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TOURIST GUIDE TO THE AOSTA VALLEY



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A place to rediscover time



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THE AOSTA VALLEY A PLACE TO REDISCOVER TIME

Green, light blue, and white. Transparent waters and snow. **Unspoilt nature** and **breath-taking landscapes**. Memorable experiences, outdoor sports activities and **first-rate traditional cuisine**. The Aosta Valley is the tourist destination that brings together all these attractions, and much, much more! Within its territory – the smallest region of the Italian peninsula – are condensed some of the most important scenic beauties in Europe. Its mountain ranges, consisting of the four highest massifs in the Alps – those of **Mont Blanc**, **Monte Rosa**, **The Matterhorn** and **Gran Paradiso** – have brought it international fame. The valleys that wind through its mountains contain **natural wonders** as well as **incredible artefacts**, a testimony to the love that the people of all eras have felt for these lands. Its **history**, dating back thousands of years, has made the Aosta Valley, a border area with **linguistic**, **ethnographic** and **traditional peculiarities**, that are **unique** and **special**.

Our guide offers a key to enter the Aosta Valley, to explore its wonderful territory and to understand its history, life, and values. You will be guided through **the unique beauty of the mountain landscape**; you will come to know the **exclusive and special experiences** that only this trip can give you; you can schedule a tasting of our **typical products**, but also just chill out on the shore of an **alpine lake** or in a spa bath and learn about the history that has shaped and anthropized the **cities** and **villages**; you can travel between **castles** in theatrical natural settings, experience the intense colours of the changing seasons and rediscover **traditions** and **events** whose roots are lost in the mists of time.

During your trip to the Aosta Valley you will feel that you have recovered the sense of time, of it having expanded and become permeated with **authentic beauty**: the Aosta Valley is a **never-ending journey**, and its emotions will stay with you always, in your heart ... Enjoy your stay!



*A peak reached
is the frontier
between the finite and the immense..*

Erri De Luca



**NATURE
AND THE TERRITORY**



THE GIANTS OF THE ALPS

Gazing up at them from the valley they can only be described as giants: the **Giants of the Alps**, for their majestic grandeur and the altitude which distinguishes them. They are giants above all for their stories and for those of the people who conquered them, step by step, palm by palm. In any season the magic that envelops them can steal your heart away.

Mont Blanc, The Matterhorn, Monte Rosa and Gran Paradiso are **the backbone of the Aosta Valley**, upon which gravitates the life of a unique territory, a concentrate of pure beauty, one of the most sought-after destinations internationally.

A mountain has always meant **wisdom**. The mountains of the Aosta Valley contain the infinite wisdom that has accompanied humankind throughout its evolution. They tell the story of the tradition and the nature of a generous people who have always known how to share **knowledge, experience, love, and beauty**.

MONT BLANC (4,807 M)

No traveller is left unmoved. The *glitter* that crosses it takes on an aura of mystery that can unsettle the soul, but also irresistibly attract. The history of the most famous highest peak in Europe reveals that its first conquest took place in 1786. Its walls today represent the most popular destination for mountaineers from all over the world: its hypnotic power becomes an emotion similar to religious bliss, that instant of infinity which can only be understood by those who reach its eternally snow-capped peaks. The spectacle that can be enjoyed from the suspended panoramic terrace of Pointe Helbronner (3,466 m), the last station of the futuristic Skyway Monte Bianco, is peerless and well worth the trip to the Aosta Valley alone.



GRAN PARADISO (4,061 M)

The etymology of its name comes from the paradisaical dimension which swathes the entire area of the Natural Park. Emerald green for spring, intense blue for summer, amber gold for autumn and pure white for winter: these are the colours that best paint the landscape overlooking the valleys of Cogne, Valsavarenche and Rhêmes. Rising from the valleys along the mountain slopes, forests of larch, spruce and stone pines give way to vast alpine pastures, dotted with a multitude of native late spring blooms.

Once a hunting reserve of the House of Savoy, in 1922, the territorial area at the foot of the Gran Paradiso became the first national park to be established in Italy, to prevent the extinction of the ibex, a true symbol of the territory.



THE MATTERHORN (4,478 M)

The “most noble cliff in Europe” has always attracted artists and mountaineers. Due to its memorable shape, it is one of the best-known and celebrated images in the world. The locals call it simply *Gran Becca* or “big mountain”. Its pyramidal shape – similar to *an ascetic absorbed in prayer against the night* (Antonia Pozzi) – shows its best profile from the Blue Lake, after Valtournenche, on the road to Breuil-Cervinia.

The perpetually frozen plateau of the Plateau Rosa (from the Aosta Valley patois *rosà*, which means “frozen”) is a choice place for summer skiing and, thanks to the new cable car (Matterhorn Alpine Crossing) can now be reached all year round, both from Breuil-Cervinia and from Zermatt (in Switzerland).

The conquest of the peak of the Matterhorn has been a mountaineering myth throughout the world for more than a hundred years. On July 14, 1865, Edward Whymper and his party had the insight to select a route starting on the Swiss side of the Matterhorn, which allowed them to conquer the coveted destination before Jean-Antoine Carrel, who reached it just a few days later, on July 17, from the Italian side.



MONTE ROSA (DUFOURSPIITZE 4,634 M)

At the foot of the mountain whose snow is pink, part of a famous verse written by Giosuè Carducci, summoned by Queen Margherita of Savoy to Gressoney, in 1889. A famous stay for a well-known “influencer” of the time, during which he composed poems in honour of the Aosta Valley. The Monte Rosa mountain range is characterized by the presence of the largest number of high peaks in the Alps above 4,000 metres. Among these, is Lyskamm (4,527 m), the highest of the group in the Aosta Valley, Lysjoch (4,253 m) with its spectacular Alpine pass, Signalkuppe (4,554 m) which houses the legendary Margherita Hut, the highest mountain refuge in Europe. In addition, Dufourspitze (4,634 m) is the second highest peak in the Alps.



AT 4,000 METRES ABOVE SEA LEVEL

The Aosta Valley consists of a central depression which develops along the course of the Dora Baltea river that crosses the entire region longitudinally, and lateral vales which, to right and left, ascend towards the mountains. Listing them clockwise, starting from the bottom, these are the Valdigne (or Mont Blanc Area) and, on the south-facing slope (orographic left of the Dora Baltea), also called *adret*, the valleys of the Great Saint Bernard, the valley of the Matterhorn and those of Monte Rosa (Val d'Ayas and Lys Valley); on the opposite side (the orographic right of the Dora Baltea), also called *envers*, we find the valley of Champorcher which, together with the valley of Champdepraz is one of the gateways to the Regional Park of Mont Avic, the valleys of Saint-Marcel and Clavalité and the three valleys of Gran Paradiso (Cogne, Valsavarenche and Rhêmes) with Valgrisenche, surmounted by the Tête du Ruitor.

The entire territory of the Aosta Valley is strongly characterized by the presence of nature in an unspoilt mountain environment. In the collective imagination, borrowed from eloquent images of documentaries and films, the Aosta Valley represents the quintessential idea of an **ALPINE LANDSCAPE**: glaciers, lakes, waterfalls, coniferous forests and snow-capped peaks which sublimate breath-taking views, with changing seasonal colourings, making every trip to the Aosta

Valley at any time of the year unique and unrepeatable.

The **MONT BLANC CHAIN** frames Courmayeur, one of the most famous towns in the region. At the foot of the chain stretches the valley floor, almost flat, which develops into two visually striking branches, **VAL VENY** and **VAL FERRET**. A wide range of sporting activities can be practised in the area, from summer trekking to mountain-biking, from rafting to fishing, and from ice skating to skiing in all its various forms.

The **GRAN PARADISO** is the heart of the National Park of the same name. This area is a popular tourist destination especially for those seeking the most authentic contact with nature and tradition. Its territory provides relaxation for travellers: time seems suspended in a place completely suffused by the beauty of nature. The dense network of paths that criss-cross it sees landscapes alternating with rewarding encounters with local fauna and flora. In autumn, the larches take on shades that turn from orange-yellow to cadmium red, a suggestive setting for the period of love of the chamois that inhabit these woods. Snow falls plentifully in the winter season: this is the opportunity for long walks on foot with snowshoes, or cross-country skiing to contemplate nature, in absolute silence.

The tourist area of **THE MATTERHORN** is characterized by a rich variety of landscapes. The differences in height of the territory offer coniferous forests, green pastures, crystal clear lakes and perennial snows which, despite climate change,

can still satisfy ski lovers even in summer. The valley is also a land of many farmers and artisans: here the *Désarpa* (the descent into the valley of the herds after a summer spent in the mountain pastures) is celebrated every year and some of the most famous manual skills of the Valley are in operation, the creations exhibited in typical markets or during the large craft fairs.

The **MONTE ROSA CHAIN** is the relief that marks the border with Switzerland: it extends from the Théodule Hill, located east of the Matterhorn, to the Monte Moro Pass in the Anzasca Valley. This area includes a large number of peaks which reach as many as 4,000 metres in height. Along this chain of mountains are the great glaciers of the Aosta Valley. Unfortunately, increasing global warming has wrought heavy changes to their extent. The waterways and lakes generated by them are visually striking: they embellish the landscape like precious glittering diamonds, becoming popular destinations in the many excursions that can be undertaken. Among these, at lower altitudes we find Lake Villa, in which a variety of white water lily grows spontaneously, an emblematic biotype of the varied flora of the Valley. At the foot of the massif wind the **VAL D'AYAS** and the **LYS OR GRESSONEY VALLEY**.

In these two valleys we can trace the specific particularities of the culture of the ancient Walser population, which strongly marked the territory, leaving indelible signs on both the material and immaterial heritage.



*Watch the playlist of videos
dedicated to nature
in the Aosta Valley*

EXPERIENCE NATURE



The Aosta Valley has a **natural heritage** of unsurpassed beauty, safeguarded by a system of **protected areas** consisting of two natural parks, the oldest national park and the only regional park, ten nature reserves, four alpine botanical gardens and an **ecological network** (Natura 2000) which identifies Sites of Community Interest (SCI) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). This system is united under the label “VIVA, the Aosta Valley, unique by nature”.

AMONG THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PARKS IN THE WORLD

All of a sudden an **IBEX** looms into view. The thrill is strong. His horns dominate the air and his step is proud. He is looking for the best grass, which is why he has ventured to the fringes of the lush meadow. Photographing him makes the encounter with the viewer unforgettable. It is not so much about taking a beautiful photograph, as having the opportunity to preserve that unique and lastingly exciting memory.

It could be the suggestion generated by the panorama, it could be the feeling of being in an **EARTHLY PARADISE**: what the eyes capture is amplified by the silence, by the melody of the water that flows freely and by the wind that slowly stirs the narrow cones of larch and spruce in unison. The Gran Paradiso National Park is undeniably a place of great beauty. When you read about its beauties

in books and magazines you can only grasp the idea; visiting it is the real revelation. And you will then come to understand why this little portion of infinity is known as Gran Paradiso – the Great Paradise.

The ibex was becoming extinct. It deserved the preservation and conservation of its habitat. The first eureka moment to protect this territory came to King Victor Emmanuel II who, in 1856, decreed it a royal hunting reserve, to protect the few remaining animals.

The king himself set up a corps of specialized guards, with the task of safeguarding all the animals included in the Gran Paradiso area and creating the paths and mule tracks necessary to explore the territory. Even today these paths represent a vital network which serves the park rangers to cross the park.

In 1919, King Victor Emmanuel III donated the 2,100 hectares of his family's hunting reserve to the Italian State, with the proviso that they become a natural park. So it was that, over 100 years ago, on December 3, 1922, the

FIRST NATURAL PARK IN ITALY was established, with the aim of preserving the ecosystems that revolve around the Gran Paradiso massif for present and future generations.

Today, the Gran Paradiso Natural Park consists of a network of trails 850 km long, ten visitor centres (between the Aosta Valley and Piedmont) and sees more than one million visitors a year. In addition to maintaining the **BIODIVERSITY** and landscape, scientific research, promotion of culture and knowledge related to the



territory, the Park Authority is busy increasing the fauna, for example, by working on the nesting of the bearded vulture in the Western Alps or promoting local products and businesses.

Since 1989, the **MONT AVIC REGIONAL PARK** has been active in the Aosta Valley, in the territory of the Municipalities of Champdepraz ("field of meadows" in the French idiom, from its salient characteristic) and Champorcher. The park is crossed by the Chalamy stream and is dotted with countless lakes, easily accessible thanks to well-marked paths.

One of the most famous excursions of the park is that of the **TOUR OF THE LAKES**: along the way you meet five of them (Muffé, Vallette, Bianco, Nero and Cornuto), arriving as far as the hill of Lago Bianco, where there is also the **BARBUSTEL LAC BLANC MOUNTAIN REFUGE** (2,154 m), from which you can enjoy all the majesty of Mont Avic, the Monte Rosa complex, the Matterhorn and the Dent d'Hérens. From here, you can continue until you reach the Gran Lac, one of the largest natural basins in the Aosta Valley.



THE NATIONAL RESERVES OF THE AOSTA VALLEY



» LAKE VILLA

Nature Reserve

(Challand-Saint-Victor, Montjovet)

An oasis of peace of large dimensions (25 hectares) in which to contemplate the typical nature of this lacustrine-peaty environment. The lake, of glacial origin, is fed by the subsoil. Its waters are home to the *white water lily* and the *amphibious knotweed*, two very rare species. Particularly suitable for children and teenagers, with the Challand Art Path that develops nearby.

