 10th century Crê castle. In Roman times it was a strategic point on the road of the Gauls, and there are still traces in the "Pierre Taillée" stretch, carved out of the rock. In Runaz, the ancient Maison de Mosse has been recently restructured and set up as a seat for ethnographic exhibitions. From the Lo Crou picnic area, along the road rising to Cérellaz, with a short walk, you can reach the impressive waterfall of Frenay. Higher up, in the mountain pastures of the beautiful narrow valley of Vertosan, the historical "Bataille de reines" is held, recorded by the poet J.B. Cerlogne at the end of the 19th century. Particularly popular are the annual chestnut festival and the "Fiocca" festival. This latter is held in the village of Baulin (1777 m) the last Sunday in June: in a cave perennially filled with ice, cream is hand-whipped using leafless willow switches.

Surrounding the village there are plenty of vineyards, bearing witness to the determination of men to use every inch of ground. Here

a much-appreciated red wine, "Petit Rouge", is produced. Another famous red wine of the area is "Enfer d'Arvier", one of the first Valdaostan wines to obtain DOC recognition.

Arvier (776 m) is in a small basin full of vineyards. In the centre of the village there is the parish church with its museum of sacred art, the Romanesque bell-tower and La Mothe Castle, built towards the end of the 13th century. From Grand Haury, where there are still the old water operated mills and sawmills, it is easy to walk to the attractive Castle of Montmayeur of which a cylindrical tower remains.

From Leverogne you go up to **Valgrisenche** following the steep bends around a summit on which the small sanctuary of Notre-Dame de Rochefort stands with its backdrop of the magnificent Château Blanc glacier. Continuing along the road note the medieval fortified manor house just before the pleasant hamlet of Planaval: in winter there is an attractive cross-country skiing track

- Vineyards of Arvier





Gran Paradiso

which winds round the foot of an austere tower erected in the 14th century on a plain which is also the starting point for ski-touring excursions and heli-ski on the massif of Rutor.

From La Ravoire where there is a practice wall for climbing you take the panoramic path which leads to the Nature Reserve of Lac Lolair.

Valgrisenche presents itself to the visitor surrounded by peaks and glaciers. The valley is dominated by the Rutor glacier and in the upper part there is the Beauregard dam whose wall is used as an artificial climbing wall. A pleasant road permits you in 3 hours to walk round the whole perimeter of the lake, the venue also in the month of August of one of the classic "Martze a pià" running races, the "Tour du Lac".

At 1664 metres lies the village of **Valgrisenche** grouped around the 19th century parish church of San Grato and the late 14th medieval century bell-tower. A permanent exhibition is dedicated to the traditional working of "drap", a woollen cloth hand woven on ancient maple looms, made with raw wool, half scoured and felted with water and beaten with wooden spatulas.

Despite their formidable aspect the peaks and glaciers surrounding Valgrisenche have always represented a meeting point with the inhabitants of the adjoining Val d'Isère thanks to the numerous cols which still today are venues for celebratory meetings of common history and traditions. The sides of this valley can also be followed with short walks, long excursions such as the Tour around Rutor or

ascensions of all degrees of difficulty. You can also try free-climbing on rock faces not far from the village.

In winter the skiing area is particularly suitable for ski learners and families with children, thanks to some ski lifts and the picturesque cross-country skiing track of around 8 kilometres. But the top for skiing in Valgrisenche is heli-ski, a young modern speciality suitable for the best skiers on absolutely spectacular slopes, organised by the local mountain guides.



• *Valgrisenche*

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