



# Biella, Valsesia and Vercelli

A surprising journey between nature and culture.

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The provinces of Biella and Vercelli, in the north of Piedmont, enclose an extensive territory of biodiversity, which from the Vercelli rice fields and the morainic amphitheater of Ivrea with Lake Viverone stretches up to the Biellese Alps and the alpine landscapes of Valsesia. Places rich in history and culture, perfect for lovers of nature, outdoor activities, and food and wine specialties.

Just a stone's throw from Milan and Turin, you can enjoy the unspoiled nature of the Alpine valleys and breathtaking views, discovering the ancient medieval villages and the incredible cultural heritage of the old towns.

**A good way to discover these places is to take a journey through these four major narrative themes: Territory and Nature, Outdoor and Sport, Culture and Food and Wine.**



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# Territory and Nature



**V**isiting the Biellese, Vercellese, and Valsesia areas that the two provinces of Biella and Vercelli encompass means discovering an extremely varied territory with unique characteristics. Going up from the plains to the Alps, through rice fields, woods, nature parks, hills, and mountains, nature changes gradually but significantly and it is therefore easy to find oneself within a radius of a few kilometers in environments and places that are also very different.

Territories that touch and influence each other, whose traditions are often similar and which time has transformed and redefined, sharing the same great soul in the name of protecting and promoting the environment: this is a complete tourist experience suitable for all.



## From the lands of rice to the lands of Nebbiolo.

The journey begins in the southernmost area of the province of Vercelli, where you come across the Vercellese plain, **an area with a rice-growing vocation** since the Middle Ages when the Cistercian monks began the first reclamation works on the plain and introduced the massive cultivation of rice. These early land reclamation works gave rise to the **Grange**, ancient residential units, and agricultural centers that had their fulcrum in the **Abbey of S. Maria di Lucedio** and that over the centuries were transformed into modern farms.

Alongside rice fields, ancient forests such as the **Bosco della Partecipanza**, as last relict of forests that covered the Po Valley, a true green raft over rice fields. Visit beautiful nature parks such as the **Lame del Sesia Nature Park**, a typical riverine oasis rich in biodiversity, and admire unique and surprising landscapes such as the **Baragge Nature Reserve**, where vast prairies and heaths alternate with sporadic trees and wooded valleys on the high plains of the Biella, Vercelli, and Novara provinces.

The Vercelli plain is an environment that offers great charm and fascination, especially in springtime, thanks to a unique spectacle: the **“checkered sea”**, a magical landscape of incredible views when the flooded rice fields turn into mirrors of water reflecting the sky.

From Baraggia heading northwards, the rice-growing landscape gives way to the gentle hills of the **“Nebbiolo lands”**. These are the areas of Gattinara, Lozzolo, and Roasio: places with a very ancient wine-growing tradition and a very special microclimate and subsoil, thanks to the protection from the cold north winds offered by **Monte Rosa** and the **Sesia Supervulcano** and thus a volcanic origin land, one of the secrets of the wines of this area.

Moving towards the border with the province of Biella, one is greeted by a truly unusual landscape: that of the **Rive Rosse** (whose name derives from the particular color of the soil), where areas of low vegetation, rocky hills, gullies, and ridges alternate with vineyards and small streams.



The Vercelli “checkered sea”



Principality of Lucedio



Gattinara Vineyards



Rive Rosse - Credits: Massimiliano Tarello

Oasi Zegna - Pera Furà

Morainic Serra di Ivrea

Lake Viverone

Salvine, Elvo Valley - Credits: Massimiliano Tarello



Trappa di Sordevolo - Credits: Massimiliano Tarello



## A natural oasis at the foot of the Alps.

Arriving in the **province of Biella**, the territory presents itself as a true **“landscape showcase”** it is loved for the richness and variety of its natural environments and not only as a “trait d'union” between plains and mountains, a task that it fulfills due to its position and that is of absolute interest.