» LES ÎLES

Nature Reserve

(Brisogne, Nus, Quart, Saint-Marcel)

This wetland, lying along the course of the Dora Baltea, is the most important regional resting and feeding site for migratory birds (white heron, purple heron, egret). Many species are resident here. One interesting

experience is to take a stroll for about an hour and a half around the area.

» MARAIS

Nature Reserve

(La Salle, Morgex)

This extends over an alluvial plain, and is characterized by vegetation typical of water-rich environments. A nesting place and migration station for birdlife, it presents a rare example of a hygrophilous forest of white alder. The site houses a scientific-naturalistic research centre, which keeps a fundamental thematic library.

» MONT MARS

Nature Reserve

(Fontainemore)

Fairytale scenarios dotted with typical wooden and local stone buildings, beneath the intense contrasts of the sky and the mountain. The largest reserve in the Aosta Valley. Basins arrayed in steps testify to the presence of an ancient glacier, now reduced to a small snowfield. The alpine environment



Go to the site
of the Mont Mars
Nature Reserve



is rich in larch forests, interrupted by areas of shrubs (rhododendrons, blueberries and dwarf junipers).



» CÔTE DE GARGANTUA

Nature Reserve

(Gressan)

According to legend, the elongated spur – the *côte* – which characterizes this would be the little finger of the giant Gargantua. In a habitat shaped by glaciers and the sun, the rare *Artemisia vallesiaca* and *Telephium imperati* find fertile terrain. The reserve is rich in entomofauna. Spring and autumn are the best periods for a visit.

» LOSON POND

Nature Reserve

(Verrayes)

This small lake, located on a glacial terrace, is home to a rich zooplankton population, dragonflies and amphibians.

» LAKE LOLAIR

Nature Reserve

(Arvier)

The lake, fed by three springs, is considered one of the most typical environments of the nature of the Aosta Valley. The reserve is surrounded by extensive reeds and *roches*



moutonnées of glacial origin. A haven for different animal species, it hosts varied flora, including the very rare *Potentilla pensylvanica*.

» MONTAGNAYES

Nature Reserve

(Bionaz)

Thanks to its strategic position in a typical Subalpine landscape, this reserve is home to chamois, ibex, deer, roe deer, hares, marmots and other predators, as well as the golden eagle and the dwarf owl. It also presents beautiful blooms.

» HOLAY POND

Nature Reserve

(Pont-Saint-Martin)

A very small reserve near the ruins of the castle of Suzey, this is the habitat of two very rare amphibians: the *dotted newt* and the *crested newt*. It is also the only known Aosta Valley location of *Isolepis setacea* and *Lythrum portula*.

» LO TSATELET

Nature Reserve

(Aosta, Saint-Christophe)

This reserve, north-east of Aosta, appears as a hill with steep sides and is characterized by the presence of a mound near Busseyaz, which is assumed to be a tomb from the Salassi era (Iron Age, 7th-5th century BC). The place is prized in terms of both landscapes and archaeology. Oak woods allow the nesting of birds of prey and corvids.



For further
information visit
lovevda.it



THE BOTANICAL GARDENS OF THE AOSTA VALLEY



The best way to familiarize yourself with the botanical varieties present in the Aosta Valley is to visit one of the four botanical gardens region's. These natural oases are intended for scientific research and the preservation of the flora heritage, while also representing tourist opportunities to learn to recognize the types of mountain environments and the alpine flora that inhabit them.

In Valnontey, in the Cogne valley, there is the **PARADISIA ALPINE BOTANICAL GARDEN**, whose natural backdrop is the Gran Paradiso. It is managed by the Park Authority and owes its name to the presence here of the *Paradisea liliastrum*, a variety of white lily. It was founded in 1955 and today is home to more than a thousand



botanical species. A visit to the garden can take two routes, along which will be found a collection of lichen, a petrographic exhibition, an area of medicinal plants and a butterfly garden.

Facing the Monte Rosa chain, inside the park of the Savoy Castle in Gressoney-Saint-Jean, the **ALPINE BOTANICAL GARDEN OF SAVOY CASTLE** is a great tourist attraction. It has several rocky flowerbeds where you can admire alpine flora. Of particular charm is the flowering of the *Edelweiss*.

In Courmayeur, to be precise, at the first station of the Skyway Monte Bianco, is

the **SAUSSUREA ALPINE BOTANICAL GARDEN**, which was opened in 1987 and has become an attraction of great scientific value.

The botanical park contains more than nine hundred species. The garden owes its name to Horace Bénédict de Saussure, who in 1786 was among the backers of the first ascent of Mont Blanc. The **CHANOUSIA ALPINE BOTANICAL GARDEN**, at the Little Saint Bernard Pass (La Thuile), closes the collection. It was conceived in 1897 by Abbot Pierre Chanoux, rector of the nearby Hospice of the Mauritian Order. In just a few years, the garden garnered international fame by having acquired around 2,500 alpine species. Due to the bombings of World War II, it came to be abandoned. In 1976, thanks to the interest of the Société de la Flore Valdôtaine, the Société d'Histoire Naturelle de la Savoie and various botanists, reconstruction of the garden began, and today it contains 1,200 species from alpine and snow-clad environs.



Saussurea Alpine Garden and SkyWay Edelweiss



ARBORETA: WOODED AREAS FOR BIODIVERSITY

In the Aosta Valley there are special places where tree biodiversity is protected: the *arboreta*. Open to the public, they have educational and pedagogical purposes and are oriented to scientific research and classification of species as well as representing authentic works of natural ornamental architecture.

The “Borna du Laou” Arboretum (“wolf’s den” in patois) is located in Verrès. Inside, starting from 1951, many native and exotic tree types have been planted (including maritime pine, domestic pine, black pine, strobe pine, Atlas cedar, Caucasian fir, holm oak, hornbeam, thuja ...) which have adapted to the local microclimate. With the natural backdrop of the Val d’Ayas and the Castle of Verrès, this arboretum features different visitor routes, all easily accessible: a special infographic identifies the species present.



At Verrayes, Abbot Pierre-Louis Vescoz designed and had built an arboretum on the Pointys promontory (**PIERRE-LOUIS VESCOZ ARBORETUM**). At the end of the 19th century, this active naturalist abbot had intuited that reforestation could revive botanically degraded areas subject to erosion. Starting from 1905, over eleven thousand trees were planted which, with the complicity of the climate, today constitute a unique habitat to visit, in which vegetation and fauna develop naturally. A stone’s throw from Aosta, in Entrebin, closing this review of the territory’s arboreta, is that of “**LE PARQUE D’ENTREBEUN**” (“small wood” in patois).

WILDLIFE PARKS



» The **PARC ANIMALIER D’INTROD** stars the fauna of the Aosta Valley in a protected artificial oasis, inhabited by different animal species (ibex, chamois, roe deer, deer, wild boar, wolves, eagle owls, snow owls, owls, golden eagles, marmots, hares, foxes, badgers, squirrels, jays, trout, char, alpine frogs, crayfish) in balance with their ecosystem. Thanks to a simple itinerary, visitors need to keep their eyes peeled and respect the silence to let the amazement seep into them.

Go to
the wildlife
park website



» In Champdepraz, inside the Mount Avic Park, we find the **CHEVRÈRE WILDLIFE PARK**, surrounded by a splendid pine forest, within which, by following a ring-shaped itinerary, it is possible to enjoy the typical fauna of the Aosta Valley first-hand. The animals in this oasis come from recovery centres, where they have been treated following accidents. Here the animals can continue to live peacefully, while receiving the necessary protection.

Go to
the wildlife
park website



Arboretum
Pierre-Louis Vescoz



LAKES, WATER AND WATERFALLS



Counting them one by one exceeds the number one hundred. Every lake in the Aosta Valley is set within a natural landscape of stunning beauty. The strong colour contrasts of the Alps find powerful accents of beauty in the rippling of the water, which can strike the heart of the visitor at any time of the year. Their silence and harmonious colours make the Aosta Valley lakes rewarding destinations for many excursions of varying lengths and degrees of difficulty. Children of the great thaw, they were born from the centuries-old glaciers, running towards the valley floor, where they now feed the region's main waterways.

» LAKE ARPY (2,066 m)

This is a fairytale body of water that can be reached easily on foot from Colle San Carlo, not far from Morgex and La Thuile. Enhanced by an

evocative alpine landscape, and overlooked by the granite Grandes Jorasses of the Mont Blanc massif, Lake Arpy, of glacial origin, is one of the most photographed and best known in the entire Aosta Valley. In it live trout and the rare alpine newt.

» LAKE LICONY (2,554 m)

The paths leading to Lake Licony are commonly considered long but extremely rewarding by hikers thanks to the view they offer of the entire Mont Blanc chain. This is one of the largest natural lakes in the Aosta Valley. As weather conditions change, the lake takes on some striking colours which turn from emerald green to an intense blue. From the lake you can easily reach Licony pass (2,670 m) and the Pascal bivouac (2,920 m).

» LAKE MIAGE (2,020 m)

This lake's greyish waters are fed by the homonymous glacier, enclosed by its right-hand moraine. It is particularly known and studied



for the detachments of small icebergs on its surface. It is located in the Municipality of Courmayeur and can be reached on foot in just over an hour from La Visaille in Val Veny. It has a curious shape which many romantics like to see as a heart.

» THE BLUE LAKE OF CERVINIA (1,980 m)

The waters of this lake are considered a must for all those who visit the Matterhorn valley: it is in its crystalline mirror that the famous *Noble Cliff of Europe* is reflected. The surrounding vegetation affords admirable scenery when the heather and rhododendron are dressed up in their warmest colour, in contrast with the intense green of the fir trees. Its esoteric charm is also the scene of one of the most famous legends in the culture of the Aosta Valley tradition.





THE LEGEND OF THE BLUE LAKE

Once upon a time, there was a young, good-hearted shepherd boy. His family, however, were not as welcoming and charitable as he was. One day a pilgrim knocked on the door of their house. "Can I have something to eat, please?" asked the disconsolate man at the shepherds' door.

"We have nothing for you, beggar!" the young shepherd boy's mother snapped arrogantly.

"Mamma, please help him. I can give him my bowl of milk. It would be my pleasure, you don't have to give him anything," the young boy muttered in a pleading tone.

"You dishonour us, son! We have nothing for this beggar. Neither you, nor us. Be off with him!" thundered the horrid parents, slamming the door in the face of the poor pilgrim, who gloomily took his leave, but not before uttering some unintelligible words. The shepherd boy's parents severely punished him by sending him to collect wood in the middle of the night. His courage bolstered by the dark and the company of the animals, the young man managed to collect enough wood to be able to return home. With amazement and despair he discovered that where his home had stood, there was now a lake with cold blue waters. The rest of his family had been punished.

Since then, the descendants of the shepherd boy who settled near the lake have always given a hearty welcome to all those in need who knock on their door.



» THE BLUE LAKE OF AYAS (2,216 m)

With its intense turquoise colour, Lake Ayas, in the homonymous valley, is a well-known tourist destination. Starting from the hamlet of Saint-Jacques in the Municipality of Ayas, after about a two-hour walk and after passing a majestic pine forest and a plateau we arrive at the lake, from which we can enjoy an amazing view of the Monte Rosa chain. During the summer, on clear days, an ideal place for just relaxing on the handy beach and enjoying the sunlight.

» THE LAKES OF MONT AVIC PARK

The Mont Avic Park offers a considerable series of naturalistic experiences, among which an excursion to its lakes is certainly one of the most fascinating. The route that groups them – taking about 2 hours – begins from Cort (1,760 m), near Champorcher, to the stretch of water of the Gran Lago (2,539 m), through enchanted, unspoilt nature dominated by forests of hooked pine, Scots pine, larch and beech trees. In the vicinity of the Barbustel

mountain refuge, we come across, in succession, Lake Vallette (2,190 m.), Lago Bianco (2,153 m), Lago Nero (2,166 m) Lago Cornuto (2,172 m) and then continue our ascent to the Gran Lago. Again in the territory of the Park, from Dondena, it is possible to make an excursion which leads to the crystal-clear **LAKE MISÉRIN** (2,591 m): on whose shores stands the Sanctuary of Our Lady of the Snows, a regular destination for many pilgrims in the summer, and the homonymous mountain refuge.



» **LAKE LOD (2,019 m)**

A backdrop of fairytale mountains, from Cima Longhède to Château des Dames, offers a natural setting for this small lake located thirty minutes from Chamois, one of the most characteristic villages in the whole of the Aosta Valley, accessible only on foot or by cable car. The lake can also be reached via a handy chairlift from the central square, in the hamlet of Corgnolaz.

» **LAKE PLACE-MOULIN (1,968 M) AND LAKE LEXERT (1,555 m)**

These two lakes are located

in Valpelline and are easily reached by car. **LAKE LEXERT** lies in the Municipality of Bionaz, in close proximity to a convenient car park. On one shore is an area equipped for picnics, surrounded by a forest of spruce and larch. From its body of water we can admire the imposing mountains: Dent d'Hérens, the Tza de Tzan Glacier, the Becca de Luseny, Les Grandes Murailles, the Vessona Valley, the Morion chain and the Col Crête Sèche. Continuing along the same road we arrive at the largest artificial basin in the Aosta Valley, **LAKE PLACE-MOULIN.**

The dam built in the 1960s is one of the largest in Europe at 155 metres in height and 678 metres in width. The turquoise colour of its waters makes it one of the most photographed and recognizable places in the whole of the Aosta Valley.

