

Discover Vercelli and Vercellese

A touristic map to visit the city
and its surroundings



A little bit of history

Vercelli is a town of East Piedmont with about 47,000 inhabitants. Founded about the 6th century B.C. by a tribe of Liguri mixed with Celtic tribes, once submitted to the Romans it became a *municipium* and over the years it underwent several historical and cultural events: the process of Christianization with Eusebio of Vercelli, the first bishop in Piedmont; the birth of the Free Commune and the struggles between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines; foreign sieges and occupations; and at last the changeover under various Lordships, before returning to the Savoy with the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) and experiencing, finally, a real artistic boom with the construction of new buildings, churches and streets.

After the French Revolution Vercelli was annexed to France and it became the capital city of the Sesia Department under Napoleon I (1801); the Vercelli inhabitants took part into the liberal revolts, stopping the advance of Austrians thanks to the artificial flooding of the plain; then came the constitution of both liberal and socialist organizations (in 1906 the rice weeders, the so called *mondine*, played a fundamental role in the workers' achievement of a limit of eight working hours a day).

With the 20th century came the World Wars: during the Second Vercelli demonstrated a heroic spirit in the Resistenza and could later regain a period of welfare.



Cyclable rice paddies

Pleasant bike itineraries that explore the surroundings of Vercelli and the villages disseminated in the Vercelli plain. Discover them all and set out to discover Vercelli's lands of rice on two wheels!



of **Balocco** ⑩, Collobiano, San Germano, Vettignè, San Genuario di Crescentino, Montonero, Sali, Prarolo e Villata.

Cavour Canal and Vercelli irrigation system

The Vercelli area boasts one of the most efficient irrigation networks in Europe, developed over the course of centuries. There are currently about 10,000 km of man-made canals used for flow irrigation, without the aid of dams or hydraulic pumps.



Almost 85 km long and built between 1863 and 1866, the **Canale Cavour** ⑪ is a fantastic example of hydraulic engineering work that connects the Po River in Chivasso to the Ticino River in Galliate. Strongly wanted by Camillo Benso Conte di Cavour, this colossal work represents, together with other canals such as the Naviglio d'Ivrea and the De Pretis Canal, the backbone of an extensive and efficient irrigation network that crosses the entire Vercelli plain, and thanks to which it has been possible, over the centuries, to grow rice.

the oldest in Italy. The **Via Francigena**, of which Santhià is the 44th stop, is the route from Canterbury to Rome by the English bishop Sigeric in 990. In addition to the Via Francigena, another important route that starts in the town is the Oropa Path, a fourstage route that connects Santhià to the well-known Marian sanctuary in Biella.

The Vercelli castles

Castles are valuable reminders of the power of the noble families in the Vercelli area in medieval times.

The **castle of Moncrivello** ⑧, once a defensive fortification, it was transformed into a stately home in the 15th century, it still preserves an ancient helicoidal staircase, a 15th-century fireplace and the rooms with coffered ceilings.

The **consortium castle of Buronzo**, already mentioned in a document from 1039, consists of a complex of fortifications and fortified houses built by the aristocratic families of the lords of Buronzo. It preserves part of the outer fortifications, the tower-gate and the halls with frescoed ceilings of the XV century.

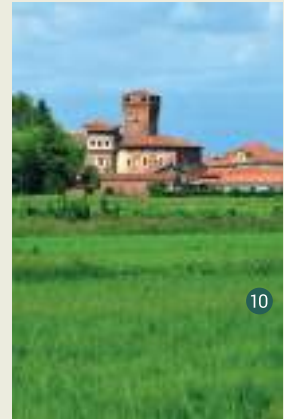


The **castle of Quinto** consists of the ancient 12th-century stronghold and the adjoining church with 15th-century frescoes. Owned by the Avogadro family, it was modernized in the 1500s and then transformed into a rice farm.

The **castle of Desana** ⑨ was built around the 10th century to defend the Vercelli district and it was passed into the hands of the Tizzoni counts in the 15th century. In 1833 it was modernized after it was purchased by the family of Federico Rosazza, a prominent figure in the Risorgimento.