Its five valleys - Elvo, Oropa, Cervo, Mosso, and Sessera - hills, mountains, and nature parks are perfect for “active” holidays lovers, to discover surprising places characterized by extensive green spaces, including the protected area of Oasi Zegna, the Serra Morenica area and Lake Viverone, the Bessa Nature Reserve, the “Felice Piacenza” Burcina Park, the Baragge and the Sacro Monte di Oropa. They all offer unforgettable emotions

for all those who love to fully experience nature in all its facets.

**Lake Viverone**, for example, with its 55 square kilometers is **Piedmont's third largest lake**, and the widest lake basin within the huge morainic glacial origin amphitheater of Ivrea, dating back to the Quaternary. In addition to water sports and recreational activities in the tourist center of the same name, it offers peaceful walks and wilder shores rich in reed thickets and is of great ornithological interest due to the high variety of species that find refuge there. Lake Viverone skyline is dominated by the mountains in the background and the Serra hill, which extends for 25 km, holds the record as the largest moraine in Europe.



## Discovering surprising places.

Truly special and interesting for its origins is the **Bessa Nature Reserve**: an area of almost 10 square kilometers transformed in Roman times into one of the world's largest opencast gold mines; an area with a lunar appearance and unique geological, floristic, and faunal features, with a veritable sampler of rocks of various kinds.

For lovers of plants and flowers, a visit to **Burcina Park** is not to be missed: a landscape garden extending over an entire hillside in the territory of the municipalities of Biella and Pollone, created from the mid-1800s onwards. Of great importance is the landscape composition that, in an alternation of local flora and exotic species, between expanses of meadows and areas of woodland, offers splendid panoramic points with views of the mountains and the surrounding plain (a must is the May flowering of

the spectacular “rhododendron basin”).

Another place of great impact is certainly the **Sacro Monte di Oropa Reserve**, at an altitude of about 1,200 meters. In addition to guarding the splendid jewel of the sanctuary complex, the reserve is no less valuable from the nature and environmental point of view, with its particular harmonious fusion of architecture and nature of great beauty.

Finally, the **Oasi Zegna**, created in the 1930s as part of a project to enhance the territory at the behest of the textile entrepreneur Ermenegildo Zegna, covers **a mountainous area of about 100 square kilometers** where an extensive network of trails allows direct contact with uncontaminated environments.



Valsessera - Credits: Massimiliano Tarello



Burcina Park - Rhododendron basin



Baraggia di Candelo - Credits: Massimiliano Tarello



Sacro Monte di Oropa



Foliage at Oasi Zegna

Monte Rosa



Alta Valsesia Nature Park



Alpe Faller



Sesia River



Rassa



## The greenest valley in Italy.

As you travel northwards, you get closer and closer to the famous mountain ranges of Upper Piedmont and first come across **Lower Valsesia**, a fascinating territory that offers postcard views of the Alps and areas of great natural and historical interest. Examples of this are the enchanting low-mountain villages covered in beech and chestnut forests or **Mount Fenera**, which rises mightily and solitarily near Borgosesia and Valduggia.

Finally, you reach the Alpine peaks as you enter the heart of **Valsesia**, with its unspoiled nature, where it is easy to marvel at the breath-taking landscapes and delightful valleys - Val Grande, Val Sermenza, and Val Mastallone - furrowed by crystal-clear rivers and streams. Located at

the foot of Monte Rosa and known as the **greenest valley in Italy**, Valsesia is rich in historic villages, beautiful natural sites, and some of the highest peaks in Europe.

The protected areas to discover in the area mainly include the **Sesia Val Grande Geopark (UNESCO site)**, with the fossil Supervulcano of Valsesia, active 300 million years ago, of which some incredible outcrops can be admired in an area between Balmuccia and Prato Sesia, and the **Alta Valsesia Nature Park**. It is the highest protected area in Europe, with an incredible variety of landscapes and an alpine park par excellence dominated by the presence of Monte Rosa massif and its glaciers.



