



# Province of Vercelli

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An endless discovery.

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# Province of Vercelli

**An endless discovery.**

The province of Vercelli presents itself as a rich and varied territory, with very different characteristics to discover crossing it from north to south.

From a landscape point of view, one goes, in fact, in a short time from the paddy fields of the Po Valley to the hills of the Gattinara area, to reach the pre-Alpine environment of Valsesia and go as far as the Alps.

These are all different lands, which over time brought about the development of cultures, production activities, unique traditions, and customs, yet influenced by each other, in a continuous relationship and sharing of common cultural roots.

A deeper appreciation of the richness, and uniqueness of all the cultural, artistic, naturalistic, and food and wine aspects, which are present in every part of the territory, provides a full understanding of the beauty that distinguishes the entire province.



# SUMMARY



**01**

**TERRITORY AND NATURE**  
p. 04-06

**03**

**CULTURE**  
p. 10-15



**02**

**OUTDOOR AND SPORT**  
p. 07-09

**04**

**FOOD AND WINE**  
p. 16-18





The Vercelli "checked sea"



Gattinara Vineyards



Bosco della Partecipanza



Baragge Nature Reserve



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

Starting from the southernmost area of the province of Vercelli, we come across the Vercellese plain, an **area with a rice-growing vocation since the Middle Ages** when Cistercian monks began the first drainage works on the plain and introduced the massive cultivation of rice. From this first land reclamation, the Principato di Lucedio and the **Grange** were built, ancient residential units and agricultural centers, where Italian rice cultivation was initiated and which have their fulcrum in the **S. Maria di Lucedio Abbey**.

In today's modern farms, where local delicacies are served, more than one hundred varieties of rice are cultivated, among which the Riso di Baraggia Biellese e Vercellese, Italy's first and only PDO rice since 2007.

The Tenuta Colombara, a farmstead located in the municipality of Livorno Ferraris, also testifies to the historical link between the Vercelli area and rice cultivation now home to the **Conservatorio della Risicoltura (Rice-growing Conservatory)** dedicated to the rice-growing memory of the Vercelli area. A visit can be made to the settings where life in the last century is reconstructed.

Alongside rice fields, ancient forests can be discovered, such as the **Bosco della Partecipanza**; the last remnant of forests covering the Po Valley (a true green raft on the rice fields), visit beautiful nature parks such as the **Natural Park of the Lama del Sesia**. This is a typical fluvial wildlife oasis rich in biodiversity and admires

unique and surprising landscapes such as the **Baragge Nature Reserve**. Their vast prairies and heaths alternate with sporadic trees and wooded valleys on the high plains of the provinces of Biella, Vercelli, and Novara.

That of the Vercelli plains and rice fields is an environment capable of great charm and fascination in every season. In spring, however, this land offers a truly unique spectacle: the **"checked sea"**, a magical landscape that presents incredible views when the flooded rice fields are transformed into mirrors of water reflecting the sky.

From Baraggia heading north, 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 presence of the **Sesia Supervulcano** and thus a volcanic origin soil, one of the secrets of this area wines.

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



Principality of Lucedio



TERRE  
DELL'ALTO  
PIEMONTE

## The greenest valley in Italy.

Climbing towards the north of the province and thus approaching the famous mountain ranges of Upper Piedmont, one first meets the **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.

Continuing to climb, one finally reaches the Alpine peaks, entering the heart of **Valsesia**, with its unspoiled nature, where it is easy to marvel at the breathtaking 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.

Of the three valleys that make up Valsesia, **Val Grande** can be regarded as the main, where nature is the real protagonist thanks to the Monte Rosa chain, the Alpe di Mera, the Sesia river, and the delightful village of Alagna, perfect places for summer and winter outdoor activities.

**Val Mastallone** is one of the wildest valleys in Valsesia with its varied landscape: to the south, there are spectacular deep gorges carved by the torrential force of the Mastallone River. To the north, on the other hand, wide plateaus alternate with beautiful beech and fir forests. Like the Val Grande, it shows traces of the **ancient Walser peoples** who colonized these areas, especially in the characteristic village of Rimella.

