

# Alba and Langhe



Departure: 08.30

Return: 19.30

This is a trip into the heart of Piedmont, into deep traditions of rural life. It will be possible to become acquainted with ancient tales and customs of people that once lived in a world of poverty and simplicity. To better understand their character today we should recall times gone by and deeds of the previous generations. This will be done throughout our tour of the region of Piedmont.

This area is particularly famous for cheeses, gourmet delicacies such as truffles and wines, amongst which the king of Italian red wines: Barolo. There are a number of wine producers and cellars dotted around the hill-top villages of Alba, the best being at Barolo, Annunziata and Grinzane Cavour. Vineyards are the basic economy of the Langhe and part of our day will be dedicated to wine-tasting at a family run wine producer.

Nearby is the Castle of Grinzane-Cavour rented by the Cavour family in the 19th century. The Count of Cavour was Italy's Prime Minister upon the unification of Italy and used the castle as a weekend retreat. Excellent spot for pictures, it is possible to pay a visit to its top vintage wine shops.

Several different localities are worthwhile paying a visit to admire the beautiful landscape. A few kilometers away from Grinzane-Cavour is the earthy old village of La Morra with magnificent views over the undulating vineyards below.

Whether or not you want to taste wine, Alba, the region's main town is worth a visit; its central core of red-brick medieval towers, baroque palaces and cobbled streets lined with gourmet shops is one of Piedmont's most alluring.

To be seen, the late Gothic Cathedral has been gradually restored and contains some fine Renaissance stalls.

Free time will be left in Alba for shopping, photos or simply strolling around its pedestrian main street.

# Aosta and Courmayeur



Departure:08.30

Return:19.30

Useful suggestions: warm clothes and comfortable shoes.

Fringed by Europe's highest mountains, Mont Blanc (4810 m) and Monte Rosa (4600 m) veined with valleys and studded with castles, Valle D'Aosta is undeniably picturesque. The central Aosta valley cuts right across the region, following the River Dora to the foot of Mont Blanc on the French border. Along the river are most of the feudal castles for which Valle d'Aosta is famed.

The first part of our excursion is dedicated to the visit of Aosta, the regional capital, where some remains of the Middle Ages and Roman times still exist.

The new cathedral of San Lorenzo with its paintings and ancient decorations, the tombs of bishops and lords from the Middle Ages (15<sup>th</sup> century) in the ancient San Lorenzo church, the beautiful St. Ours complex with its cloister, priory and crypt and, nearby, the archeological Roman site from the time when Aosta was a colony of the Roman Empire.

After the visit time will be left for shopping and lunch.

Early afternoon we will leave Aosta to proceed towards the end of the valley and a small village called Entreves where, weather permitting, we will admire the peaks forming the Mont Blanc chain.

Afterwards, we will go back down just a few kilometers to spend the remaining time at Courmayeur, one of the most famous, tourist localities of the region, well known to summertime alpine climbers and winter skiers. The ski resort is a modern alpine town boasting centuries of history, counts 23 modern and functional lifts (cable cars, chairlifts, ski-lifts) and provides 100 km of ski runs.

Guest Relations

# Genoa



Departure: 8.30

Return: 19.30

**Genoa** is the main town of the Liguria region and the nearest sea coast town to the cities of Turin and Milan. During the Middle Ages, it was one of the four Maritime Republics. Today it is the second Italian port for passenger boat arrivals and the first for cargo.

In its renewed and modern port area Genoa hosts the largest Aquarium in Europe where seals, dolphins, sharks, giant crabs, jelly fish, seahorses and tortoises are some of the 600 species classified.

Completing the area are several marine and tourist attractions such as a panoramic lift, an ancient galleon, a nautical museum and there is the possibility of taking a trip around the harbour by boat (additional fee).

From 1384 to 1515, except for brief periods of foreign domination, Genoa was ruled by a Doge who ran the city from the Palazzo Ducale right in the heart of the old town off Via San Lorenzo which we will admire during our walk.

Not far from here is the Cathedral of San Lorenzo with its elaborately inlaid and carved walls and the city's prettiest small square, Piazza San Matteo, with its black and white marble bands on the buildings belonging to the Doria family, the most important in those times. Further uphill through the twin-towered stone gate called Porta Soprana is the house of Christopher Colombo.