# Outdoor and Sport

Alagna Freeride Paradise



Hiking in Valsesia



Biellese Alps



Bocchetta di Margosio - biking in Oasi Zegna



**A**n area rich in different habitats is the perfect setting for all outdoor activities that combine sport, discovering nature, and sharing food and wine and cultural moments.

There are many outdoor proposals to discover in both provinces that offer an alternative for all tastes: whether it is “slow tourism” to enjoy the landscape, get to know and experience it, or you prefer sport and adventure, the search for strong emotions and unforgettable experiences.



## Mountains to be experienced in every season.

Starting this time from the north, and therefore, from Valsesia, you come across a land rich in landscapes of rare beauty: the ideal setting for winter sports and multiple summer disciplines.

In winter, the numerous pistes of the **Monterosa Ski district** delight all lovers

of snow sports: alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and, for the more adventurous, off-piste skiing at **Alagna Freeride Paradise** and ice climbing on the numerous icefalls. In summer, the mountains offer the possibility of practicing various outdoor activities. From trekking, with routes suitable for all levels of difficulty, to

mountaineering (a popular destination is the **Capanna Regina Margherita**, the highest hut in Europe), from climbing to paragliding, and the many alternatives on two wheels, MTB and Trial among them, and the various cycle paths that allow you to explore almost the entire territory from Alagna to Guardabosone.

Capanna Regina Margherita





## An adventure that never ends.

For thrill-seekers, there is nothing better than the rapids of the **River Sesia**, one of the longest watercourses in Piedmont and the past the scene of world canoe and kayak championships, which can also be tackled by trying rafting, hydrospeed, and canyoning.

Outdoors to be experienced to the full also in the Biellese area, where really anyone can easily find their favorite activity, thanks to the great variety of the landscape. The nature parks and itineraries between the mountains and hills are perfect places for **cycling and hiking** enthusiasts, with challenging routes such as ascents to Alpine peaks and refuges in the valleys. The **Grande Traversata delle Alpi (GTA) (Great Alpine Crossing)** is worthy of note in this regard: a hiking itinerary in

stages, (including the Riserva del Sacro Monte di Oropa) that unites the entire western Alpine arc - or under the banner of "slow tourism" such as the Cammino di Oropa and the section of the **Via Francigena** and Baraggia flat expanses.

For lovers of challenges and competition, the Biellese region offers a wide range of sports and thrilling experiences: **bungee jumping, adventure parks, golf, air and water sports**, these latter especially at Lake Viverone, but also **canyoning** on the Elvo torrent. It is also an ideal territory for **equestrian sports**: the great variety of environments, from the plains to the Alps, make it particularly suitable for splendid horse riding excursions through nature reserves, nature oases, sanctuaries, and small villages.



Wakeboard Lake Viverone



Via Francigena



Rafting on the Sesia River



Biking in Valsesia



Ponte di Morca - water sports



Bungee Jumping Veglio



Baraggia di Candelo Biking



Oasi Zegna Trekking - Credits: Massimiliano Tarello



Cycling in Gattinara



Nordic walking in Mosso Valley

Bielmonte Oasi Zegna



## Adrenaline and fun for the whole family.

An essential place to experience the outdoors and sport in the Biellese area is certainly **Bielmonte**. Located in the heart of the **Oasi Zegna**, it is a **family-friendly ski resort** par excellence, with many services and activities designed especially for families: winter ski slopes (with its 18 km of downhill slopes suitable for skiers of all levels and 20 km of cross-country trails), snowshoeing, ice skating and much more.

In summer, the area becomes an ideal place for many activities such as **trekking, mountain biking, forest bathing, horse riding, summer bobsleighbing, and air sports** and maintains a special focus on children and families, with proposals such as the **Adventure Forest** and the **Bielmonte Summer Kids** entertainment. At weekends, there is a rich calendar of

festivals and events.