Finally, **Val Sermenza** is a valley to discover for its wealth of art gems and surprising natural treasures. Narrow and entirely wooded is dotted with quiet, secluded mountain villages surrounded by magnificent natural scenery protected by the Alta Valsesia Nature Park, offering visitors wonderful views and a sense of peace and harmony.

Among the areas protected worth mentioning is the **Sesia Val Grande Geopark (UNESCO site)**, with its fossil Valsesia Supervulcano active 300 million years ago, some incredible outcrops which may be admired in an area between Balmuccia and Prato Sesia.

The **Alta Valsesia Nature Park**, on the other hand, an alpine park par excellence dominated by the Monte Rosa massif and its glaciers, boasts the status of the highest protected area in Europe, with an incredible variety of landscapes.



Alagna Freeride Paradise



Hiking in Valsesia



Monterosa Ski District



Valsesia Bike Paths



## Mountains to experience in every season.

Valsesia offers an incredible variety of outdoor activities and is the ideal setting for winter sports and the many summer disciplines to practice in the mountains.

In winter, the numerous pistes of the **Monterosa Ski district** delight all snow sports lovers: downhill skiing, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and, for the more adventurous, off-piste skiing at **Alagna Freeride Paradise** and ice climbing on the numerous icefalls.

The district extends **between Piedmont and Aosta Valle**, reaching 3,250 meters in height, between Alagna Valsesia, Gressoney-La-Trinité, and Champoluc, and consists of a vast system of ski resorts.

The **ski mountaineering** routes are not

to be missed, and for those who love peace and quietness, the numerous snowshoeing itineraries offer a valid alternative to enjoying the scenery of yesteryear, floating on snow. Cross-country skiing enthusiasts, on the other hand, will find many alternatives in Riva Valdobbia and Carcoforo.

In summer, the mountains offer the opportunity to practice various outdoor activities. Trekking offers routes suitable for all levels of difficulty, mountaineering (a coveted destination is the **Capanna Regina Margherita**, the highest hut in Europe), climbing, and paragliding to the many alternatives on two wheels, **MTB**, and **Trial**. Among all, several cycle routes allow you to explore almost the entire territory from Alagna to Guardabosone.

**Trekking** is undoubtedly one of the most attractive activities, and the many spectacular routes through the Monte Rosa valleys are suitable for hikers of all types and experiences.

Summer, of course, also means mountain biking, and the four **Alta and Bassa Valsesia cycle paths** offer truly exciting views for lovers of two wheels and unspoiled nature. There are many proposals for itineraries that can be covered completely or partially, choosing according to the level of difficulty and the area you wish to visit; some examples are the cycle path from Borgosesia or Guardabosone to Varallo, the Mera cycle (and pedestrian) loop, and the e-bike or mountain bike excursions on the routes from Balmuccia to Alagna.

Capanna Regina Margherita



Morca Bridge - water sports



Cyclable rice paddies



Biking in Valsesia



Rafting on the Sesia River



## Adrenaline and fun for the whole family.

For thrill-seekers, there is nothing better than the **rapids of the Sesia River**, one of the longest watercourses in Piedmont (about 140 km) and an important left tributary of the Po River. The Sesia has its source at an altitude of about 2,500 meters and its crystal-clear waters, populated by a rich and precious ecosystem, make it one of Europe's most sought-after destinations for live-water sports.

An example of the purity of its waters is the **Mastallone torrent**, which in some stretches hides swimming pools of emerald green water in which to bathe during the summer season.

Once the scene of world canoe and kayak championships, the Sesia River is also a popular destination for **rafting, hydrospeed, and canyoning** enthusiasts. River sports can be practiced at qualified centers. They are not dedicated only to experts, but are instead within the reach of anyone who wants to have fun and experience unforgettable emotions: they are perfect sports for groups of friends, families, or team-building experiences.

There are numerous itineraries to follow walking or cycling among the Gattinara vineyards, such as "**Le vie dei calici**", where precious works of art meet spectacular panoramas and where the occasion is ideal for discovering excellent wineries and wine producers, and the "**Sentieri dei Gatti**". They are curated and promoted by the association of the same name, which proposes adrenalin-pumping trails in the hills surrounding the city.