» **LAKE VERNEY (2,088 m)**

Easily accessible by car, **LAKE VERNEY** can be reached from La Thuile using the road that leads to the Little Saint Bernard Pass. Its basin is one of the largest among the Aosta Valley lakes (20.3 hectares) and is a popular destination for

fishing. A circular path allows us to skirt it in its entirety (on foot, around 30 minutes). The panorama takes in dozens of alpine peaks, however the view of La Thuile valley is particularly impressive. From the same lake departs a hiking trail which, in about 40 minutes, takes us to **UPPER LAKE VERNAND** (2,278 m).

Every mountain hiking trail involves crossing areas abounding in water, whether these are small lake basins or simple wetlands featuring thriving characteristic vegetation. In the Aosta Valley, the destinations

leading to lakes are countless. Some of them, in addition to hiking trails, are made easier by the use of the ski lifts, which also run in summer. For example, from Pila, travelling by cable car and then by chairlift, we can reach **LAKE CHAMOLÉ**, from which the view of Mont Blanc, the Great Saint Bernard Valley and the Grand Combin is peerless. In Estoul, the chairlift takes us high enough to facilitate an excursion to the five lakes of glacial origin (**THE PALASINAZ LAKES**). From Gressoney-La-Trinité, using the ski lifts or via different hiking routes, we reach **LAKE GABIET** (2,371 m), located in a basin from which

to enjoy a panorama of the Monte Rosa chain. Other interesting destinations include: **LAKE GOILLET** (2,603 m), in the Breuil-Cervinia area, easily reachable by hiking from the village, or on foot from the Plan Maison cable car station; **LAKE LOIE** (2,346 m) in Cogne, inside the Gran Paradiso Park, with its enjoyable ring-shaped route that starts from the Lillaz waterfalls; the **NIVOLET LAKES** reachable from Valsavarenche; the **LAKE SAN GRATO** in Valgrisenche; the **LAURES LAKES** reachable from Brissogne; **LAKE CIGNANA** in Valtournenche.



ENCHANTED BY THE WATERFALLS



In the Aosta Valley, water and verticality are distinctive and recurring features of the landscape; the combination gives rise to striking waterfalls which we can suddenly come across in almost all of the valleys. With the arrival of summer and the rise in temperatures, the snows melt and the water flowing from the tops of the mountains towards the valley produces spectacles full of pure energy and thunderous downpours as the water leaps from rock to rock. These leaps paint suggestive colours: the clarity of the water is embellished by the silts of the glaciers or the algae of some of the lakebeds encountered on the way down, or simply the refraction of the alpine light, rendered opaque by the colours of the mountains. The emotional

effect is such that no one can remain indifferent to such a waterfall and those of the Aosta Valley in particular inspire ecstasy.

In Cogne, within the Gran Paradiso National Park, the Urtier stream forms the **LILLAZ WATERFALLS** (1,610 m). This place is a must-see, thanks also to the path which allows easy access to the three waterfalls. Even in winter the show is guaranteed, especially for ice climbing lovers. The hiking route also features detailed geological information panels which explain to visitors how the falls formed. The geological park is wheelchair accessible.

From the vast Ruitor Glacier (3,486 m), the clear waters of the homonymous stream descend towards La Thuile and, before arriving in the valley, fall playfully three times, producing another fairytale setting in the Aosta Valley: the **RUTOR WATERFALLS**.



These can be reached along a path which ascends the stream starting from the hamlet of La Joux. It is advisable not to stop at the first fall, but to carry on to the third one, possibly fitting in an overnight stay at the Albert Deffeyes mountain refuge near Lake Santa Margherita.

The **ISOLLAZ WATERFALL** (695 m) in Val d'Ayas can be reached via a short downhill



path from Challand-Saint-Victor, a town located just a few minutes from the Verrès motorway exit. The place oozes charm and mystery. Near the waterfall is the abandoned mine of



Sache, from which pyrite was extracted until the beginning of the 20th century. This location is at the centre of a legendary story: it is said that there is an ancient door which opens only on Christmas Eve, and any lucky individual who finds it and passes through will receive a solid gold calf as a gift. But he or she must be careful to get out before the door closes, for fear of being trapped inside the mountain! Also worth mentioning is the **LENTENEY WATERFALL**, reachable and visible along the main road which climbs from Aosta towards Courmayeur, at Derby (near La Salle).

The territory of the Aosta Valley is also characterized by multiple ravines, natural fissures carved by the flow of water over time. Of great impact for its panoramic lookout point on an artificial slope suspended over the void, is the **PRÉ-SAINT-DIDIER**

RAVINE. At 160 metres above sea level, overlooking the Dora di Verney, from the walkway the view sweeps across to the thermal spring of Pré-Saint-Didier. Instead, the **GOUFFRE DES BUSSERAILLES RAVINE** can be reached from Valtournenche. Carved into the mountain by the force of the waters of the Marmore stream, it is 35 metres deep and 104 metres long. It can be visited all year round, but is best appreciated during the winter, when the ice crystals hanging from its walls create an even more Gothic environment. In the valley of the Lys (or Gressoney), in Fontainemore, of note is the **GUILLEMORE RAVINE** (991 m), while in the Valley of Champorcher we can follow the **PATHS OF THE RAVINES (Percorsi degli Orridi)**, which wind their way through the Municipalities of Hône, Pontboset and Champorcher.



BEFORE REACHING THE MOUNTAINS: ON THE HILLS



Long before the construction of the Mont Blanc and Great Saint Bernard tunnels, long before the motorway and convenient regional roads that now ascend the smaller valleys, in the Aosta Valley area communications between the various valleys and the neighbouring countries of France and Switzerland took place across the hills, precious transit routes brimming with history and culture.

The passes, cross-border and from valley to valley, occupy that median band which lies between the valley floor and the high peaks overlooking the region, offering stopping places and amazement when, after



the climb, at the top of the hill the view of “the other side” suddenly appears.

THE CROSS-BORDER PASSES

Along the Via Francigena, on the border between Italy and Switzerland, the **GREAT SAINT BERNARD PASS** (2,472 m) is a place full of history, its strategic importance already understood by the Romans.

In the first decades after the year 1000, thanks to the work of St. Bernard of Menton, the Hospice was built, a place of shelter and protection which welcomed travellers and pilgrims. Starting from the 16th century, the canons learned how to train large Molossian dogs, particularly adapted to the forbidding climatic conditions of the pass. The breed was selected and today, the *St. Bernard* (Barry), in



addition to being the symbol of this location, is the quintessential icon of mountain rescue.

One famous crossing of the Alps was that of Napoleon in May 1800, an episode recalled by the typical masks (*Landzettes*) worn at the historical carnivals of the Great Saint Bernard Valley (also called *Coumba Freida* in Aosta Valley patois).

The **LITTLE SAINT BERNARD PASS** (2,188 m) connects La Thuile with France. The presence of a *cromlech* testifies to a history thousands of years old





with its roots in prehistory. The *mansio* (warehouse and accommodation for soldiers and travellers) documents the frequentation of the place by the Romans, who used the pass to reach *Gaul*. Many of the finds found on this hill are on display at the Archaeological Museum of Aosta. Here too St. Bernard built a hospice, destroyed and rebuilt many times over the centuries. After the bombings of the Second World War, the building was partially rebuilt and in addition to a tourist office, it now houses a museum on the history of the hills, Valdigne and the Savoy. Of note is the *Column of Joux*, the pedestal of the statue of St. Bernard. Legend has it that it was the saint himself who demolished the statue of Jupiter which once stood on the column to make way

for a brand-new religious cult.

THE JUNCTION POINTS BETWEEN THE VALLEYS

Too numerous to mention them all, some hills are better known and more travelled than others. The **COL DE JOUX** (1,640 m) – which connects Saint-Vincent to Brusson (in Val d'Ayas) – reveals a very evocative territory, also thanks to the charm of its forests, accessible all year round, from winter to spring and from summer to autumn. The **COLLE DEL NIVOLET** (2,602 m) – in the Gran Paradiso National Park – connects Valsavarenche to the Valle dell'Orco in Piedmont. This is a paradise for amateur astronomers: the protection of the mountains removes the “noise” produced by artificial lighting and we can fully enjoy the stars in all their glory. The

COLLE SAN CARLO (1,971 m) – connects Morgex to La Thuile – and is a popular destination for cyclists. The climb from Morgex is one of the toughest in the Alpine panorama, the scene of several passages of the Giro d'Italia [cycle race] and amateur time trials. From the Colle, a circular route lets us visit Lake Arpy and enjoy the view from the **COLLE DELLA CROCE**. The **COLLE DI SAN PANTALEONE** – which connects Torgnon to Saint-Denis – offers a striking view of the valley of the Marmore stream, with the Matterhorn in the background. The **COL D'ARLAZ** (1,030 m) can be reached from several sides, thanks to several simple but pleasant hiking routes: the Rû d'Arlaz, starting from Brusson and Challand-Saint-Anselme, where in the forest of Scots pines, firs and larches it is possible to trace rock engravings and cup marks; the artistic path of Challand Art starts from Challand-Saint-Victor; that of the fairy forest departs from Emarèse. The Col d'Arlaz can also be reached by car from Montjovet. The **COL D'OLEN** (2,880 m), an Alpine pass which connects the Lys Valley (aka Gressoney Valley) to Valsesia in Piedmont, at the beginning of the 20th century, became a well-known starting point for ascents of Monte Rosa, thanks to its historic hotels.



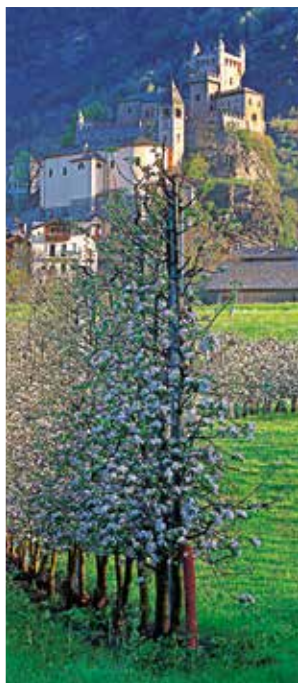
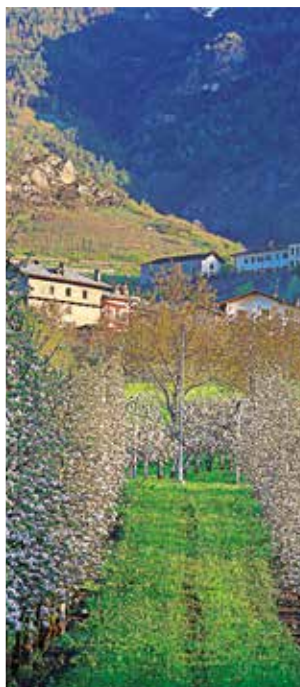


*The world scares me
and I chose the valley
of the beautiful and the good
and where time does not run...*

Giovanni Pascoli



**ART, CULTURE
AND TERRITORY**



EXPERIENCE THE AOSTA VALLEY'S VILLAGES, TOWNS AND CITIES



The historical evolution of the Aosta Valley has left indelible traces on the territory.

Art, culture and **history** are intertwined in the urban fabric of villages and towns which, like a constellation, represent the tangible sign of **a history thousands of years old** and **traditions** still alive today whose roots lie in the past. Testimonies of the Romans, walls of mighty medieval castles, watchtowers and regal residences harmoniously enrich the natural landscape, gifting guests and inhabitants of the Aosta Valley permutations of **sheer beauty**.

AOSTA, ROMAN AND MEDIEVAL CITY

The capital of the Aosta Valley is proud to show off its past. Visiting the city, you immediately notice its layout of Roman origin: streets perpendicular to each other are contained within a large rectangle, bordered by the ancient city walls, well preserved and still visible in several places.

The remarkable monumental testimonies of the Romans make it one of the most important examples of Roman architecture in Northern Italy: the *domus*, the Porta Praetoria, the theatre, the walls, and the cryptoporticus recall the splendour that Aosta once boasted under its founder, Emperor Augustus.

For 2,000 years, the **ARCH OF AUGUSTUS** has been one of the symbols of the city; the **ROMAN THEATRE**, with its 22 metres of almost intact façade is one of the most evocative monuments in Italy; in addition, the **MEGALITHIC AREA**, brought to light in 1969, is one of the most interesting archaeological sites of Prehistory in Europe.



There are many ways to visit Aosta. The tourist guides propose different itineraries, which can normally be covered in one or more days, if we leave aside the countless museums present, which deserve being investigated in depth. The **CATHEDRAL** – dedicated to St. Mary of the Assumption and John the Baptist – was built starting from the 11th century over a pre-existing religious building, in turn built on top of the Roman cryptoporticus. Enlarged and modified over the centuries, the current structure can be traced back to the first decades of the 16th century, its façade frescoed with episodes from the life of Mary. The current front was added in the neoclassical era. Its ambulatory houses the **TREASURY MUSEUM**.

In the **COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF SANT'ORSO**, in Romanesque and Gothic style, an ancient mosaic depicting Samson killing the lion has been brought to light. The wooden choir, the cycle of frescoes in the attic and the cloister – with the capitals of its colonnade featuring a narrative attributable to the life of Saint Ursus (*Orso*) – make it one of the most visited places in the city. Not only history and culture, though! Surrounded by mountains and connected to Pila (a well-known ski resort) by a cable car which can take you from the city centre to the ski slopes (in winter) and to various hiking trails (in summer) in just 17 minutes, Aosta too boasts a strong alpine soul.

Aosta
on lovevda.it



FROM THE SALASSI TO THE ROMANS



Between the 8th and 5th centuries BC, the Celts had an important influence on the indigenous populations settled in the current territory of the Aosta Valley, allowing the development of the Salassi civilization. The Romans, interested in the conquest of Gaul, clashed with the population of Salassi, to make that portion of land the gateway to present-day France and England. In 25 BC, the Romans decided to found *Augusta Praetoria Salassorum*, today's Aosta, and to construct the routes towards the uplands of the Little and Great Saint

Bernard passes. Roman rule was to last for five centuries.