Finally, descending towards the plain, one first meets the numerous itineraries to follow on foot or by bicycle among the vineyards of the Gattinara hills, such as **"Le vie dei calici"**, where precious works of art meet spectacular views and where the occasion is ideal for discovering excellent wineries and wine producers.

Then we arrive in the Vercellese area with the "rice-fields cycle routes", ideal two-wheel itineraries to discover the Piedmontese checkered sea and the beauty of the rice lands in no less than 7 ring routes of varying difficulty, each varying from 25 to 95 km on asphalt and dirt roads.

# culture



**T**alking about culture in the provinces of Biella and Vercelli means once again discovering the richness of these territories, but also their common soul. Art, religion, history, and tradition have left similar and shared traces over the entire area while maintaining distinct and interesting identities and peculiarities.

If one thinks of the value of sacred art and UNESCO heritage sites, of the indissoluble link between artisanship and territory, and of the desire to promote and preserve the traditions associated with them, it is easy to understand how these places are regarded as an organism in which, despite the differences, a single original heart beats.



## Vercelli: a journey through faith, art, and history.

The combination of art and religion, rural tradition, and artisanship is an essential key to understanding Vercelli, known for being the European capital of rice and one of the most interesting cities in Piedmont, rich in history, treasures, and artistic masterpieces.

There are many worship places of great artistic interest to visit; **Sant'Andrea Abbey**, a symbol of the city for more than 800 years and an exceptional example of the fusion of Romanesque and Gothic elements; **Sant'Eusebio Cathedral** with its splendid silver-foil crucifix from the Ottonian period and one of the most relevant examples of medieval sacred art. Finally, **San Cristoforo Church** is a small city jewel that houses some precious frescoes by the talented Gaudenzio Ferrari, master of the Piedmontese Renaissance.

Considered one of the most important medieval northern Italian cities, Vercelli still preserves in its urban fabric some traces of this glorious past. The most noteworthy undoubtedly

are the medieval towers, true symbols of civic power, but there is no shortage of ancient palazzi, shopping streets, alleyways, and historic squares of great charm.

For history and art enthusiasts, the journey continues in the city's museums: the **Borgogna Museum**, one of the most important art galleries in Piedmont. It is a splendid house museum with more than 800 works including furniture, paintings, and sculptures ranging from the Renaissance to the 20th century. The **Cathedral Treasury Museum** houses an incredible collection of sacred objects and some of the world's most important manuscripts such as **Vercelli's Book**, entirely written in ancient Anglo-Saxon. The **Leone Museum**, which, in a constant dialogue with the smaller **Museo Archeologico Civico (MAC)**, exhibits its archaeological and ancient art collections in the 16th-century Casa Alciati and the Baroque Palazzo Langosco, illustrating the history of Vercelli and its territory from its origins to the early 20th century.

Sant'Eusebio Cathedral



Sant'Andrea Abbey



San Cristoforo Church





Quarters of Varallo



Sacro Monte of Varallo



Sacro Monte chapels detail



Parete Gaudenziana - Santa Maria delle Grazie Church



## Varallo and Sacro Monte: a treasure chest of wonders.

In addition to the **Vercelli museums**, the **MUVV (Musei di Vercelli e Varallo)** museum network also includes the **Palazzo dei Musei in Varallo** with its important Art Gallery and the Calderini museum with its naturalistic and archaeological collections.

Indeed, in Varallo, as in the whole of Valsesia, the strong bond of these places with the customs and traditions of a carefully preserved past becomes evident. The town center is a network of trade routes from past centuries (the so-called **Quarters**) that still bear a visible trace of the town's old urban planning, embellished with courtyards, porticoes, frescoes, and balconies; several historical residences to visit and majestic 19th-

century mansions recall the high cultural level reached in the 19th century.