The newer part of Genoa starts with the large central square called De Ferrari from where we will reach the ancient Strada Nuova today called via Garibaldi. To walk along it is to stroll through a Renaissance architect's drawing pad with sculpted facades, stucco work and medallions decorating the exterior of some "palazzi". Among the most famous are Palazzo Bianco with its collection of paintings, Palazzo Rosso, Palazzo Doria Tursi, now Genoa's town hall, and Palazzo Lomellino.

Free time will be left at the end of the tour.

Visit of the Aquarium may be made during the visit to Genoa.

Entrance fee: € 13,00

# Lake Como



Departure: 7.30

Return: 19.30

Useful suggestions: comfortable shoes

Lake Como is one of the lakes in the northern Italian Lake District and lies between Milan and the border of Switzerland. Its southern tip is about 40 km north of Milan. It is the third largest lake in Italy, after Lake Garda and Lake Maggiore and is Italy's deepest lakes. The area boasts impressive scenery, with mountains rolling down to the water's edge.

Lake Como, has been a popular destination since Roman times. As a result there are many historic and beautiful villas lining the shores, such as the Villa Carlotta and the Villa d'Este. Many references have been made to this beautiful lake by writers such as Alessandro Manzoni, Mark Twain, Shelley, Hemingway. The area's beauty has also earned it a reputation among the stars with Como being used as a location for films and with a number of celebrities choosing to make Como their second home. It is a top romantic travel destination and a great spot for photography. Particularly appreciated in Spring and Autumn for the beauty and variety of plants and flowers, this excursion will give you the possibility of walking, sightseeing, relaxing and shopping as much as you like.

Our first stop will be at the town of Como, a lively and pleasant town with an appealing historical centre on the banks of the lake. We will take a brief visit to the impressive Gothic-Renaissance cathedral in Piazza Cavour and then a short stroll around the town.

Afterwards we will take the ferry for a 2 hour boat ride southwards along the lake to admire the many exquisite villas with beautiful gardens.

We will then arrive at the town of Bellagio, one of the most attractively positioned of the lake resorts, known as the pearl of the lake. Its narrow cobbled streets and breathtaking views make it a most enchanting spot to visit. From the central waterfront, we will walk along the stepped and cobbled lanes rising up the hill in a tight little network separating the lakeshore from the town's main street, Via Garibaldi. This is a pretty lane where you'll find more shops, cafes and also Bellagio's main town square, Piazza San Giacomo, or Piazza della Chiesa. Walking from the piazza past the church and out towards the tip of the Bellagio promontory, you reach a viewpoint, park and little harbour at Punta Spartivento, where the lake divides. Free time will remain for a visit to the small beautiful shops and excellent ice-cream parlours. The bus will pick you up at Bellagio for the return journey to Turin via Lecco, the last town on the south banks of the lake.

# Lake Maggiore and Lake d'Orta



Departure: 8.30

Return: 19.30

Useful suggestions: Visit Palazzo Borromeo, € 9.00 p.p. (less than 20 pax) € 7.50 p.p. (over 20 pax)

Famous since Roman times and later included in the Grand Tour of Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> c. our two destinations are certainly peaceful and romantic. Particularly appreciated from Spring to Autumn for the beauty and variety of plants and flowers, both localities will give you the possibility of walking, sightseeing, relaxing and shopping as much as you like.

Once at Lake Maggiore, after a brief walk through the narrow streets of Stresa, the main town in the area, we will take a boat for a few minutes ride to the tiny island of Isola Bella, one of the three Isole Borromeo possible to visit.

On Isola Bella is the best known and most luscious of all the lake's gardens, though three centuries ago it was little more than a barren rock. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century Count Carlo Borromeo decided to create an island paradise and transformed it into a sumptuous Baroque oasis. The palace with rooms opulently furnished, mysterious artificial grottos and a collection of 18<sup>th</sup> c. marionettes, camellias, lemon trees, magnolias and white peacocks make the visit an unforgettable experience. (see suggestions). Should you choose not to visit the Palazzo then you can simply walk around the small souvenir shops or have a coffee and relax while waiting for boat departure.