The **Casanova Elvo castle**, which was first mentioned in a document from the 1170, was part of the possessions of the counts of Biandrate. The keep is still preserved, with corbels and machicolations, along with a ribbed vault from the 15th century of the room once used as a kitchen. The ancient fort was reduced to a private residence.

Worth mentioning are also the castles



The **Sorti della Partecipanza Wood** ⑦: the last vestige of the vast lowland forest that covered the Po Valley, before the great agrarian reclamation works that saw its almost total destruction in the Middle Ages. We owe its preservation to a strict tree felling system that has been respected since 1275, when the entire area was assigned in common ownership to the citizens of Trino. To date, members use the wood in accordance with the tradition of past centuries. **Piedmont Po Nature Park**: established by regional law in 2019. The Po River constitutes the link between the different areas that make up the Piedmont Po Protected Areas. In the Vercelli area, the river flows through the municipalities of Crescentino, Fontanetto Po, Palazzolo Vercellese and Trino, a flat area devoted to rice-growing but with a high biodiversity and bordering the Casale hill area. **Baragge Nature Reserve**: situated on the north-western border of Piedmont, between the provinces of Biella, Vercelli and Novara, this area at the foot of the mountains is characterised by compact clay soils, vast grasslands that give way to barren heaths, and a peculiar environment at times resembling the **African Savannah**.



Santhià, Carnival and the Via Francigena

The town, which hosts the oldest historical carnival in Piedmont every year, preserves some precious testimonies of its medieval past in its historical town centre, such as the Teodolinda Tower and the crypt of St. Stephen in the parish church of St. Agatha. From a mansion, later conquered by the Lombards, it became an important center of the **Via Francigena** in medieval times. The **historical carnival of Santhià** dates back to the mid-14th century, it is the oldest in Piedmont and among



Water lands



The Vercelli plain is dominated by rice cultivation, more than 100 varieties are grown. The landscape of the Lower Vercelli Plain changes its colors as the months go by: kilometre after kilometre of rice fields makes this vast territory a fascinating and evocative environment that reveals a strong sense of balance between nature and human activity, always in perfect harmony with the passing of the seasons, which, in the rice fields, is mirrored by astonishing hazy hues of colour. Along the road of the "grange" that winds through the immense rice-growing plain and connects Larizzate with Crescentino, in Lignana lies the **Veneria farmstead**, an extraordinary example of a farm house with an inner courtyard that became famous thanks to one of the most significant films of Italian Neorealism: *Riso Amaro* (Bitter Rice), in 1949. Continuing on the same road, we first



cross the area of Lucedio and then **Castell'Apertole**, along with the fascinating **Colombara farmstead** ④, inside which the **Conservatorio della Riscoltura** ⑤ (Rice-growing Conservatory). In the town of **Fontanetto Po**, home of the 18th-century composer and violinist Giovan Battista Viotti, not to be missed are the churches of San Sebastiano and San Martino, and the **San Giovanni Mill** ⑥, a beautiful example of an ancient rice mill that is operated through a hydraulic turbine and a complex system of belts and pulleys.



Parks

Lame del Sesia Nature Park: a protected oasis extending in the province of Vercelli in the municipalities of Greggio, Albano, Oldenico, Carisio, Villarboit and Villata. The "lame" (blades) are stretches of water that have arisen from branches of the Sesia River. Within the park, there is the special reserve of the Isolone di Oldenico, where rare birds nest: grey herons, tufted egrets, little egrets, night herons, cormorants, glossy ibis, spoon bills and the sacred ibis.

Discovering the Lands of Rice

Trino, Lucedio and the granges



An important place in Roman times, **Trino** became the main seat of the Paleologi fiefdom. In 16th-century times it was home to illustrious printers. Of historical importance are the church of **San Michele in Insula** ①, with a Romanesque interior, the parish church of San Bartolomeo, an 18th-century remake of a 13th-century church, Palazzo Paleologo, and the Gian Andrea Irico Museum. In the municipality of Trino, the Principality of Lucedio, an imposing historic farmstead: the grange. The **Abbey of Santa Maria di Lucedio** ②, now known as Principato, was founded by a group of Cistercian monks from France on land belonging to the Marquis of Monferrato and became a potent religious center. After a slow decline, it was converted into a farm in the late 18th century.