Speaking of culture, art, and religiosity, one cannot fail to mention what is regarded as the city's true pride and joy: the **Sacro Monte of Varallo**. A UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2003, the oldest Italian Sacro Monte (dating back to 1491) dominates the city of Varallo and is an essential stop for all believers and art lovers. The sacred representation takes place in 44 chapels and a Basilica (the 45th) staging 800 life-size wooden and polychrome terracotta statues, with more than 4000 frescoed figures.

Among the local artists and artisans

who participated in the realization of Sacro Monte, it is worth mentioning the work of **Gaudenzio Ferrari**, the greatest exponent of the 16th century Piedmontese school of painting who had a special relationship with the city. His polyptych for the Collegiate Church of San Gaudenzio (a splendid church erected on a rocky promontory) and the imposing frescoed wall inside the Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie (so-called **Parete Gaudenziana**) are all admirable. It consists of 21 scenes depicting the life of Christ, considered the prologue and synthesis of the experience that every believer or tourist can get at Sacro Monte.



## Valsesia: traditions and ancient peoples.

The entire Valsesian area, with its pretty villages where skilled artisans made and still make truly unique pieces, deeply connects it with its past and strong craft tradition.

Among the most interesting symbols of artisanship are the **Scapin Valsesiano**, a traditional slipper whose origins probably date back to the first Walser settlements, and the **Puncetto**, a precious ornamental lace used to produce beautiful embroidery that adorned clothes, furniture, and windows.

The production of **artificial marble**, a decorative art appreciated by courts all over Europe between the 18th and 19th centuries, and the working of wood and soapstone, on the other hand, represent **excellent artisanship** that tells of a past still well preserved and handed down with love.

Climbing up in Valsesia towards the three main valleys - Val Grande, Val Sermenza, and Val Mastallone - one

encounters the heritage of the **Walser culture**, a people of Germanic origin who settled in Valsesia in the mid-13th century, who traced out paths and built characteristic villages perfectly integrated with the Alpine landscape, coexisting with a hostile nature made of ice and rocks.

The Walser colonies of Alagna, Rimasco, Rimella, Riva Valdobbia, Rima San Giuseppe and Carcoforo still preserve the culture and clear traces of the passage of this people. Examples of this are the typical dwellings made of wood and stone, which today, in some cases, are used as museums, such as the **Walser Museum in Pedemonte**.

This historical and natural heritage is also protected and promoted by an **Eco museum** - of the Walser Territory and Culture, in fact - with guided tours and educational and research activities that make use of the direct involvement of the population, associations, and cultural institutions.



Puncetto Valsesiano



Walser Museum in Pedemonte



Rosario Fiorito - Alagna



Scapin valsesiano



## The Biellese: art and culture to discover.

Sanctuary of Oropa



Cittadellarte Fondazione Pistoletto.



Cathedral square Biella



Medieval village of Piazza

The UNESCO World Heritage recognition of the territory does not end with the splendid Sacro Monte di Varallo but also involves the Biella area, in particular, the **Sanctuary and Sacro Monte di Oropa** (located at an altitude of about 1,200 meters) in a journey "between earth and sky" to discover nature and the sacred. Such a discovery can continue with a visit to the other three important Alpine sanctuaries, places of faith and artistic interest: **Graglia Sanctuary, San Giovanni di Andorno Sanctuary, and Brughiera Sanctuary**, where it is possible to stay overnight.

Lake Viverone also boasts an important UNESCO acknowledgment: a few meters below the water level are extraordinarily well-preserved remains of around 5,000 piles that supported the structures of a very ancient large pile-dwelling village dating back to the Bronze Age and today registered in the system of **"Prehistoric Pile-Dwelling Sites of the Alpine Arc"**.

Moreover, the **city of Biella** is identified as a wool textile province that made the history of Italian manufacturing. In 2019 was awarded the valuable recognition of **UNESCO Creative City** in the "Crafts and Folk Art" sector and in 2021 was officially designated the **"Alpine City of the Year"**.