Finally, the Vercelli plain, with its "**Cyclable Rice paddies**", offers two-wheel itineraries that are ideal for discovering the Piedmontese "checkered sea" and the beauty of the rice lands in no less than 7 circular routes of varying difficulty, ranging from 25 to 95 km each, on asphalt and dirt roads.

Rich in architectural and scenic testimonies and ingenious hydraulic works, these itineraries allow you to discover the Vercelli countryside and some of its treasures such as the Cavour canal, the Baraggia, the Grange, nature parks, and the many farms and rice mills that produced for generations, where you can **taste wines and local specialties**.

Cycling in Gattinara



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

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

There are many places of great artistic interest to discover in the city, perhaps alternating cultural visits with a stop in the charming Piazza Cavour to taste local specialties.

**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, consists of a Basilica, Cloister, and Chapter House. It was built in just eight years between 1219 and 1227 at the behest of Cardinal Guala Bicchieri.

Although the name of the author of Abbey's design is still a mystery, its

architectural peculiarity lies in the perfect union between the Romanesque lines of northern Italy and the Gothic lines of the other side of the Alps, which are surprising for their majestic lightness. From the outside, the Basilica features four vertical structures and the chromatic effect created by the different materials used for the construction is remarkable.

The imposing **Sant'Eusebio Cathedral** with its splendid silver-foil crucifix from the Ottonian period is one of the most important examples of sacred art from the Middle Ages. It was built instead as a cemetery basilica, probably by St Eusebius himself, one of the fathers of the Church and first bishop of Vercelli, as well as the inspirer and promoter of Christian faith in Piedmont. Its construction began in the 12th century (the imposing Romanesque bell tower is a relevant trace) and was then largely rebuilt at the end of the 16th century and completed in the 18th

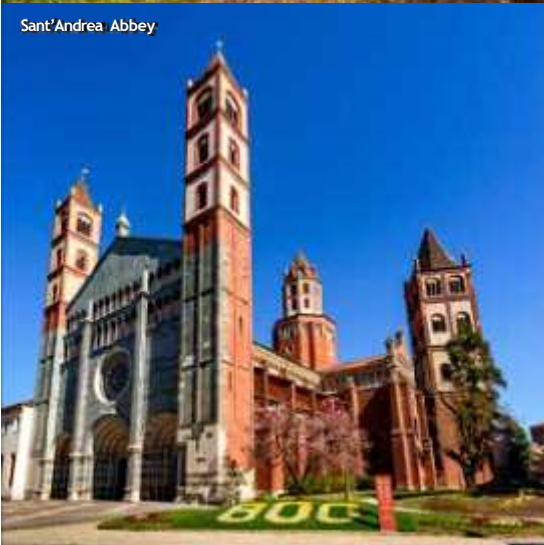
and 19th centuries with the neoclassical pronaos and dome.

**San Cristoforo Church**, also known as "the Sistine Chapel of Vercelli", is a small city jewel that houses some precious works by the talented Gaudenzio Ferrari. The frescoed church houses some of the most important masterpieces of the Piedmontese Renaissance such as the Madonna degli Aranci altarpiece, the Stories of Mary Magdalene, the Stories of the Virgin Mary, the Crucifixion and the Assumption of the Virgin.

Finally, the **Synagogue** - bearing witness to the presence of the Jewish community in the city since 1446 - is a large temple in Moorish style built in 1878 to a design by architect Giuseppe Locarni and decorated by various artists from Vercelli, including painter Carlo Costa, the Bona brothers, sculptor Ercole Villa and Michele Fornari.



St. Eusebius Cathedral



Sant'Andrea Abbey



San Cristoforo Church



Sant'Andrea Abbey - Cloister



Synagogue

Piazza Cavour Vercelli



Via Francigena



Borgogna Museum



Leone Museum



Vercelli's Book



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## Museums and the Via Francigena.

Regarded as one of the most important centers of northern Italy in the medieval era, Vercelli still preserves in its urban fabric some traces of its glorious past. The most significant ones are undoubtedly the medieval towers, true symbols of civic power, but there is no lack of ancient palazzos, shopping streets, alleys, 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, is a splendid house museum with more than 800 works including furniture, paintings, and sculptures ranging from Renaissance to the 20th century. The **Museum of the Cathedral Treasury** houses an incredible collection of sacred objects and some of the world's most important manuscripts such as **Vercelli's Book**, written entirely in the ancient Anglo-Saxon language. Finally, 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 the origins to the early 20th century.