On the territory we can find many traces left behind by the Romans in their desire to expand northwards. Aosta itself is certainly the place which offers the largest number of testimonies.

In addition to the latter location, there is a significant bridge-aqueduct over the Grand-Eyvia stream in Pont d'Ael, a village easily accessible from Aymavilles along the road leading to Cogne. This is an imposing artefact in masonry and blocks of cut stone, datable to 3 BC thanks to an inscription on the northern front, which also bears the name of Caius Avillius Caimus, its sponsor and owner. A recent enhancement

project allows visitors to time travel, to better understand the work and the adjacent Roman road – no longer visible.

In Donnas, an arch and a 221-metre-long portion of the ancient Roman road to Gaul, cut out from the rocky promontory over the waters of the Dora Baltea, testify to the Romans' enviable technique in building road connections. An original milestone, still standing, informs us that Aosta is XXXVI miles away (about 54 km). Towards Pont-Saint-Martin, we come across a monumental Roman bridge, the first Aosta Valley outpost on the road towards Gaul, an unparalleled example in Europe for the width of its single arch, with an exceptional span of 36 metres.

SAINT-VINCENT



The "Riviera of the Alps" is unique in the territory of the Aosta Valley. Saint-Vincent's position, sheltered from cold winds thanks to the presence of Mount Zerbion, has allowed the development of vegetation more typical of Mediterranean areas, including olive trees, pines and palm trees. The presence of the **SPA BATHS** and the **CASINO DE LA VALLÉE**, have long made the town a popular tourist and holiday destination. Saint-Vincent preserves several testimonies of its historical past, including the church dedicated to St.

Vincent, remodelled in the 19th century by the architect Camillo Boggio, famous for the castle of Saint-Pierre. Beneath the church is an archaeological site, which testifies to the presence of the first Iron Age settlements and which revealed some structures will thermal functions. An ideal tourist

destination for every season, Saint-Vincent is an excellent base for visiting the entire region. The sports offering is also varied: the winter one hinges on the nearby ski area of Breuil-Cervinia, the summer one provides a wide range of itineraries for hiking and mountain biking.



COURMAYEUR

The echo of its world-famous name precedes this famous Alpine resort, which hugs the border with France. The ingredients that make it unique are many: nature, Mont Blanc, hotels and restaurants, stone and wooden houses, the Skyway, Val Veny, Val Ferret... the list goes on and on. The "New York Times" has included it among its 52 must-see world destinations. The best way to enjoy Courmayeur is to take a long stroll through its Old Town, savouring the crisp air, the colours, the fine shops, the restaurants. Since 1786, the year of the conquest of the summit of the *white giant*, it is considered one of the historic capitals of mountaineering and mountain hiking. Stops at the **CHURCH OF SS PANTALEONE E VALENTINO** and the **DUCA DEGLI ABRUZZI ALPINE MUSEUM** allow us to make the most of the time spent and increase our knowledge of Courmayeur. The **SANCTUARY OF NOTRE-DAME DE LA GUÉRISON**, on the road to Val Veny at the foot of the Brenva glacier offers an opportunity for moments of recollection in contemplation of the numerous votive offerings. One must is the futuristic **SKYWAY MONTE BIANCO**, the cable car which, from **ENTRÈVES** (1,300 m), transports us to the heart of Mont Blanc, as far as **POINTE**



HELBRONNER (3,466 m). The intermediate station – **PAVILLON DU MONT FRÉTY** (2,173 m) – offers a wide range of activities: in addition to being able to eat and drink at the refreshment point, you can visit the cinema, or the Cave Mont Blanc for a taste of high-altitude winemaking, the boutique, and also enjoy, outside, the **SAUSSUREA BOTANICAL GARDEN**. A further recommendation is some cultural study at **HANGAR2173**, a museum located in the old cable car station which allows us to learn about the complex history of the cable car itself as well as mountaineering. A real must-see: the new **'INFINITY ROOM'**: an experience in the experience which absolutely should not be missed. The chance of entering in an ice cave, of flying over the peak of Mont

Blanc, of getting lost in some autumn woods, everything in an unreal room. Reaching the Skyway terminal station, the circular terrace, overlooking the glacier offers a 360° view of the surrounding mountains. The library, the crystal room and the **SKY VERTIGO** complete the day at a high altitude filled with many emotions. The skiing area boasts 100 km of slopes and a multitude of sports activities to try out, both in winter and in summer. At the **COURMAYEUR SPORT CENTRE** the ice arena is open all year round. Finally, the nearby **PRÉ-SAINT-DIDIER SPA BATHS** offer all the relaxation you could ever need to enjoy your holiday in Courmayeur even more.

Discover
Courmayeur



GRESSONEY-SAINT-JEAN AND WALSER CULTURE

Sitting at the foot of the Monte Rosa massif overlooking the Lyskamm glacier, Gressoney-Saint-Jean (1,385 m) is an elegant resort on a human scale which, together with the nearby Gressoney-La-Trinité (at the top of the valley), represents a historic tourist destination (among its most illustrious guests was Queen Margherita), both in



winter, to practise alpine skiing and ski mountaineering, and in summer for trekking and mountaineering. The **WALSER CULTURE** is the peculiar characteristic of Gressoney. More than eight centuries ago, while passing through the Colle del Teodulo, the Walser population of Germanic origin chose to settle here. There are many references to the history of this people in the area, key elements being the Walser German language, spoken by the local people, the original architecture with its typical *stadel*, and the use of traditional costumes. The female version of the costume is particularly fascinating: it consists of a long scarlet skirt, a bodice embellished with golden chevrons, a lacy white shirt, an ornate black apron, a velvet harness, a short jacket and a cap embroidered in gold filigree.



From Gressoney-Saint-Jean depart itineraries that let us visit the Walser villages of **NOVERSCH, ECKÒ** and **ALPENZÜ**.

Queen Margherita of Savoy, who chose Gressoney as her favourite resort for summer holidays, had her “summer residence” built here, the fairytale **SAVOY CASTLE** which, together with the garden, is today an obligatory stop on any trip to the Aosta Valley.

IN THE LAND OF THE WALSER



Starting from the 13th century, arriving from what is now Switzerland, the Walser population colonized the Lys Valley (Gressoney, Issime and the hamlet of Niel in the Municipality of Gaby) and the upper Val d'Ayas (Canton des Allemands) in the Aosta Valley and Valsesia, Val Formazza and Valle Anzasca in Piedmont. Shepherds, mountaineers, woodcutters and farmers, they had developed effective survival

strategies for adapting to the hostile mountain ecosystem. Their original traditions have been handed down from father to son, so much so that today in the Aosta Valley it is easy to identify the places where this population still lives. Customs and traditions represent a strong identity root for the Aosta Valley. Among these, the language stands out: it is surprising to hear people talking to each other in dialects of a German origin, such as the *titsch* of Gressoney-Saint-Jean and Gressoney-La-Trinité and the *töitschu* of Issime. The typical houses, the *stadel*

or *rascard*, a perfect organized system, once served mainly as grain dryers, but also stables and milk storage, as well as accommodation. The *rascards*, built mainly of larch, instead of resting on the ground, stand on so-called “mushrooms”, large granite discs which allowed good ventilation of the rooms and protection from rodents. Their roofs are made of *lose*, the slate slabs typical of Aosta Valley houses. To have a complete overview of the peculiarities of the Walser culture, we recommend a visit to the Walser **Ecomuseum** in **Gressoney-La-Trinité**.

COGNE, PEARL OF THE ALPS

An oasis of nature, in the heart of the **GRAN PARADISO NATIONAL PARK**, Cogne (1,534 m) is one of the most famous places in the Aosta Valley. The village overlooks the **SANT'ORSO MEADOW**, counted as an "Italian Wonder", one of the largest mountain meadows in Europe, which represents a genuine open-air plant museum, still fashioned by the skilful work of the farmers.

The residential nucleus of the village is an enchanting maze of small streets, shops of typical products and houses in wood and local stone, renovated with great architectural taste, taking care to maintain the charming patina of time. One admirable example of this, which can also be visited, is the **MAISON**

GÉRARD DAYNÉ (in Sonveulla), with its ethnographic museum. The history of Cogne is closely linked to that of its magnetite mines which, together with the miners' village and the Aosta Valley **MINING PARK EXHIBITION CENTRE AND COGNE MINE**, today represent a fine testimony to industrial archaeology. The guided tour of the mine (departure from Costa del Pino) is fascinating: first on board a vintage train and then on foot, you enter the tunnel to relive the life of the miners.

Cogne is also famous for its **BOBBIN LACE**. There are still many artisans who try their hand at this ancient art, which allows them to weave wonderful ornamentation in flax, wrapped around spindles. Near the **PARISH CHURCH OF SANT'ORSO** can be found a permanent exhibition



where they also sell Cogne lace, organized by the 40 lace makers of **LES DENTELLIÈRES COOPERATIVE**.

The territory also offers some major natural attractions such as the **PARADISIA ALPINE BOTANICAL GARDEN** and the **LILLAZ WATERFALLS** as well as countless excursions and sports activities, both in winter and summer. With its 80 km of slopes this area ranks among the most interesting for cross-country skiing. But you cannot leave the village without photographing the iron fountain – built at the beginning of the 19th century thanks to the interest of a doctor, César Emmanuel Grappein – against the backdrop of the Gran Paradiso.



Discover
Cogne



CHAMOIS, A CORNER OF INFINITY

In the middle of Valtournenche, the tiny town of **CHAMOIS** (1,816 m) can only be reached by cable car, on foot, or by mountain bike and, in winter, by snowshoeing along a pleasant route starting from La Magdeleine. It is inhabited all year round by around a hundred people, some of whom are not indigenous but chose it as a place to live after falling in love with it. The town is included on the list of “Pearls of the Alps”, a title which rewards virtuous mountain resorts for eco-sustainability and soft mobility. It is the only Italian municipality that is completely free of cars. The nucleus of the village, Corgnolaz, is surrounded by six hamlets, *hameaux* in the

local dialect: La Ville, Lieussel, Crépin, Lo Lod, Suisse, and Caillat. Exposed to the elements on a glacial terrace, the village is an oasis of utter tranquillity, so much so that the campaign to promote its snowshoe route called “The Lord of the Rings” announces: “over 20 km of deafening silence”. So the scrunching of the snow under your feet, the gurgling of the streams and the relaxed voices of other people become the only audible “noises”: a place of enchantment, on a perfect human scale.

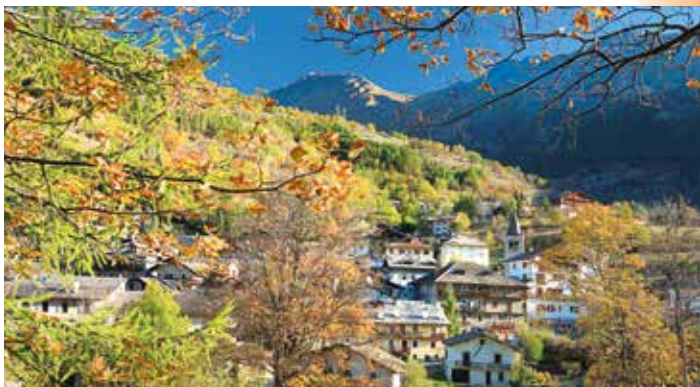


Discover
Chamois



AMONG THE MOST BEAUTIFUL VILLAGES IN ITALY: ÉTROUBLES AND BARD

Being counted among “The Most Beautiful Villages in Italy” means becoming part of a network to valorize and promote the historical heritage of some smaller Italian settlements. Which is the case of **ÉTROUBLES** (1,270 m), with its open-air museum, and **BARD** (381 m): two of the most characteristic villages of the Aosta Valley. Halfway between Aosta and the Great Saint Bernard Pass stands Etroubles, a place of strategic importance since Roman times and a station of the Via Francigena during the Middle Ages. It has the singularity of hosting a permanent open-air contemporary art gallery, set up thanks to the experiential contribution of the Pierre Gianadda Foundation in Martigny, Switzerland. The characteristic context of Etroubles is the ideal setting for works of art: walking through the streets of the village – among fountains, houses in wood and local stone and the 15th-century bell tower – you have the impression of being suspended between present and past. The same feeling is felt by visiting, in succession, the first Aosta Valley dairy (1853) and the first hydroelectric power station (1904), today both museums. Arriving in **BARD** you