Biella is characterized by its **three-level** layout, which recounts different moments and aspects of its history.

**The Piano**, firstly, dates back to Roman times and today houses important monuments from different eras set in an elegant context that is the result of 19th-century city planning development. Among the most important sights in this area to mention is the **Cathedral**. Dedicated to the patron saint of Biella, Saint Stephen, it was built at the behest of the community following a vow made to the Madonna of Oropa for the escape from the plague in 1399. It became a cathedral in 1772 following the assignment of Biella as an Episcopal seat. **S. Stephen's bell tower** dates

back to the 11th century, as well as the **Baptistery of St. John the Baptist**: a fine example of Romanesque architecture, built in cobblestones and bricks on a quadrilateral plan, its interior preserves traces of two decorative fresco campaigns attributable to the Master of Oropa.

The **Museum of the Biellese Territory** hosted in the San Sebastiano building complex, in the Lombard Bramante style - also located in the city Piano - and commissioned by Sebastiano Ferrero, a prominent figure of the Biellese Renaissance, is very interesting. Besides the cloister and the basilica, rich in frescoes and works of art, the museum enables visitors to deepen their knowledge of the Biellese territory with a journey through time that interweaves the testimonies preserved in the archaeological section with those of the historical-artistic section.

Perched on the hill to the west of the city and reached by a scenic funicular railway, the **Piazzo** (the second level of the city) retains the characteristics of a medieval village, with access gates and cobbled streets winding between stately palaces. Founded in 1160 by the bishop of Vercelli Uguccione, the Piazzo was rapidly populated, becoming the center of trade and the city's cultural and administrative development. Over the following centuries, the **residences of the great noble dynasties of Biella** flourished at Piazzo, including Palazzo Ferrero, Palazzo Gromo Losa, and Palazzo La Marmora, which today constitute the **"Cultural Pole of Biella Piazzo"**, hosting events, festivals, and exhibitions.

Finally, the third city level, along the Cervo torrent, preserves one of the most important industrial heritage in Europe, with the old textile mills now cultural centers, where contemporary art is the protagonist, including **Cittadellarte Fondazione Pistoletto**, home to the largest exhibition of Michelangelo Pistoletto's works, **M.A.C.I.S.T.** Museum of Contemporary Art and **Woolbridge**, an art gallery created in the spaces of the former Lanificio Pria.



Masserano



Rosazza



Maddalena Bridge - Biella



## Between history and entrepreneurial heritage.

There are many places, museums, and sanctuaries of great interest in the Biellese territory. The **Ricetto di Candelo** and **Rosazza** for example, are included in the circuit of **"Italy's most beautiful villages"**, **Masserano** with its beautiful porticoed old town, and the **Biellese Museum Network**, which includes different realities favoring the valorization of the heritage of castles, palaces, natural areas and indeed museums, including 15 Eco museums and company museums.

Among traditional and religious events, not to be missed is the **Passion of Sordevolo**: an imposing sacred representation that every five years since 1816 has engaged the entire population of Sordevolo, a municipality of 1,300 inhabitants at the foot of the Alps. The performance takes place in an open-air amphitheater for about 3,000 spectators in covered stands, in an area of 4,000 square meters where a small strip of Palestine is scenically reproduced, and 400 characters, performers, and extras bring to life the Sacred Drama, a text dating back to the late 15th century.

On the subject of villages, the Ricetto di Candelo is a "unicum" of its kind thanks to its splendid state of preservation, which has earned its inclusion since 2002 in the **"Club of Italy's Most Beautiful Villages"** certified by ANCI. It consists of a late-medieval fortified structure built by the local farming community and intended to provide stable protection for the community's most precious belongings: land produce, grain and wine; in extreme

cases of danger, and for a short time, it also served as a refuge for the entire Candelo inhabitants.