Of the ancient medieval structures, the bell tower, chapter house, cloister, convent refectory, and other buildings functional to today's farm survive. The abbey church dates from the second half of the 18th century. Crossing the plain that surrounds the Principality, once occupied by a vast marsh-land later reclaimed by the monks, it is possible to glimpse the closed court farmsteads, once **grange** (granaries, warehouses), built by the monks to control and work the land that the abbey of Lucedio accumulated during the period of its most significant power. The primitive core consisted of six granges located in an area of 8 km²: Montarolo, near which stands the 18th-century shrine of **Madonna delle Vigne** ③, **Ramezzana**, **Montarucco**, **Leri**, owned by Camillo Cavour, **Castelmerlino** and **Darola**.



ATL TERRE DELL'ALTO PIEMONTE
AGENZIA DI ACCOGLIENZA
E PROMOZIONE TURISTICA LOCALE
BIELLA NOVARA VALSESIA VERCELLI



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Discovering Vercelli

Majestic churches, extraordinary museums full of artistic masterpieces, mediaeval towers, alleyways scented of history and typical trattorias where you can enjoy traditional local dishes - **come and discover Vercelli!**

1. Abbazia di Sant'Andrea
2. ARCA, Chiesa di San Marco
3. Chiesa di San Paolo
4. Torre Vialardi
5. Chiesa di San Cristoforo
6. Piazza Cavour
7. Broletto
8. Sinagoga
9. Chiesa di San Giuliano
10. Casa Centoris
11. Casa Tizzoni
12. Museo Francesco Borgogna
13. MAC Museo Archeologico Civico
14. Castello Visconteo
15. Hospitale Sancti Eusebi, accoglienza pellegrini della Via Francigena
16. Museo Camillo Leone
17. Teatro Civico
18. Palazzo Arcivescovile Museo del Tesoro del Duomo
19. Cattedrale di Sant'Eusebio
20. Seminario Arcivescovile



1 Abbazia di Sant'Andrea is the symbol of the town, a beautiful example of the passage from the Lombard-Emilian Romanesque style to the French Gothic architecture. This church was built between 1219 and 1227 at the commission of Cardinal Guala Bicchieri of Vercelli. The pure Gothic structure emphasizes the stately interior with the nave and two aisles, with a very high transept, while in the square apse is set a beautiful wooden choir of 1511. The Basilica hosts one of the finest chapter-house in Italy and a rectangular cloister, with brickwork and paintings date to the early 16th century (now nearly disappeared). The chapter-house has also a great historic value: this is where, in front of emperor Henry VII, the Guelph and the Ghibelline parties of Vercelli signed a treaty (1310).



In front of the basilica is the **Salone Dugentesco** (mid-15th century) that is what remains of the Ospedale dei Pellegrini (Pilgrims' Hospital) founded in 1224 by the Bicchieri family. Its entrance is embellished by a 13th century painted lunette; in the elegant interior is kept a nice 16th century fresco.

2 ARCA, ex-Chiesa di S. Marco. Inside of the old Church of St. Marco, with its valuable frescos recently brought to light, has been created the exhibition centre ARCA, which houses high standard cultural initiatives. **Tel. +39 0161.649605**
www.comune.vercelli.it



Nearby... The **Chiesa di San Bernardo**, seat of the diocesan sanctuary of Maria Salute degli Infermi, is a very important centre of popular devotion. It is made up of two parts: the former is the oldest Romanesque monument in Vercelli, built between 1151 and 1168; the new part was built in 1896 after Giuseppe Locarni's plan. **Corso Libertà**, the main shopping street of Vercelli, is the old street that linked on a West-East line the two great communication roads to Turin and to Milan, cutting across the town centre. It starts from Piazza Pajetta, where Ercole Villa's monument of Vittorio Emanuele stands (1887), and ends in Piazza Cugnolio, at the side of the ancient Convento di Santa Chiara.

3 Chiesa di San Paolo. Founded in the 13th century, it was utterly re-hashed in the 17th century, except for the bell-tower and the first three spans. In the interior there are two works by Bernardino Lanino (the Natività and La Madonna delle Grazie), while in a hall leading to the sacristy there are frescos of The Saints (second half of 14th century).