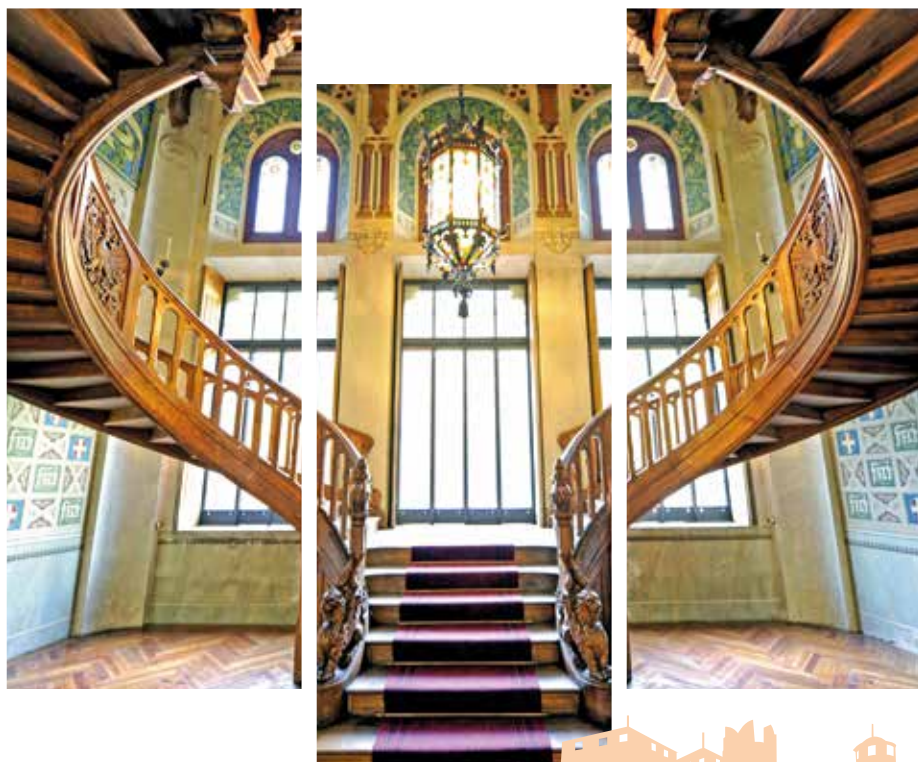


immediately notice that its orographic conformation is strategic for the territory. The promontory, which invades the valley floor to an extent that almost obstructs it, is a natural barrier on which stands the **FORT**, a military fortress dating back to the early 19th century and the scene of historical battles. Conquered and rebuilt several times over the centuries, today the Fort of Bard – owned by the Region – is a cultural centre and exhibition venue, hosting prestigious temporary art exhibitions, events and activities. Three panoramic lifts give access to all levels of the Fortress, following the

form of the promontory. Bard is also known for its historical **MEDIEVAL VILLAGE**. In the village can be found many typical local houses, declared national monuments, and enhanced by such treasured architectural elements as mullioned windows, arches or painted ornamentation. Bard is also a stop on the Via Francigena. Not far from the village you can visit an archaeological geo-site, home to the so-called “potholes of the giants” as well as some interesting examples of rock carvings.

Discover
Bard





ONE VALLEY FOR 100 CASTLES



*All the castles
of Aosta Valley
on lovevda.it*



During the **Middle Ages**, as a gateway to the Alpine passes, the strategic position of the Aosta Valley represented one of the main reasons for division and contention between the various local noble families. So it was that the territory saw the multiplication of **castles, towers** and **fortified houses** to control the valley floor and the lateral valleys. Over the centuries, numerous manors were transformed from **bastions of defence** into **stately homes**, adapted to eras and fashions, while others were slowly abandoned. Today these places so full of art, history and legends, enhanced by the beauty of an extraordinary landscape, fascinate visitors with their **fairytale charm**.

» SAVOY CASTLE

(Gressoney-Saint-Jean)

An exception compared to the other castles of the Aosta Valley, this was actually built in recent times, at the behest of Queen Margherita, who had fallen in love with the beauties of Gressoney. This eclectic castle is located in Belvedere and its first stone was laid on August, 24 1899. In “medieval” style, it was designed by the architect Emilio Stramucci, with a central body surmounted by five neo-Gothic towers. Many were the artisans – also engaged in the royal residences of Turin – involved in creating the large decorative apparatus of the royal manor (among others Carlo Cussetti and Michele Dellera). After the death of King Umberto I, it became the habitual residence of the Queen Mother in the summertime. In 1936, it was bought by Ettore Moretti, who



kept the interiors practically intact. In 1981, the Autonomous Region of the Aosta Valley took over the property. The visit, which gradually winds its way through the castle, tells us a lot about the life of Queen Margherita. The botanical garden, the Romitaggio Carducci (a house destined for the Queen’s poet friend) and the Villa Belvedere complete the fairytale aura of the site.

» VERRÈS CASTLE

The peculiarity of this castle is that it rises from a spur of rock, which was to dictate its impregnability and military life. It is documented from 1287 as being the property of the De Verretio family. Towards the middle of the 14th century, with no extant heirs, the castle passed to the Counts of Savoy, who entrusted it to the powerful Challant family. From Ibleto Challant, the castle passed into the hands of Francesco, the first Count of Challant, who died without any male heirs: the dispute between his daughter Caterina and his cousin Giacomo generated one of the most absorbing family sagas in the history of the Aosta Valley. Tradition has it that Catherine and Peter Sarrìod d’Introd, her husband, in order to win over the people, joined the great dance party on the Day of the Holy Trinity. Since then the festival has been commemorated every year, during the four days



of the historic Carnival of Verrès. This was not, however, enough to win the contest, and Giacomo became the second Count of Challant. In 1536, with René of Challant, the fortress was adapted to the use of firearms and equipped with new defence systems, such as a buttressed wall capable of deflecting cannon shot. The castle received a new, more secure entrance with a vestibule and drawbridge. Then new cross windows and Moorish arched doors completed the modernization work. René of Challant died without any male heirs, so the manor again passed to the Savoy, who had the military equipment transferred to the Fort of Bard. The restoration of the castle took place at the end of the 19th century thanks to the action of a group of intellectuals. The tour of the castle mainly focuses on its defensive system. The geometric austerity and limited decorative details are indicative of its military nature. The three floors of the manor are interconnected by a monumental staircase with flying buttresses.

» ISSOGNE CASTLE

The castle's architecture is an expression of the morphing of the Gothic style into the Renaissance manner. Its historical vicissitudes are linked to the nearby Verrès Castle of the De Verretio family and to disputes with the bishops of Aosta, owners of the pre-existing fortified

house, which culminated in 1333 with an assault and its partial destruction. In 1379, the property passed to the Challant family who restored it according to the dictates of the courtly Gothic style. In the Renaissance period, starting from 1480, further works turned it into the sumptuous current residence, called "castle" for its beauty: a single horseshoe-shaped palace, overlooking an Italian garden. The surrounding wall was decorated with stories of heroes, while its portico was given lunettes, frescoed with scenes of daily life and workshops. At the centre of the courtyard is the fountain of the pomegranate, an ancient symbol of prosperity. The interiors were also extensively decorated. Alternating fortunes led the painter Vittorio Avondo to purchase the manor in 1872. It was he who oversaw the restoration of the castle, together with Alfredo d'Andrade, and its

furnishing with furniture from the antiques market and then, in 1907, he donated it to the Italian State. Today it is owned by the Autonomous Region of the Aosta Valley.

The tour winds from the fountain of the pomegranate to the room called "of the King of France". A permanent exhibition dedicated to Vittorio Avondo illustrates the history that linked him to the castle.





» FÉNIS CASTLE

The history of this castle is intertwined with the events of the Fénis branch of the Challant family. Erected on a slight hill without natural defences around it, in the 14th century it was endowed with imposing defensive systems and crenelated walls, but also with elegant decorations and frescoes starting from the 15th century, to characterize it as a representative seat. In the collective imagination, its appearance represents the typical “medieval castle”. In 1716, it passed into the hands of Count Baldassarre Castellar di Saluzzo Paesana, whose family affairs led to the castle being abandoned. In 1895, it was purchased by the Italian State

through the intercession of the architect Alfredo d’Andrade, who had sensed the tourist appeal of the local castles. It has been a national monument since 1896 and today belongs to the Autonomous Region of the Aosta Valley.

With a pentagonal plan, each corner of the castle features circular turrets, with the exception of the south-west corner with its imposing circular tower, and the south one, with its square-section tower. A double wall protects the keep. Filled with antique furniture, in their succession within the visitor route, the interiors display connotations of medieval life. The architectural model used by D’Andrade for the construction

of Turin’s “Medieval Village”, the inner courtyard – decorated in Gothic style – opens onto a characteristic semi-circular staircase, over which looms a fresco depicting St. George lancing the dragon.

» CHÂTEAU DE CLY

(Saint-Denis)

The events related to the history of this manor, which can only be visited in summer, have left indelible traces on its structure. With its imposing *donjon* and walls, it dominated the feud that today corresponds to Valtournenche. From the Challant family it passed to the Savoy and then to the Roncas, who plundered it of many materials for the construction of their palazzo

in Chambave. A spectacular view of the valley floor can be enjoyed from the castle.

» USSEL CASTLE (Châtillon)

Located on top of a hill, from the castle we can enjoy a beautiful view of the plain of Châtillon. It features monobloc architecture, a stylistic evolution of the medieval model. Its construction began in 1343, following a dispute within the Challant family. Following various historical vicissitudes it became a prison and then a barracks. In 1983, ownership passed to the Autonomous Region of the Aosta Valley. It was restored thanks to the patron Baron Marcel Bich of Aosta Valley origins, famous all over the world for *Bic* pens. Occasionally used as a venue for major temporary exhibitions, it can only be visited in the summer months.



» AYMAVILLES CASTLE

With its elegant and majestic profile, this edifice stands at the entrance to the Cogne valley, among the vineyards and the first mountain buttresses

on the right bank of the Dora Baltea. Its shape is an expression of the architectural changes that have occurred over time, from the medieval nucleus to the baroque façades, all wrought by the Challant family. Recently restored and opened to the public, it houses the precious collection of art and archaeology of the Académie Saint-Anselme.

The castle, which stands on a morainic hill, was mentioned for the first time in 1207. In 1354, the Counts of Savoy entrusted the castle to the Challant family.

At the beginning of the 15th century, it was complemented with four towers – two Guelph and two Ghibelline – equipped with corbels and battlements. In 1728, Giuseppe Felice di Challant demolished the outer walls, thereby opening the manor to the surrounding natural park, and built the baroque loggias between the towers, adapting the building to the Rococo style, in vogue at the time. It then passed into the hands of the Bombrini family. In 1970, it was purchased by the Italian State and sold to



the Autonomous Region of the Aosta Valley, which had it restored and has recently reopened it to the public – including all of its rooms, and provided it with a new and interesting museum visit. Of great charm is the 15th-century attic, which also houses three wooden models of the different construction phases of the castle.

» THE ROYAL CASTLE OF SARRE

Known for being the hunting lodge in the Aosta Valley of King Victor Emmanuel II, the castle is located in Lalex, on the promontory overlooking the plain of Aosta. Since 1989, the castle has been entrusted to the Autonomous Region of the Aosta Valley, which had it restored and transformed into a museum on the history that links the territory to the hunting activities of the Savoy court, preserving most of the original furnishings, including the famous



“Sala delle Corna”, a reception room decorated entirely with hunting trophies, according to the taste of the time.

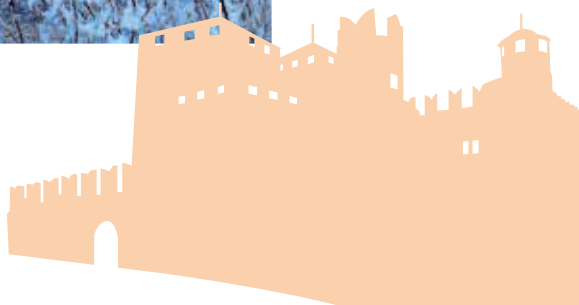
» SARRIOD DE LA TOUR CASTLE

Located on a flat area overlooking the Dora Baltea, and surrounded by apple trees whose flowering accentuates its fairytale appearance, the manor belonged to the Sarriod de la Tour family and dates back, in its oldest part, to the 11th and 12th centuries. In the following centuries, the architectural structure underwent interventions of expansion and development. Inside the chapel you can see an important cycle of wall paintings from the early 13th century, while outside, in the adjoining room, there are some 15th-century frescoes. Singular and fascinating is the so-called “Room of Heads”, which takes its name from the decoration of the wooden ceiling, whose corbels are carved with curious characters, fantastic and monstrous beings.

» INTROD CASTLE

Protected by the gorges of the Savara stream and the Dora di Rhêmes, this castle is still private, but the owners have loaned the Municipality of Introd the ground floor and the park, which can be visited. The history of the castle dates back to the 12th century, when its structure consisted of a keep surrounded by simple walls. Pierre Sarriod had it converted into a fortress, as a symbol of his family’s power. At the end of the 19th century, two disastrous fires forced a restoration, overseen by the architect Jean Chevalley, resulting in the version we see today. In 2007, after further works to make it safe, the castle reopened to the public and can be visited during the summer season. One curiosity is the nearby Cascina L’Ola, a rare example of a typical 15th-century wooden construction, and the contemporary granary, equipped with a fine crenelated Gothic look that recalls the profile of a castle.





MUSEUMS AND ART VENUES



*Guide to the museums
of the Aosta Valley
on lovevda.it*

The **cultural offering** of the Aosta Valley also includes numerous **museums**, distributed throughout the region, often set up in prestigious historic buildings, specially restored to be returned to the use of the community, tourists and residents. A complete list would be too long but many are worth a visit to learn more about the territory, history, culture and tradition of this small Alpine region.

THE MUSEUMS OF THE CAPITAL

Whether permanent installations or temporary exhibitions, at any time of the year in Aosta it is possible to visit museums to deepen our knowledge of the history and culture of the location and

help us to get to know the city better.

The prehistoric past of the region can be traced among the ritual ploughing, menhirs, dolmens and statue stele of the **MEGALITHIC AREA OF SAINT-MARTIN-DE-CORLÉANS**. This site is cloaked in a deep esoteric charm, made even more evocative by a museum visit – 6 m below street level – enlivened by spectacular scenic lighting.

In its chronologically ordered visit, the **MAR – REGIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM** houses finds ranging from the Mesolithic to the end of the Roman Empire and the medieval period. The interactivity provided by the multimedia supports allows us to animate many exhibits of the museum and to immerse ourselves in an understanding of the history of the city and its territory.