Important for narrating the past and present of Biella's industrial fabric are the **company museums**. Among the most significant ones, we mention **Casa Zegna**, a discovery of the Ermenegildo Zegna Group history, from 1910 onwards. Its extraordinary setting combines the factory with the surrounding mountain environment. **MeBo**, the Menabrea beer museum, traces the more than 170-year history of the oldest Italian brewery still in operation; **Casa Botalla**, the cheese museum, that tells the story of a dairy deeply rooted in the territory; the **Fila Museum**, dedicated to the Biella brand, with an innovative emotional itinerary and finally **Fondazione Sella**, which enhances and makes available a vast historical documentary and iconographic archive.

Among the museums' curiosities, we would also like to point out the **Falseum - Museo del Falso**, which offers an interactive itinerary dedicated to the theme of fakes in the scientific, historical, photographic, and artistic spheres, set up in the splendid setting of Verrone's medieval castle.

Once again, environment, religiosity, tradition, art, artisanship, and enterprise are the common thread in the story of these places so rich in love for beauty and culture.



Falseum - Museo del Falso



Ricetto di Candelo



Passione di Sordevolo

# Food and Wine



**F**inally, it would be impossible to conclude the trip without discovering the flavors and food and wine excellences that strongly characterize the territory as a whole, among which rice and DOC wines certainly stand out.

These excellences are not only an attraction for good food lovers but are a tool to better understand the history and tradition of these places, which, once again, touch and influence each other, giving rise to surprising taste trails.



## Taste trails, food, and wine excellence.

Starting again from the south and the Vercelli rice paddies, one encounters a multitude of farms, many of which can be visited, dedicated for generations to the cultivation of rice and immersed in unique environments rich in history, such as the historic farmsteads in the **Grange**, where it is possible to buy excellent varieties of rice and learn all the secrets of its cultivation.

In **Baraggia**, on the border between Vercellese and Biellese, the first and only Italian PDO rice is produced, excellence recognized by the greatest national and international chefs that represents the highest expression of the area's great rice-growing tradition: **Baraggia Biellese and Vercellese rice**.

Those who visit the rice lands will find it hard to pass up a stop at one of the many holiday farms and trattorias in the area where you can taste delicious risottos such as the traditional **Panissa**: the most typical of Vercelli risottos prepared with beans, pork rinds, chopped lard, herbs and "salam d'la duja".

To end the meal on a sweet note, you can choose from some

typical Vercelli sweets, such as the delicate **Bicciolani**, fragrant biscuits scented with cinnamon, cloves, and coriander, or the **Tartufata**, a cake made with sponge cake and delicate Chantilly cream, covered with an elegant chocolate leaf drapery, or the **Canestrelli Biellesi**: biscuits made with two overlapping wafers, usually rectangular and filled with chocolate.

Moving towards the hills, the border between the provinces of Biella and Vercelli is a succession of splendid views, picturesque villages, and renowned wineries where one encounters another great excellence: wine.

These are the **Lands of Nebbiolo**; a vine whose grapes produce full-bodied and long-lived red wines, but above all wines that can be skilfully combined with traditional dishes. The hilly area in the province of Vercelli, between the municipalities of Gattinara, Lozzolo, and Roasio, produces some of the best red wines in Italy in terms of quality, delicacy, and harmony: these are **Gattinara DOCG**, **Bramaterra DOC**, and **Coste della Sesia DOC**.



Typical desserts of Vercelli



Vineyards of Biella



Panissa vercellese



Vineyards of Gattinara



Local wines and flavors



Tasting in the vineyard



Caponnet



## Typical specialties to be handed down.

Concerning the province of Biella, this is the production area of **Lessona**, **Bramaterra**, and **Coste della Sesia**: DOC wines rich in flavor, history, and tradition. Lessona, the most prestigious wine of the Biella area, is also called the "wine of Italy" because it was chosen by the then Minister of Finance, Quintino Sella, in place of champagne to toast the unification of Italy after the taking of Rome in 1870.