In the early afternoon we will reach Lake d'Orta by bus. This small lake, situated on the other side of the Mottarone Mountain, is romantic and well known for long weekend breaks from the Spring onwards. Orta San Giulio occupies the tip of a peninsula on the lake's Eastern shore and is a romantic little town where narrow cobbled streets run between pastel-washed houses.

A 15 minutes' walk will lead us from the bus park down to the lake shore where daily life is divided between two piazzas full of small beautiful shops and excellent "gelaterias" (ice-cream parlours).

Orta's highlight is its Isola San Giulio, a tiny island-village dominated by a severe white seminary and the tower of its 12<sup>th</sup> century Basilica. Should you decide to visit the island, boats leave every 15 minutes (additional fee €3.60). If you are tired of walking at the end of the day you can choose to come back to the bus park by tourist train departing from the piazza (cost € 1.00).

# Milan



Departure: 08.30

Return: 19.30

Founded by the Gauls in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC **Milan** is today considered to be Italy's business capital. Always busy and restless, Milan is also the centre of Italian fashion. It is in fact here that all the most important Italian and foreign fashion houses have their headquarters.

Our visit will begin at **CASTELLO SFORZESCO**, a red-brick castle begun in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and result of numerous re-buildings. Converted a century ago into a series of museums, it hosts inside Michelangelo's **PIETA' RONDANINI** which the artist worked on for the last nine years of his life.

After a nice walk along the shopping thoroughfare, Via Dante, we will arrive in the heart of Milan, Piazza Duomo, a large, mostly pedestrian square. It is rarely quiet at any time of day and boasts the world's largest Gothic cathedral. Begun in 1386 under the Visconti family, it was completed nearly five centuries later and was it was there that Napoleon proclaimed himself "King of Italy". The presence of about 3500 sculptured statues, the beauty of the works of fine art employed for its construction, the green, almost subterranean half-light that filters through the stained glass window are an experience not to be missed.

Outside the cathedral it is possible to climb up to the roof (additional fee) where you can enjoy fine views of the city and, on a clear day, even see the Alps. Later on our we will continue our excursion by walking through the 19<sup>th</sup> Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, a cruciform glass-domed gallery, dedicated to the first Italian king, to reach Piazza della Scala and the world famous opera-house, La Scala, inaugurated in 1778.

Now is the time to discover the fashion-houses of the Quadrilatero D'oro, home to all big designer boutiques as well as design studios and contemporary art galleries.

Indeed, to leave Milan without looking in the windows of the designer boutiques would be to miss out on a crucial aspect of the city.

# The Principality of Monaco and Nice



Departure: 06.00

Return: 22.30

Useful suggestions: visit the Oceanographic Museum optional

To talk about this excursion is also to talk about a part of recent history. The mythical 50s and 60s and its celebrities, the legendary love story between Prince Ranieri and Grace Kelly or the fascinating world around the Formula One Circuit, the car race that takes place here once a year.

The **French Riviera** is also famous for being home to many artists, painters, singers, writers. For this coast with its tiny villages overlooking the blue sea, is a place where light reigns everywhere, even in each drop of rain that falls.

Our visit will begin in old Monaco where each day at 11.55 there is the changing of the guards in front of the Prince's Palace. Then a visit to the **Cathedral**, a walk through **St.Martin's Gardens** and a visit to the **Oceanography museum** (optional) will complete the tour. Afterwards, by lift, we will rejoin our bus and proceed towards Monte Carlo, to one of the five areas belonging to the **Principality of Monaco. Monte Carlo** is the kingdom of luxury, five star hotels and casinos all perfectly inserted into an atmosphere epitomising the "Belle Epoque".

At the end of our visit free time will be left and in the afternoon we will proceed on to our next destination.

## Nice

Situated along the 9 km of coast known as "Angels Bay", Nice boasts almost fifteen beaches delimited by large hotels built along the "**Promenade des Anglais**", famous since the early thirties.

During the walk around, before your free time, you will see the principal points of interest of this seaside town: the **Opera House**, the **open-markets**, the **Church of Mercy and the Church of Saint Reparata**, and the **Law Courts**.

During the warm season in your free-time you may choose to swim or sunbathe on one of the free beaches or otherwise walk through the narrow streets full of souvenir shops.

# Pisa and Florence



Departure: 06.00

Return: 23.00

It was in Tuscany that the Renaissance came to fruition. This single fact has given the region an importance quite beyond its political significance. In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries Tuscan artists created works that have influenced painters and sculptors up to present times.