GAMBA CASTLE (CHÂTILLON) AND CONTEMPORARY ART

Gamba Castle currently houses the **MUSEUM OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART OF THE AOSTA VALLEY**, where a permanent exhibition hosts works by major Italian and international artists of the 19th and 20th centuries, such as Turner, Ashton, Delleani, Maggi, Calderini, Bazzaro, Lupo, Martini, Mastroianni, Manzù, Arnaldo and Giò Pomodoro, Casorati, De Pisis, Carrà, Guttuso, Schifano, Baruchello, Rama and Mainolfi. Gamba Castle is also the venue for many temporary art exhibitions. The building, conceived as a private residence, was designed at the beginning of the 20th century by the engineer Carlo Saroldi for Baron Carlo Maurizio Gamba. It became the property of the Autonomous Region of the Aosta Valley in 1982. It has a grandiose English-style park, with numerous types of trees, many of which are monumental. Of remarkable beauty is the flowering of daffodils and tulips in spring.



CASTLE OF SAINT-PIERRE AND THE EFISIO NOUSSAN REGIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL SCIENCES

Its profile is instantly recognizable and could easily be confused with the fairytale castle designed by Walt Disney. Located on the rocky outcrop of the locality known as Tache, it is mentioned for the first time in the *Charter of Franchises* of 1191. Its name is linked to its first owners, the De Sancto Petro (Saint-Pierre) family. Having passed into the hands of the Savoy and Challant, in the 17th century it was bought by Pietro Filiberto Roncas, who had it enlarged and transformed into a sumptuous courtly residence. In the second half of the 19th century, it became the property of Baron Emanuele

Bollati, who commissioned the architect Camillo Boggio to restore it. It was his inspiration that produced the current layout with the addition of four towers at the corners of the keep. After passing into the hands of the Municipality of Saint-Pierre, since 1985 it has housed the exhibition venue of the **“EFISIO NOUSSAN” REGIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL SCIENCES.**

In 2022, major restoration works allowed the museum to be rearranged. Today, inside a double register of visits, which combines the history of the castle with the museum, the rooms show all the variety of the alpine natural heritage, given context by the culture and mountain environment of the Aosta Valley (www.museoscienze.vda.it).

THE FORT OF BARD AND THE MUSEUM OF THE ALPS

Built on a rocky outcrop that almost completely obstructs the central valley, which is occupied virtually exclusively by the flow of the Dora Baltea, this fortress has always been an obligatory stopover for anyone crossing the region: for this reason, over the centuries, it was exploited to impose heavy taxes on merchants and travellers and as a point of protection from enemy armies. Of note was the strenuous defence which in May 1800 managed to block the Napoleonic army's advance for two weeks: in revenge Napoleon had the fort razed to the ground.

The current structure was commissioned by Carlo Felice in 1830 and was completed in 1838; it started to decline from the end of the 1800s, and in 1975 the fort was abandoned by its military owners and purchased by the Autonomous Region of the Aosta Valley in 1990. After a long restoration, it was opened to the public in 2006 as a museum and cultural centre.

Inside you can visit three permanent museums. The **MUSEUM OF THE ALPS**, whose 29 rooms offer an interactive discovery of the alpine world. This experiential journey allows us to listen to the passing of the seasons, to fly like an eagle among the



peaks, to dance in the magic of the traditional Aosta Valley carnival, and to conquer a peak. In the **PRISONS** you can see the cells where the prisoners were locked up, while a multimedia visit helps visitors to relive the fort's history. The **MUSEUM OF ALPINE FORTIFICATIONS AND BORDERS** illustrates the defence systems used in the Alps from Roman times up until the 20th century.



BETWEEN CRAFTS AND THE RURAL WORLD

The history of traditions in the Aosta Valley, due to the latter's roots and peculiarities, occupies several museum locations throughout the territory. Handicrafts, in their essence, are repositories of knowledge, creativity and adaptation to life. Not merely intended for the maintenance of memory, but also a symbol of the human intelligence which conceived and realized them, in a time when function was not linked to aesthetics, but to practicality of use. Material, form and gesture are the keys to understanding which accompany visitors in their discovery of the **MAV – MUSEUM OF TRADITIONAL AOSTA VALLEY CRAFTS** in Fénis.

Some rural houses in the area are significant examples of life in the Aosta Valley. In Introd, the **MAISON BRUIL**

ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM

tells the story of rural life in the Gran Paradiso area. The visit allows us to understand how food preservation took place, while the *Atelier du Goût* serves as a showcase of traditional food and wine products, with the possibility of tastings. The museum is completed by a playful interactive centre dedicated to the milk supply chain. The **BERTON HOUSE MUSEUM**, in La Thuile, maintains the appearance of a refined mountain house, in addition to housing a library with many books on local history, furnishings and furniture typical of the Aosta Valley. A mystery game allows discovery of the house-museum.

In Torgnon, two small hamlets make up the romantic **PETIT-MONDE**, the most complete and complex ecomuseum in the Aosta Valley. A permanent exhibition "The Labyrinth of Memory" animates the place,



bringing to life the objects and rural houses that make up the system, immersing the visitor in the slow pace of the mountain peasant world. The route is completed with a visit to the recently restored mill.

For an understanding of life in a mountain pasture, we recommend a visit to the **MAISON DE L'ALPAGE** in Valtournenche.

MAISON GÉRARD-DAYNÉ

ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM is housed in a typical rural house made of wood and stone: the building itself and its interior layout are an integral part of the cultural itinerary that tells of the "life of the past".

*Life is not measured
by the number of breaths you take,
but by the moments
that leave us breathless.*

Maya Angelou





**SOME FUN
EXPERIENCES**





SPORT IN THE AOSTA VALLEY



Guide to sports
in the Aosta Valley
on lovevda.it



“Sport” and “the Aosta Valley” are a **perfect marriage**. Due to its natural conformation, the territory lends itself to the enjoyment of several **outdoor activities**, both in winter and summer, while the evolution of technology allows increasingly larger audiences to experience excitement and adrenaline-rich sensations in the presence of breath-taking **natural surroundings**.



IN THE WINTER SEASON

ALPINE SKIING is one of the sporting attractions for which the Aosta Valley is best known. One number best exemplifies its importance: a total of 800 km of slopes, not counting off-piste itineraries, plus a vast network of modern ski lifts, international areas between Italy, France and Switzerland.

Courmayeur, La Thuile, Aosta-Pila, Cervino Ski Paradise, and Monterosa Ski are the main areas for downhill skiing joined by other smaller resorts, ideal for spending time with your family. There are many possibilities to ski **OFF-PISTE** (freeriding). This adrenaline-filled discipline must be practised with care, relying on mountain guides and ski instructors and following the legal requirements: an avalanche transceiver, shovel and probe must always be present in the



backpack.

At the **Fun Slope** ski park (Colle Bettaforca – Gressoney-La-Trinité) you can test yourself in overcoming various obstacles, some more, some less challenging, but all great fun: parabolic curves, humps, tunnels ...

For **SNOWBOARD** lovers, always looking for fresh snow in addition to powerful emotions, the Aosta Valley

is the ideal destination: the multipurpose freestyle area of the **Indian Park** (Breuil-Cervinia) has been writing the history of this sport for twenty years; the snow parks of **Courmayeur, Castore** (Gressoney-La-Trinité) and **Bordercross** (Torgnon) are suitable for riders of all levels; music marks the rhythm of the descent in the **Areaeffe** snow park (Pila); intrepid freeride snowboarders cannot fail to try their hand at the **Éspace San Bernardo** snow park (La Thuile).

CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING

lovers can gain access to a genuine paradise in the Aosta Valley: there are hundreds of kilometres to lose yourself in nature and among the woods, surrounded by rare beauty. Among the places where you will find wonderful slopes are: **Val Ferret (Courmayeur), Cogne, Saint-Barthélemy, Brusson, Torgnon and Gressoney-Saint-Jean.**





IN SUMMER

What is there to do in the Aosta Valley in summer? The answer to this question finds an unimaginable number of answers. The sports activities that can be practised are literally a myriad, from trekking to mountain biking, practicable at all levels, to specific activities particularly suited to the characteristics of the territory, and which find their best expression here. For example,

MOUNTAINEERING. The Giants of the Alps represent its historic destinations, attracting practitioners of this sport from all over the world.

NATURAL ROCK GYMS are frequented by the best climbers, attracted by the beauty of the area and the high degree of commitment that some of these “gyms” demand. A list of all these gyms and *via ferrate* (trails with amenities) for hiking, is available online (www.lovevda.it/it/sport/arrampicata).

When practising these sports it is advisable to always rely on the professional mountain guides of the Aosta Valley.

SUMMER SKIING can be practised on the Plateau Rosà, in the Matterhorn area (Breuil-Cervinia). With around 25 km of pistes, it ranks among the largest in Europe. The Gravity Park snow park, for snowboarders, is also operational in the summer. Rounding off the tourist offering of a skiing holiday,

The history of **SKI MOUNTAINEERING** is linked to the Aosta Valley territory for the enchantment of its landscape and the quality of the snow, present in countless areas where the sport can be practised, as well as for the Mezzalama Trophy, the glacier marathon, founded in 1933: one of the oldest and most famous ski competitions in this discipline.

There are countless excursions to enjoy wearing **SNOWSHOES**, including organized ones with a guide. This sport, less demanding than cross-country skiing, allows everyone to get to know the mountains. Walking in unspoilt places in the silence of the snow can be the best form of escape from work-based stress that exists. In addition to all the sports practised on fresh snow, the Aosta Valley offers various **ACTIVITIES ON ICE:** climbing, hockey, short-track, curling and skating. The ice-skating rinks are located in various

municipalities of the Aosta Valley, both in permanent sports facilities (the Courmayeur Sport Centre for example) and on temporarily frozen natural lakes, such as Gressoney-Saint-Jean, or in Brusson and Verrayes, on a special platform, which expands the offering in high season.

Then, in the middle of winter, there is the practice of **ICE CLIMBING** on the region's various waterfalls – an unforgettable experience. In Courmayeur and Breuil-Cervinia it is also possible to practise **DOG SLEDDING**, or leading a pack of sled dogs across the snow. The two centres also offer group and children's activities.

Snowmobiling, snowkiting and heliskiing round off the wide range of activities that the Aosta Valley has to offer on the snow.

Nordic
skiing



is the **Ice Cave**, one of the wonders of the Alps that extends between the Klein Matterhorn and the Breithorn, where you can admire a large series of artistic ice sculptures and the characteristics of a glacier (access with a mountain guide only). In the waters of the Dora Baltea and in some alpine streams of the Aosta Valley, rafting, hydrospeed, canyoning, kayaking and canoeing are practised. **RAFTING** involves the descent of a river on a raft. The rough waters and the various differences in height of the Aosta Valley streams are always thrilling for rafters who, with the help of a specialized guide, row vigorously to avoid falling



victim to the obstacles in their path. The sport is very exciting and there are different levels of difficulty. Fun is guaranteed, as long as you don't fall into the water! Rafting is practised in Arnad (which also features a competitive training centre), Avisa, Aymavilles, Morgex, Pré-Saint-Didier and Villeneuve. **CANYONING** involves the descent on foot of a stream following its path towards the valley, descending with ropes or simply letting yourself slide along the narrow natural gorges formed by water erosion, protected by a wetsuit and helmet. This is a sport which allows direct contact with nature, often in fascinating unspoilt locations. In the Aosta Valley it is practised on the Fer stream in Donnas, Pacoulla and Bouro in Fontainemore, Chalamy in Champdepraz.

SPORT FISHING is governed by strict rules, a fishing calendar and a special map, which indicates all the streams, lakes and ponds where you can practise this sport (www.lovevda.it/it/sport/pesca). Many of the territory's fishing reserves are "catch-and-release", i.e. they envisage the compulsory release of all fish caught without killing them. The lay of the land and the wide alpine spaces have allowed the creation of several **GOLF COURSES** throughout the territory. The Cervino Golf



Club (Breuil-Cervinia) opened its doors in the early 1950s and manages one of the highest circuits in Europe; it develops over 18 holes beneath the Gran Becca. The Aosta Brissagne Golf Club, the Aosta Arsanières Golf Club and the Courmayeur et Grandes Jorasses Golf Club feature 9 holes. The Gressoney Monte Rosa Golf Course has 12 holes overlooking the Monte Rosa chain.

TREKKING ON HORSEBACK is a special experience that allows you to fully enjoy the beautiful landscapes of the Aosta Valley. There are several centres in the area that offer the possibility of long walks to explore enchanted places. Fun is also guaranteed at the local **ADVENTURE PARKS**, where adults, children and teenagers alike can tackle nature and hone their skills, with Tibetan bridges, pulleys and themed routes. Often used by companies for "team building", there are nine adventure parks in the Aosta Valley and they are scattered throughout the region (www.lovevda.it/en/sport/adventure-parks).



*Trekking
in Valle d'Aosta
on lovevda.it*

DISCOVERY AND ADVENTURE

The **trail network** is the flagship of the Aosta Valley. The countless routes cover the whole territory, from the valley floor to the highest Alpine peaks. Travelling them, whether on **foot** or **mountain bike**, allows you to come into close contact with nature and become one with it.

Adrenaline and **relaxation** alternate in the Aosta Valley to bring tourists a **seesaw of emotions**. Unique experiences that leave their mark, for all tastes, interests, and ages!

TREKKING

The Aosta Valley trekking routes extend for over 5,000 km. All routes are catalogued and mapped on topographic maps available on the **geonavigator** portal (mappe.regione.vda.it/pub/geosentieri), with constantly updated GPS tracks, downloadable directly to electronic devices.