Also of great importance is Vercelli's role as a key stop on the **Via Francigena**, a three-thousand-kilometer cultural and faith itinerary from Canterbury to Rome and on to Santa Maria di Leuca.

Vercelli was an important transit center both for pilgrims on their way to Rome and for merchants traveling throughout Europe for their business. The city's ancient hospital, run by the Vittorini friars who lived in the cloister of the Basilica of Sant'Andrea, was born as a **place of welcome and shelter for travelers and pilgrims** moving along the Via Francigena and who found Vercelli a hospitable stopover.

Today, Vercelli maintains the central role that its historical position gave it along the Via Francigena, and is a member of the European Association of Vie Francigene.



Torre delle Castelle - Gattinara



## Gattinara: wine culture of excellence.

For the Vercelli hills and in particular, for the city of Gattinara, wine is much more than just a successful agricultural and production activity, but describes its history, and identity and is the first attraction for all tourists visiting “the lands of Nebbiolo”.

Gattinara was founded in the mid-13th century in an area that had been the subject of great interest since Roman times. The route along the Sesia River was of strategic importance in ancient times because it served as a link between the plains and the routes to the Alpine passes.

Precisely its **particular geographic position** is one of the main secrets of the success of its wines: the mild climate the vineyards are exposed protected from the cold north winds by **Monte Rosa**, but also the presence of the Sesia Supervulcano, they have proved to be ideal conditions for the cultivation of a **Nebbiolo DOCG** of excellence such as 'Gattinara'.

The Supervulcano has bequeathed a soil

of volcanic origin rich in **iron minerals** (hence the typical red color of the earth), which uniquely characterize the flavor of the local wines.

A symbol of the town and great historical importance is the **Torre delle Castelle**, a fortified complex dating back to the 11th century, near which the red “**Giant Bench**” is now positioned, which “looks” over the town of Gattinara, while behind it the landscape of typical vineyards and the Monte Rosa chain. In addition, testifying to the town's medieval period is the porticoed buildings downtown and the terracotta tiles depicting viticulture scenes on Saint Peter's parish church.

Two kilometers from the center stands the **Sanctuary of Santa Maria di Rado**, one of the largest churches dedicated to the Virgin existing in the upper Vercelli area: the Madonna Bruna, protector of the Gattinara community.

Getting back to wine and its decisive role in the town, the **Enoteca Regionale di**

**Gattinara** is very important. It was set up in 1999 to relaunch and protect local wines: an objective that complements a broader project aimed at enhancing the area's gastronomic tradition and highlighting its historical, social and cultural peculiarities.

Numerous initiatives are aimed at arousing the interest and curiosity of both tourists and those who experience this area daily. **Villa Paolotti**, once a historic "Gattinara Wine Shop", is now home to the Enoteca. The 19th-century manor house with its cloistered courtyard is the ideal setting for conferences, meetings, and weekends dedicated to tastings.

The Enoteca also organizes **visits to the vineyards and hillsides**, to encourage an all-around encounter with the world of viticulture and with a natural environment of ancient charm. All of this is enjoyable by walking or mountain biking, exploring the rows of vines and centuries-old villages, rich in art and history, and getting a closer taste of the winegrowers' profound wisdom.



Giant Bench



Wine Tasting



Panorama over Gattinara



Varallo Historical Districts



Sacro Monte chapels detail



San Gaudenzio Collegiate Church - Varallo



Sacro Monte of Varallo



Parete Gaudenziana - Santa Maria delle Grazie Church

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

In addition to the **Vercelli museums**, the **MUVV (Museums of Vercelli and Varallo)** museum network includes the **Palazzo dei Musei in Varallo** with its remarkable art gallery and the Calderini Museum with its collections of wildlife and archaeology.

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 **Historical Districts**) 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.

The Sanctuary is nestled in the beautiful setting of the **Sacro Monte di Varallo Special Reserve**, built according to the Renaissance garden scheme with native and exotic vegetation, into which the chapels of the representation are completely immersed.