**PISA:** Thanks to its **Leaning Tower**, Pisa is known to almost every visitor, yet this is just a single component of the amazing core of this city, our first stop in the region of Tuscany. The amazing core of Pisa is called the **Campo dei Miracoli** (Miracle Square) which we will reach by shuttle bus (free of charge) leaving from the tourist bus park just outside the town. There the **Duomo**, the **Baptistry** and the **Camposanto** (Cemetery) complete an unrivalled quartet of medieval masterpieces. They belong to Pisa's "Golden Age" from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries when the city, still a port, was one of the maritime powers of the Mediterranean. The Pisan Romanesque architecture of this period distinguishes itself by its black and white marble facades, beautifully expressed in the Campo dei Miracoli by the works of Nicola and Giovanni Pisano.

The Leaning Tower, begun in 1173, started to subside when it had reached just three of its eight storeys. It was crowned with a bell chamber and completed in 1350.

The **Duomo** or **Cathedral** was begun in 1064 and is considered the archetype of Pisan Romanesque style. The third building of the "Miracoli" ensemble is the circular Baptistry, begun in the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century and completed in the latter half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century by Nicola and Giovanni Pisano.

Last is the **Camposanto**, which is placed as a screen of sepulchral white marble running along the north edge of the Campo dei Miracoli. A perimeter wall of what has been called the most beautiful cemetery in the world, it was begun at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and was completed almost a century later. In July 1944 during World War II, incendiary bombs destroyed most of the cloister's famous frescos except for the 14th century cycle by the painter known as "the Master of the Triumph of Death" detached from the wall and safeguarded in a room opposite the entrance.

Late morning, we will reach **FLORENCE**, city of the Renaissance, considered to be the greatest historical period for the development of art and literature. This is where the Italian language and culture were born. Greater Florence now spreads several kilometres down the Arno Valley and around the hills north and south of the city, but the major sights are concentrated within an area that can be crossed on foot.



Our first stop will be **Palazzo Pitti**, the largest building in town that still bears the name of the family for whom it was built, a rival of the powerful and great Medici family. Built around 1457, it was continually expanded up to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and inside houses several museums. The extraordinary **Boboli Gardens** complete the area.

Then, after crossing the River Arno on the famous **Ponte Vecchio** (Old Bridge), the only bridge not mined by the retreating Nazis in 1944, we will reach the heart of the town, **the Uffizi**. This area, where most of the tourists are concentrated, is the best-preserved medieval part of Florence.

**The Uffizi**, built at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century by the architect Vasari as a block of government offices, is today the greatest art gallery in Italy. So many masterpieces are collected here that it is barely possible to skate over the surface in a single visit: Giotto, Botticelli, Raffaello, Tiziano, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci. However, with a two-hour queue for buying an entrance ticket it is almost impossible to visit it in one day.

After a brief walk from the Uffizi, we will reach **Piazza della Signoria**, Florence's main city square. Here the **Palazzo Vecchio**, a fortress-like town hall begun towards the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, was radically altered in its layout in 1540 when Cosimo I planned his return here from the **Palazzo Medici**. Inside, the beautiful apartments can be visited where Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo were employed to paint frescos. Next to it stands the **Loggia dei Lanzi** or **della Signoria**, built in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century to house public meetings or official ceremonies.

At this point of the excursion a brief walk will conduct us to **Piazza del Duomo** where the pinnacle of Brunelleschi's dome dominates the landscape. Around the 13<sup>th</sup> century it was decided that a new cathedral would better reflect the wealth of the city. Arnolfo di Cambio began the construction of **Santa Maria** in 1294 but only in 1436 was the completion of the dome marked by the consecration of the cathedral. The "**Campanile**", the bell-tower was begun in 1334 by Giotto and continued after his death by other architects. It is thought to be the most celebrated masterpiece of the square, although the Baptistery, believed to back to the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century, is the oldest building in the city.