The routes are all indicated by vertical signs, or by poles with yellow signs in which the number or abbreviation of the path is reported, with the toponym of the place to be reached, the altitude of the destination, the walking time and the difficulty of the route (from the easiest to the most difficult: T = tourist, E = hiking without technical difficulties, EE= for experts, EEA= for experts with the use of specific equipment).



Along the way are horizontal signs, or symbols in yellow paint with an alphanumeric acronym of the particular excursion.


At the tourist offices you can buy 1:25,000 hiking maps of the different valleys/geographical areas and pick up free brochures for easy walks.




The range of high-altitude **MOUNTAIN REFUGES** and **BIVOUACS** is highly regarded; whether they are the destination of a day trip or a stopping point as part of a multi-day hiking route, they offer warm and genuine hospitality, local cuisine, and precious teachings on the mountains and on the way to enjoy them with respect. Some hiking trails and paths have made the history of the Aosta Valley and can represent the goal of a trip to this region. Let us look at some of them.

THE HIGH ROUTES

There are two High Routes in the Aosta Valley.

Also known as the **VIA DEI GIGANTI**, High Route number 1 (Trail Sign ) links the massifs of Monte Rosa, Cervino and Mont Blanc.

On the geographical left of the Dora Baltea, from Donnas to Courmayeur, in 17 stages, it allows access to an admirable succession of alpine landscapes, combining them with mountain pastures, typical Walser buildings, and various architectural marvels.

High Route number 2 (Trail Sign ) – also called the **NATURALISTIC HIGH ROUTE** – crosses the territory of the Gran Paradiso National Park and the Mont Avic Regional Park. On the geographical right of the Dora Baltea, from Courmayeur to Donnas, in 14 stages, hikers can admire the natural riches of the Aosta Valley up close. The two routes together give

rise to the **GIRO DEI GIGANTI**, a ring trek which crosses the entire Aosta Valley and on which the famous endurance trial called **TOR DES GÉANTS** is held, which attracts trekkers from all over the world every year.


INTERNATIONAL TOURS

The **MONT BLANC TOUR** is divided into a circular route of 170 km, wrapped around the Mont Blanc massif (www.autourdumontblanc.com). The **MONTE ROSA TOUR** is divided into 9 stages, for a total length of around 150 km. You can start the route from Zermatt, Switzerland (www.tmr-matterhorn.ch). The **MATTERHORN TOUR** allows us to admire the beauty of the Matterhorn from all angles, in 9 stages, crossing 6 different valleys, with their individual culture and landscape features (www.tourducervin.ch). From



refuge to refuge, in about 7 days of walking, it is possible to take the **GRAND COMBIN TOUR**, recommended for trained hikers (www.tourdescombins.ch).

CAMMINO BALTEO

The best way to get to know the Aosta Valley is to cross it on foot along the **CAMMINO BALTEO** (Trail Sign ). Developed as a ring in 23 stages, for about 350 km in length, it crosses the entire the Aosta Valley sticking to low and medium altitudes (altitude between 350 and 1,900 metres). This route, which takes advantage of mule tracks and the ancient agricultural road network halfway up the mountainside, unites 40 municipalities and crosses through hamlets, rural villages, churches, sanctuaries, castles, and fortified houses, immersed in a varied landscape which sees woods and pastures alternate with lush vegetable gardens and refined vineyards. A slow walk, which becomes





CYCLING AND MOUNTAIN BIKING

The Aosta Valley is also the land of choice for the practice of all sports that see the use of two wheels. From road cycling, retracing the legendary climbs that have seen the passage of several Giro d'Italia and some Tour de France races, to mountain biking, from downhill to freeriding and cross-country. E-bikes, which can be rented at all tourist resorts, today allow even the less fit to enjoy evocative routes, surrounded by nature.

The presence of a **bike park** completes the offer, satisfying lovers of freeriding and downhill looking for fun. The **MTB NATURAL TRAIL AREA OF LA THUILE**, with its over 220 km of trails, can be reached by a chairlift which leaves from the village. Frequently the scene of international events, it is ideal for professionals and beginners alike. The **PILA BIKELAND** has a dozen tracks of varying difficulty – all coded

with appropriate signage – for mountain bikes. Among these is the route of the *Désarpa Bike*: a 15 km-long track, with a difference in height of about 2,200 m, which from Couis 1 leads to the city of Aosta (Pila it/bike-park).

Among the pastures and perennial glaciers of the Plateau Rosa, the **MATTERHORN BIKE PARK** includes over 100 km of trails. Record slopes, catwalks, and wall rides make it one of the most loved places by bikers from all over the world, who come to compete every year in the “Maxiavalanche”, Enduro speciality.



Bicycle and MTB
on lovevda.it

a journey through the history and the most authentic culture of the Aosta Valley. All the information on the Cammino Balteo and its routes are available on the balteus.lovevda.it website. The Guide is on sale at tourist offices.

THE VIA FRANCIGENA (TRAIL SIGN 103)

The ancient pilgrims' route which led from Canterbury to Rome, winds through the Aosta Valley in 5 stages for a total length of about 90 km, crossing through 20 municipalities. The departure point is at the Great Saint Bernard Pass, which also represents the entrance of the Via Francigena into Italy, from which we descend towards Aosta, and then proceed along the central valley to Pont-Saint-Martin.



CROSSINGS SUSPENDED ABOVE THE GLACIERS

Getting to the top is not for everyone. It takes training, preparation and perseverance, but contemporary technology and engineering can lend a hand and allow access to emotions considered impossible until just a few decades ago. One of the most powerful experiences you can have in the Aosta Valley is to climb using the **SKYWAY MONTE BIANCO** (www.montebianco.com): a journey towards the sky which leads to Pointe Helbronner (3,466 m), in the heart of the Mont Blanc massif, where, from the panoramic terrace, you can enjoy a breath-taking 360° view of the Western Alps and touch the sky with a finger. The cableway system, which connects Courmayeur



to Pointe Helbronner, is a real wholly Italian-made gem, and an example of the advanced capacity of Italian cable car construction.

The futuristic shape of the cabins allows us to enjoy the ascent while admiring the landscape. The Skyway features three glass and steel stations: Courmayeur/The Valley (1,300 m), Pavillon/The Mountain (2,173 m) and Pointe Helbronner/The Sky (3,466 m). The experience is absolutely worth the trip to the Aosta Valley alone: reaching the top of the “roof of Europe” is one of the emotions to experience in life. And if the weather is not so kind, the Mont Blanc Room faithfully reproduces the scenery that would be enjoyed if the view were free. In summer, from Pointe Helbronner you can reach the Aiguille du Midi in France, via a cable car

suspended above the **MER DE GLACE** glacier, which quite literally takes your breath away.

The recently constructed **MATTERHORN ALPINE**

CROSSING cable car (www.matterhornparadise.ch)

connects Breuil-Cervinia (Italy) to Zermatt (Switzerland).

A journey in stages, also usable by non-skiers, which realizes what until a few decades ago was considered only a dream.

From its cabins you can fully appreciate the beauty of the Matterhorn. The new section (which will be operational from summer 2023) connects Testa Grigia-Plateau Rosà to the Matterhorn glacier paradise, through the futuristic “three cables”, the highest in Europe, which will be able to transport 2,000 people per hour. Plateau Rosà can be reached from Breuil-Cervinia, by using two cable cars and a cableway.

STARGAZING

You are stars that look at other stars, said astronomer Carl Sagan about the passion that unites people who have always loved to scan the night sky. The plain of Saint-Barthélemy (1,675 m), in Nus, has characteristics which make it an ideal place for stargazing. Since 2003, it has been home to the **ASTRONOMICAL OBSERVATORY OF THE AOSTA VALLEY REGION**.

The low light pollution and low atmospheric turbulence allow the observatory's scientists to carry out scientific research of national and international importance. In addition to a wide range of events, educational paths for the understanding of astronomy are active, such as the robotics atelier and astrobiology and spectrograph laboratories, along with modern 3D printing. In Lignan, near the observatory, there is also a planetarium with educational tours and amazing video animations to understand the mysteries of the universe.



The planetarium is equipped with a 4K digital projection system of the latest generation, using phosphor laser light sources, which guarantees hyper-realistic video quality. The resort has become the first **Italian Starlight Stellar Park**, one of the few world sites – recognized by UNESCO – that offers a spectacular view, even to the naked eye, of the starry vault.

Go to
the Observatory
website



EMOTIONS ON THE WING

Flying has always been a great human desire. In the Aosta Valley there are many experiences that involve direct contact with the air.

Hot-air balloon flight is one of the attractions of the area. Rising up to 2,000 metres to look down on the valley, “face to face” with the highest mountains in Europe, is a real gift; the experience can also include a toast with photoshoot included. With **paragliding** the feeling of freedom is at its height. A tandem flight with an experienced pilot certified by the Aeroclub of Italy on a two-seater paraglider, allows us to take off safely and enjoy the descent, admiring the landscape from a different perspective. Intense emotions guaranteed! An activity suitable for all ages.



WELLNESS IN THE MOUNTAINS

Immersed in spring water, outdoors, among the snow, watching the sun set over the mountains: this is relaxation Aosta-Valley style!

In **PRÉ-SAINT-DIDIER** the thermal waters flow from a cave at the foot of the ravine of the Dora di Verney. The properties of its waters were already known in Roman times. The establishment dates back to 1834 and was a centre of attraction for over 150 years, hosting royalty and celebrities. Today, after a careful restoration, in addition to the three outdoor thermal pools and saunas in wooden huts overlooking the Mont Blanc chain, it offers a highly structured wellness program. The **Fons Salutis of SAINT-VINCENT** have healing properties and are affiliated with the National Health



IN THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH

The Aosta Valley is a land rich in minerals: copper, magnetite, manganese, but also gold and silver. Exploited since ancient times, the mineral deposits saw a flourishing mining activity in the 19th century up until the mid-20th. Subsequently, the activation of economically more competitive mining sites abroad led to the end of mining in the Aosta Valley. Today, the mines have been transformed into attractions of "industrial archaeology", in which to discover the underground world. Some portions of the tunnels have been made safe and today represent the gateways to an incredible descent into the bowels of the earth.

The **EXHIBITION CENTRE OF THE AOSTA VALLEY PARCO MINERARIO** is located in Cogne, along the road to Gimillan. Today known as a tourist centre, at the beginning of the 20th century Cogne was a town of miners. It housed at least 400 in the village of Colonna (2,425 m). Of that history what remains today is an exhibition visit, as a centre of memory: the *Miners' Village*. Between innovation and the past, the exhibition combines modern multimedia technologies with ancient testimonies, and the visitor has the opportunity to relive the life of a miner.

From the exhibition centre you can reach the resort of Costa del Pino on foot or by mountain bike, where you can actually enter the mine. A period train takes us inside the mountain for 1.5 km and from there we can begin an exploration of the old mine tunnels, under the guidance of experienced personnel (www.minieredicogne.it). Saint-Marcel is home to the **MINING SITE OF SERVETTE**, of great scientific and historical interest. The place had already been exploited by the Romans for the extraction of pyrite. During the first half of the 20th century, its deposits were utilized for the extraction of sulphur from pyrite. In addition to the mine, the site still preserves remarkable



System for the treatment of diseases of the digestive and respiratory systems. Next to the treatment area is a large wellness area, with indoor pools and two outdoor pools, one of which gazes down at the valley floor. In Champoluc, in Val d'Ayas, there is the **MONTEROSA SPA** complex, housed in a modern structure overlooking the Monte Rosa massif. Throughout the Aosta Valley area, several accommodation facilities are equipped with welcoming **ALPINE-STYLE WELLNESS CENTRES**, some of them open to walk-in visitors.

For more information



examples of industrial archaeology, such as some portions of the cargo cable car and the smelting furnaces. The mining site, which can be reached in half an hour's walk from the picnic area of Les Druges (1,594 m), includes a visit to two tunnels. In Prélaz, inside the town hall of Saint-Marcel, there is the Viviminiera documentation centre related to the mining site of Servette.

The **CHAMOUSIRA FENILLIAZ GOLD MINE** is located in Brusson, in Val d'Ayas. This is the most important native gold mine of the Aosta Valley. Its history dates back to the early 20th century, with mixed fortunes in the findings. It is the ideal destination for families with children looking for new adventures. A visit to the mine takes place with an expert guide along an exciting historical route, in search of gold. The modern terrace at the exit of the mine lets us understand what the industrial context of processing extracted materials could be like.



SPECIAL ATTRACTORS FOR THE MORE CURIOUS

In Perloz, among granaries, rascards and barns, the small village of **CHEMP** houses a collection of sculptures by Giuseppe "Pino" Bettoni, who adorned the entire village with his works to transform it into an open-air art gallery. Art and nature find a renewed union in **CHALLAND ART** in Challand-Saint-Victor: the natural space becomes the place within which the artist interacts to create his work of art. In the stretch of path (no. 12) that connects Lake Villa to Col d'Arlaz, there are 16 works of art created with the natural materials of the place. In **EVE-VERDA** (Saint-Marcel) it is nature itself that colours a stream: the underlying mineral creates a suggestive and almost magical "turquoise" effect. In **VALMERIANA** (Pontey) it is the ancient art of obtaining millstones from bedrock which makes this a unique visit. The rocks on the slopes of Mount Barbeston were used for the construction of grain grinding millstones or the manufacture of soapstone pots and kitchen items. Many millstones remaining unfinished have given rise to the artistic "Road of the Sun". In **LA MAGDELEINE**, along the watercourse which runs down the slopes of Mount Tantané, the **series of mills** testifies



to the ability to multiply a single resource for the serial operation of eight individual water mills. The buildings have been restored and three of them have regained their original function. The guided tour offers the chance to get to know a significant cross-section of rural life.