Sacro Monte initially planned at the end of the 15th century by the Franciscan friar Bernardino Caimi to create a "**little Holy Land**", was then profoundly modified from 1565 onwards by Galeazzo Alessi.

Among the local artists and artisans who participated in the realization of Sacro Monte, the work of **Gaudenzio Ferrari**, the greatest exponent of the 16th century Piedmontese school of painting, who had a special relationship with the city in which

he resided for a long time and where he was commissioned fundamental works, should certainly be highlighted.

Admire his **polyptych for the Collegiate Church of San Gaudenzio**, a splendid church erected on a rocky promontory accessed by an imposing flight of steps dominating the city's main square dedicated to Vittorio Emanuele II, but above all his large frescoed wall inside the Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie (**Parete Gaudenziana**, in fact).

The Wall depicts in twenty-one scenes the life of Christ (covering a total area of more than eighty square meters) in what can be considered the prologue and synthesis of the experience that every believer or tourist can have at Sacro Monte.

Ferrari also left his valuable artistic imprint in nearby Vercelli where, around 1529, he worked in the **Church of San Cristoforo**, producing extraordinarily evocative fresco cycles and the well-known altarpiece "La Madonna degli Aranci".

## Valsesia: ancient traditions and peoples.

The entire Valsesian area, with its pretty villages where skilled artisans made and still make truly unique pieces, is imbued with an impressive bond with the past and with a strong craft tradition. Some of the most interesting symbols of artisanship include 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 embroideries 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 artistry** that tells of a past still well preserved and handed down with love.

Alagna and Riva Valdobbia, among the most important villages, still bear the legacy of the **Walser culture**, people of Germanic origin who settled in Valsesia in the mid-13th century, who traced out paths and built picturesque 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.

The **Walser Museum in Alagna** (hamlet of Pedemonte) and the **Ethnographic Museum in Riva Valdobbia**, in particular, tell the story of a lifestyle and a social and religious tradition that survived the passage of time and came down to us through architecture, tools, and customs.

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.

The artistic value of the alpine oratories is also worth mentioning, especially the two largest churches: **San Giovanni Battista in Alagna**, with its late Gothic and Renaissance lines, and **San Michele** in Riva Valdobbia, declared a national monument, with its enchanting fresco of the Last Judgement on the façade painted by Melchiorre d'Enrico from Alagna. Among the many artists, builders, architects, and decorators in the area, the name **Tanzio da Varallo** stands out.



Puncetto Valsesiano



Walser Museum in Pedemonte



Scapin valsesiano



Rosario Fiorito - Alagna



Riva Valdobbia



Panissa vercellese



Typical desserts of Vercelli



Vercelli rice



Gattinara wine shop



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## Rice and wine: excellence to savor.

Those who visit Vercelli's rice fields will encounter a multitude of farms that for generations engaged in rice cultivation and immersed in unique environments rich in history, such as the historic farmsteads in the **Grange**, where it is possible to taste and buy excellent varieties of rice and learn all the secrets of its cultivation.

In the **Baraggia** area, 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.

The many holiday farms and trattorias throughout the Vercelli area offer 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 desserts such as the delicate **Bicciolani**, fragrant biscuits scented with cinnamon, cloves, and coriander, or the **Tartufata**, sponge cake and delicate Chantilly cream, covered with an elegant chocolate leaf drapery.

Moving from the plains to 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 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 DCGG**, **Bramaterra DOC**, and **Coste della Sesia DOC**.



## Ancient Mountain flavors.

Alpine pasture cheeses and Valsesian cured meats are a perfect match for the full-bodied wines of the Gattinara hills, but there are many different food and wine specialties to taste in Valsesia.

A typical dish of the area is certainly polenta, and in particular **Polenta "concia"**, one of those preparations that testify to the fusion between resources of the alpine pastures and products of the plains: a fluid corn cream cooked for a long time in the copper pot and flavored with a little mature cheese and plenty of farmhouse butter.

There are many alpine pasture products, the **Valsesia Cold Cuts, and 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 also be mentioned: chamois leg is treated like cured 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, and speck, and of course with the typical Toma Valsesiana.



Alpine cheese



Typical cold cuts and cheeses

Valsesian excellence



Flavours and colors of the mountains



Toma Valsesiana