Other historic production areas are Vigliano and Castellengo: here, farms are often located in castles and historic residences where small producers create wines of excellent quality; on the other hand, **Erbaluce** DOGC and **Canavese** DOC are produced on the slopes of the Serra hill and around Lake Viverone.

For beer lovers, a visit to the many craft microbreweries and the **Menabrea** brewery is a must: an artisanal and entrepreneurial success story that has been alive in the area since 1846, and can be rediscovered at MeBO.

And it is precisely the water with which these beers are brewed that plays a very important role in the identity of the Biellese territory: an essential element of the landscape, it is indispensable with its purity and lightness - it is considered the lightest water in Italy - for the quality of Biellese textiles but also agro-food production. Among the brands of excellence, there is also **Lauretana**, a historic mineral water brand known internationally, based near the Sanctuary dedicated to the Madonna of Loreto, from

which it takes its name.

Also worth mentioning is the **Ratafià** di Andorno, a sweet liqueur made from the alcoholic maceration of wild cherries, whose five-hundred-year-old recipe is also mentioned in the Cookery Treatise by Giovanni Vialardi (1854), a native of Salussola, the most famous person in the area's gastronomy, who was assistant head chef and pastry chef to Carlo Alberto and Vittorio Emanuele II.

A curiosity: it was a Biellese, the distiller and herbalist Antonio Benedetto Carpano, (Bioglio 1751, Turin 1815) who invented **Vermouth** in 1786, transforming this medicament into a convivial aperitif, which immediately became fashionable throughout Piedmont.



## Ancient Mountain flavors.

A perfect accompaniment to the beers and wines in the area are the cheeses and cured meats, which take us from Biella northwards to Valsesia.

First of all, **Toma Biellese** is produced with either whole milk or semi-skimmed milk, the latter called Toma magra, typical of the Elvo and Oropa Valleys; and then, among the cheeses, **Maccagno**, which takes its name from an alpine pasture located at an altitude of almost 2,200 m in Valsesia but which has been used for centuries by mountain people from Biella.

Among the cured meats, the **Paletta di Coggiola** (or Biellese) - included among the Slow Food Presidia - preserves the heritage and legacy of cutting, processing, and preservation techniques passed down from father to son for generations. Characterized by abundant pepper coating, before being rolled into the bladder, it is served hot with polenta and accompanied by onion compote or applesauce, or cold as a tasty and genuine cooked ham.

On the other hand, the "**Riso in cagnone** Biellese" is particular and very characteristic: a typical winter dish, rooted in traditional mountain Biella, prepared with rice, cheese, and butter. Another typical dish that Biella and Valsesia have in common, in its

many variants, is polenta and in particular **Polenta "concia"**, one of those preparations that attest to the fusion between the resources of the mountain pastures and the products of the plains. Originating in the Oropa Valley, and later also becoming typical in the high pastures, it is a fluid maize cream cooked for a long time in the copper pot and flavored with lightly matured cheese and plenty of farmhouse butter.

There are many alpine pasture products, **Cold Cuts, and Valsesia Cheeses**, perfect for making tasty winter dishes such as polenta concia and capunèt: rolls of endive (or Savoy cabbage) leaves filled with chopped mortadella, garlic, onion, and bread soaked in milk.

In the pure air of the 'greenest valley in Italy' comes the **Toma Valsesiana**, a typical hard cheese of which there are several varieties, both fresh and matured. Among the cold cuts and meats, the straccetti and the **Mocetta** should be noted: chamois leg is treated like raw ham and served in very thin slices.

Finally, for a quick and tasty meal during walks and hikes, **Miacce are a must-try**: simple waffles, very thin and crispy, sweet or savory, genuine and perfect with honey, gorgonzola, jams, speck, and of course with the typical Toma Valsesiana.



Alpine cheese



Typical cold cuts and cheeses



Mountain flavors and colors



Aperitif in a mountain hut



Valsesian excellence



Biellese cheese