*Getting to know the cuisine of a place
and eating its products
means living that territory.
Eating is incorporating a territory.*

Jean Brunhes



GOOD TO KNOW



*Food
and wine
in Aosta Valley*



LOCAL PRODUCE

One of the first historical images depicting the variety of fruit, vegetables and foodstuffs in the Aosta Valley can be found in the portico of Issogne Castle. This testimony reveals how the **agricultural tradition** took root over the centuries, resulting in today's first-class products now also known internationally. The food and wine produced in the Aosta Valley are unmistakable offspring of its mountains. In the same way, the **local craftsmanship** reveals the essential link with the territory and the materials available in it.

CHEESE



The queen of Aosta Valley cheeses is **FONTINA PDO**. Each of its wheels is marked by the unmistakable profile of The Matterhorn, a graphic mark of the PDO brand. In order to be regulated, it must be: “a fatty cheese with a semi-cooked paste, made from whole cow’s milk belonging to the Aosta Valley breeds (red spotted, black spotted, chestnut), coming from a single milking”. More than 350,000 wheels are produced each year, using milk from more than 700 farms. In Valpelline there is the **FONTINA MUSEUM**, which allows a visit to the spectacular maturing warehouse, housed inside the galleries of an ancient copper mine (www.fontina-valledaosta.it). Alpine Fontina is the most sought after variant; each year, in autumn,



the Modon d’Or award crowns the best producers of mountain pasture Fontina. For the production of **AOSTA VALLEY FROMADZO PDO**, on the other hand, the milk from two milkings is used, arriving from four municipalities of the Val d’Ayas, partially skimmed, to which a small amount of goat’s milk can be added and occasionally also cumin seeds, wild fennel or juniper berries. “Fromadzo” in patois simply means cheese.

TOMA DI GRESSONEY is a table cheese from the mountain pastures of the Lys valley and the centre of the valley. Its production is limited to just over a thousand wheels per year, seasoned for two to four months on wooden boards in caves or cellars. The list of Aosta Valley dairy products is completed with:

SALIGNÒN, a particular spicy and piquant creamy ricotta, served as an appetizer in combination with *miassa*,

typical rectangles of corn flour; **REBLEC**, a fresh cheese often served sweetened as a dessert with cinnamon; **SÉRAS**, a typical ricotta; and **BUTTER**. The list concludes with **BROSSA**, a milk cream served with polenta: once a food of the poor, today it is appreciated and renowned in many restaurants and farm holiday centres (*agriturismi*).

CURED MEATS

The aromas of mountain herbs and a maturation from 12 to 30 months on hay are the basis of the **VALLÉE D’AOSTE JAMBON DE BOSSES PDO**, produced in Saint-Rhémy-en-Bosses (1,632 m a.s.l.). In the same municipality, on the second Sunday of July, a festival is organized in its honour. This ham has been documented since 1397, in the hospice of the Great Saint Bernard. It was much appreciated by Napoleon, so much so that today every





dry-cured ham is marked with the shape of his hat.

The fourth PDO of the Aosta Valley is the famous **ARNAD LARD (VALLÉE D'AOSTE LARD D'ARNAD PDO)**. This cured meat is obtained by squaring the back of the pig, leaving it to mature for at least three months in *doil* in chestnut or oak containers, then covering it in spices, aromatic mountain herbs and salt. This is a niche cold cut, produced exclusively



in four sausage factories only.

A mixture of pork lard, potatoes, red beets, aromas, wine and bovine or pork blood is the basis for the preparation of **BOUDIN**, a typical Aosta Valley sausage.

SAOUSEUSSE is never missing from cutting boards, the most traditional of the Aosta Valley sausages made with minced beef from the Aosta Valley breed and pork lard, blended with salt, pepper, garlic, cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg.

MOTZETTA is prepared using compact, low-fat cuts of meat (beef, deer, chamois or wild boar), left to macerate in a mixture of salt and aromatic mountain herbs, and finally seasoned. Cut into thin slices and served with typical rye bread it makes for a delicious appetizer.

In Gignod they make **TETEUN**, a very special cooked meat, obtained from the udders of native Aosta Valley cows. In Saint-Oyen the typical grilled ham is produced – **GRILLED SAINT OYEN HAM** – which has joined the typical food products of Italy.

FRUIT



In the agricultural production sector, the Aosta Valley is predominantly characterized by the cultivation of two varieties of apples: **RENETTA**, with a very fragrant pulp and a wrinkled spotted skin, particularly suitable for use in the kitchen (cakes and pancakes), and crunchy **GOLDEN DELICIOUS**.

Cultivation of **MARTIN SEC PEARS** is also widespread, a small primeval fruit suitable for jams, juices and the preparation of pears cooked in wine.

Chestnut and walnut trees find an ideal environment to offer high quality products. Until the mid-20th century, the **CHESTNUT** was of primary importance in the nutrition of mountain populations, so much so that it was a primary ingredient for the preparation of many Aosta Valley specialities. From its **NUTS** is still extracted an oil with a particular aroma, with which to flavour raw and seasoned meats.

TYPICAL PRODUCTS AND CULINARY SPECIALITIES



The main typical product of the Aosta Valley is **BLACK BREAD**. Arriving at a small mountain village to find a working oven filling the air with the scent of baking bread is one of the most enjoyable sensations you can experience in the Aosta Valley. A symbol of tradition, black bread is prepared with a mixture of flour (rye and wheat) and sourdough. It can also be flavoured with raisins, walnuts or chestnuts. **MICÓOULA** is a rye and wheat bread, with chestnuts and raisins – a Slow Food "Ark of Taste" – that is prepared in Hône especially during the Christmas period; **MÉCOULIN**, a sweet bread of the Cogne tradition, combines wheat flour with eggs, butter and raisins soaked in rum; **FLANTZE**, is a wholemeal bread enriched with a little butter, raisins and nuts. Bread is a fundamental ingredient for the preparation of many typical dishes. Once

considered "poor" dishes, witnesses of a gruelling peasant tradition, today they are renowned delicacies, served in many restaurants and mountain refuges:

FAVÒ DI OZEIN (with bread, pasta, fresh broad beans and Fontina PDO), **SEUPETTA DI COGNE** (served hot, just removed from the oven, in a terracotta tureen; made using bread, rice, melted butter and Fontina), **SEUPA À LA VAPELENTSE** (bread, Fontina, butter and savoy cabbage broth). Borrowed from Walser culture, among the first courses, **CHNÉFFLÈNE** are a sort of small dumpling seasoned with onions stewed in butter. In traditional Aosta Valley cuisine, **POLENTA** is of primary importance, seasoned with various sauces or in the "concia" version, enriched with butter and Fontina cheese.

AOSTA VALLEY HONEY, in addition to the wildflower kind, is marketed in rhododendron, chestnut, dandelion and linden varieties, depending on the prevalence of flowers



during the harvesting period. In Châtillon, there is a festival dedicated to honey on the last Sunday of October.

You cannot leave the Aosta Valley without taking with you a pack of **TEGOLE**, a traditional sweet biscuit. The thin discs are made from hazelnuts, sugar and egg white. Exceptional when combined with the delicious and aromatic **CREMA DI COGNE**. From Walser cuisine, **KANOSCHTRELLE** are crunchy waffles, particularly enjoyable with cream or ice cream. At carnival, **CHIECHENÉ** are prepared, similar to *Bugie* biscuits, with the substantial difference of the addition of Grappa to the dough.

Among the distillates, **GRAPPA**, the most typical mountain spirit, and **GÉNÉPY**, which comes from a selection of mountain herbs, including mugwort, stand out.

No banquet or party can end without a **COFFEE "ALLA VALDOSTANA"**, drunk from a traditional friendship cup. The recipe is simple: coffee, grappa, sugar, orange zest and lemon. Rituality has precise steps which can be learned by participating in the sharing!



A HEROIC VITICULTURE

The culture of the vine in the Aosta Valley has important historical roots, with significant testimonies remaining in various archaeological areas. The sloping territory has led men to create terraces supported by dry stone walls in order to cultivate their vines. The Aosta Valley wine landscape is very distinct, the symbol of a heroic ability to adapt to orographic and climatic situations. The low rainfall, the strong temperature excursions between day and night and the ventilation allow

the development of unique aromas. The Aosta Valley wines are brought together under a single DOC: *Valle d'Aosta – Vallée d'Aoste*, divided into seven sub-denominations of area and different types of winemaking. Among the red wines: Torrette, Enfer d'Arvier, Arnad-Montjovet, Pinot Noir, Fumin, Cornalin, Mayolet, Nus Rouge, Vuillermin and Gamay. Among the white wines: Blanc de Morgex e La Salle, Petite Arvine, Chardonnay, Müller Thurgau, Muscat del Chambave or Petit Grain, Pinot Gris and Nus Malvoisie. Aosta Valley *Donnas DOC* is an important wine also



dubbed the “mountain brother of Barolo”, produced from Nebbiolo grapes. The classic method sparkling wine *Cuvée des Guides* is aged at Cave Mont Blanc, the intermediate station of the Skyway Monte Bianco.

Wines from
the Aosta Valley



TRADITION, CRAFTS AND EVENTS

Aosta Valley craftsmanship embodies the history and tradition of the region. Wood, wool, hemp, iron, leather and soapstone are the materials on which the tradition of Aosta Valley products has been built and constantly renewed. Wood carving, born as a complementary activity while taking a break from agricultural activities during the winter season, is one of the most widespread craft professions in the region. In addition to inlaid objects of practical use, the realization of artistic sculptures, scenes of family life, alpine fauna, and sundry objects flourishes. Soapstone, a homogeneous, compact green rock, is

well-known for being easily worked. Engraved or carved, it is used to create sculptures, plates, containers and stoves. The production of leather, already widespread in Roman times, has been adapted to fashion trends, while also offering objects related to the folk peasant tradition, such as collars for cattle to be shown off during *Désarpa* (transhumance). Wrought-iron objects, both artistic and practical, are also highly prized by the market. Aosta Valley's textile craftsmanship is expressed in various prime products of high value: bobbin lace, *drap* (raw furnishing fabric in sheep's wool worked on the loom) and hemp fabric (still made on hand looms). Equally thriving is the production of

vannerie, baskets or panniers, using lengths of woven willow or hazel wood. Craftsmanship can be found at the **SANT'ORSO FAIR** (or *Saint Ours*) a point of reference. Of medieval origin with over a thousand years of history behind it, this is one of the oldest fairs in Italy.



It takes place in Aosta on January 30 and 31 each year. Very popular, today it is also a food and wine event dedicated to the promotion of typical products. The first day continues late into the night with the *Veilà* (vigil), or with musical events along the streets of the Old Town, featuring traditional dances and songs of joy (www.lasaintours.it). Since 1969, on the first Saturday of August, the summer version of the event, the **FOIRE D'ÉTÉ**, has also been celebrated. The Sant'Orso Fair also takes place in the medieval village of Donnas, on the third Sunday of January: known as "la petite Foire" due to its smaller size, it is preceded, on Friday evening, by the *Veilà*, a food and wine tour of the village's cellars (www.fierasantorsodonnas.it). Of great charm are the festivals related to Carnival, often combined with historical re-enactments. The **CARNIVAL OF VERRÈS** (www.carnevaleverres.it), linked to the events of Catherine of Challant, has its highlight inside the castle. The **CARNIVAL OF POINT-SAINT-MARTIN** (www.carnevalepsm.it) commemorates the defeat of the Salassi at the hands of the Romans as well as some local legends. After four days of parades and celebrations, on the evening of Shrove Tuesday the event ends with the burning of a figure of the devil, hung beneath

the historic bridge, and a musical firework show. The **CARNIVAL OF COUMBA FRÈIDA**, which takes place in some municipalities of the Great Saint Bernard area, features colourful traditional masks, the *landzette*, with the auspicious intent of driving away evil spirits. Every year, the **BATAILLE DE REINES** crowns the Queen Cow of the Aosta Valley. From Sunday to Sunday, as if it were a real championship, from spring to autumn, and starting from the natural vocation to determine the hierarchy within a herd, the breeders enter their cows in a challenge to find an outright winner, definitively decreed in the *Combat Final* at the Croix Noire arena in Aosta, at the end of October. During Advent, there are many traditional Christmas markets: the best known being the **MARCHÉ VERT NOËL** in Aosta, a real alpine village set up in the heart of the city from November to January, with chalets full of local artistic productions, DOC and PDO food and wine products, typical craft products and original artefacts. The **MARCHÉ AU FORT**, in the second weekend of October in Bard, is the most important exhibition-market of typical food and wine products of the Aosta Valley. There are also many festivals which, in the months of July and August, celebrate

PDO products and local agricultural tradition at various sites. Finally, several film festivals take place in summer, including the **GRAN PARADISO FILM FESTIVAL** (www.gpff.it) dedicated to naturalistic cinema, the **CERVINO CINE MOUNTAIN** (www.cervinocinemountain.com), a prestigious international festival of mountain cinema and **STRADE DEL CINEMA**, an international festival of silent cinema with live music, which takes place in Aosta. The Regional Tourist Office has made a specific App available (**Valle d'Aosta Events**), which can be consulted from mobile devices, and provides information on all the events, festivals, patronal feasts or markets scheduled in the area as well as all the proposals for visits and current organized excursions. An essential tool for your holiday in the Aosta Valley!





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