Up to this point we have the "basics" of Florence: an absolute must. If you do not yet feel tired, from here your discovery could then include: the **Academy of Fine Arts** where Michelangelo's sculpture, the **David**, is housed; the beautiful church of **Santa Maria Novella**, the Florentine base of the Dominican Order from the 12<sup>th</sup> century; the **Church of Orsanmichele**, with its exterior sculptures still well visible; the **Strozzi Palace**, the largest of the Florentine Renaissance palaces. In the same area is the **Church of Santa Croce**, a Franciscan church begun in 1294, reportedly by the architect of the Duomo, Arnolfo di Cambio, where over 270 tombstones pave the floor while grander monuments commemorate the works of art of Michelangelo, Galileo, Dante.

As usual free time will be left in the early afternoon until time of departure.

# Santa Margherita Ligure and Portofino



Departure: 8.00

Return: 20.00

During summer you might choose to spend your time on the beach, so don't forget your swimsuit and towel.

Cheerful, small, attractive resort of the Eastern Liguria region surrounded by hills and forests.

To enjoy and appreciate Santa Margherita the most, you should spend some time walking through its shopping centre, where scattered here and there are the "panetterie" (bakeries), famous for the production of focaccia (Ligurian white pizza), plain or filled with cheese or vegetables.

Afterwards you could climb up the hill (10 minutes) from the town centre where a public park belonging to the 16th century Villa Durazzo is an ideal place to relax under the shadows of its exotic trees. The view over the harbour, a friendly café and a beautiful small ancient church are at least three reasons not to miss it.

Famous yachting paradise, meeting point for the international jet-set, Portofino can be reached by boat in about 15 minutes from Santa Margherita. An enchanting old seamen's village, since the 50s a few beautiful villas have been built overlooking the blue sea.

You will be able to choose how to spend your time, whether wandering around the boutiques along the small, narrow streets, sipping aperitivos or tasting ice cream in the famous "piazzetta" by the harbour. Or still, climbing the idyllic landscape surrounded by cypress and olive trees until reaching the church of San Giorgio.

On the other side the most sporty of you can decide to go as far as the marked path towards the lighthouse to admire the coastline from its most extreme point. Respecting boat time departure is a must if you don't want to be left behind.

# Venice



Departure: 4.15

Return: 22.30

A trip to Venice is a once in a lifetime opportunity. It is a visit to the most famous town-on-water built over 118 islands and crossed by more than 150 canals and 100 bridges! Venice has no roads but only narrow little streets called “calli”. It has no buses, no cars, only boats and gondolas. Therefore be prepared, in Venice the longer you walk the more you will see. Leaving our bus behind at the Tronchetto Parking Area (until late afternoon) you will reach by boat the ancient historical heart of Venice, Saint Mark’s Square. In this square some of the most significant buildings and masterpieces of art are concentrated.

The **Basilica of San Marco** is the most exotic of Europe’s cathedrals. The shrine of Saint Mark was consecrated in 832 but then ruined by a fire in 976. After having been rebuilt in the 12<sup>th</sup> century it was then embellished over the subsequent centuries.

The **Palazzo Ducale**, residence of the Doge, the prince of Venice, like Saint Mark’s, has been rebuilt many times since its conception at the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The Bell Tower, which began life as a lighthouse in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, is considered the symbol of Venice.

The **Procuratie**, a two-wing building with porticos facing the Basilica, was begun between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. It was used to house state offices and today hosts important museums. Most of the area of Saint Mark’s Square dates back to the great period of urban renewal of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

North of the Piazza are the **Mercerie**, a chain of glitzy streets ending near the famous **Rialto Bridge**. It was here that some of the earliest lagoon settlers moved from the mainland, escaping from barbaric invasions. The Rialto Bridge, one of the three bridges over the **Grand Canal**, will be our next stop. The Grand Canal, almost 4 km long is Venice’s main canal thoroughfare. It is here that most of the important palaces stand: **Palazzo Vendramin, the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, the Ca’ d’Oro, the Ca’ Pesaro, La Rezzanico** etc.

Amongst the remaining buildings to be seen nearby are: the **Scala del Bovolo**, an amazing staircase, the **Bridge of Sighs, La Fenice Theatre, the Accademia Bridge and Museum, the Frari’s Church** and **San Rocco’s Church** containing more than fifty major paintings by Tintoretto. After leaving some free time for shopping or individual visits we will go back to Tronchetto Parking Area via the Grand Canal, weather conditions permitting. Possible: a visit to a glass-blowing furnace.