4 Torre Vialardi. Standing in the nearby Via Vallotti, with an octagonal plant, this tower is the only surviving building of the family Vialardi.

5 Chiesa di San Cristoforo. Built in 1515, the church houses the extraordinary masterpieces of Gaudenzio Ferrari. The interior, with three naves, is characterized by a vault sumptuously trompe l'oeil frescoed between 1742 and 1746. The wide presbytery is separated by elegant banisters, which were made following a plan by Juvarra (1730). The choir, the pulpit, the confessionals and the sacristy furniture are made of a valuable wood and date back to the mid-18th century. On the main altar there is a precious wooden Cross; in the side chapel of the right aisle, that reproduces the *Santa Casa di Loreto*, there is a 16th century Cross by Gaudenzio Ferrari. There are eight paintings by Mayerle in the sacristy.

6 Piazza Cavour. Perhaps built on the old Roman forum, was called "the Major Square" before it was given its present name in 1864. Dominated from the statue of Cavour made by Ercole Villa and Giuseppe Argenti, Piazza Cavour is the heart of the city. Reminders of the Medieval past are the arcades dating from the



end of the 13th century or the beginning of the 14th, another series of arcades, which are remarkable for the 15th century brick decoration of the intrados, and the powerful Torre dell'Angelo (14th - 19th century): this tower is probably the only remain of an old fortified house.

7 The old Broletto, is set in today's Piazza Palazzo Vecchio (nearby Piazza Cavour), commonly known as "Piazza dei Pesci" (Fish Market Square) The old Municipal Tower, dating back to the early 13th century, is a very charming witness of the Middle Ages of Vercelli.



8 Sinagoga the first Jewish Temple to be built in Italy after the emancipation of the Jews ratified by Carlo Alberto (1848), reminds of Vercelli Jewish Community's past welfare. It was built between 1875 and 1878 with Arab-Moresque style, after a plan by Marco Treves and Giuseppe Locarni; it has a façade in white and grey-blue sandstones. The interior, with three naves, is brightened up by Carlo Costa's fine decorations.

9 Chiesa di San Giuliano is the church where the new elected bishops, during the Middle Ages, used to stop in order to wear the pontifical gown before getting their episcopal chairs. The interior keeps the Bernardino Lanino's *Deposizione* (1547), while both the *Adorazione dei Magi* and the *Resurrezione* are of the Gaudenzio Ferrari school.

10 Casa Centoris. This building is well-known for its elegant courtyard, made at the end of the 15th century according to Bramante's style.



11 Casa Tizzoni is situated in the eponymous square. Of the old mansion we still have the tower and a 16th century rebuilding: the lower hall was decorated by Moncalvo in the first half of the 17th century.

12 Museo Borgogna. A house museum set in a neoclassical building bought by the lawyer Antonio Borgogna (1822-1906), who named it after his father and then offered it to the town. It keeps Borgogna's rich collection of paintings, furniture and objects of art, and the wide gallery of Vercelli Renaissance pictures gathered by the School of Fine Arts. The first rooms contain valuable



Medieval frescos taken from churches that no longer exist. The 16th century collection displays outstanding works by Sodoma, Ferrari, Lanino and the Giovenones. It is precious the 17th century section with art works by Carracci, Maratta and Sassoferrato. Remarkable is the Nordic collection with Vernet, Manglard, Kauffmann, Bosschaert and De Heem. Of interest the many art works by 19th century Italian artists, among which stand out the paintings by Ambrogio Alciati and those of two Divisionists: Angelo Morbelli and Giuseppe Cominetti.

Tel. 0161.252776 - 389.2116858 - www.museoborgogna.it

Nearby... **Sant'Agnese in San Francesco**, nearby the Museo Borgogna, was an important Gothic church, though it can only be admired in its present Baroque architecture. The interior contains a *Madonna con Bambino, donatore e Santi* by Giuseppe Giovenone the Younger (1570-75) and a *Sant'Ambrogio* (1528-35) by Gerolamo Giovenone.

13 Walking along Corso Libertà until its end you'll arrive at the **MAC - Museo Archeologico Civico**: this newly opened museum contains over six hundred artifacts and traces the history of the ancient *Vercellae* in seven themed rooms, arranged in chronological order.

Corso Libertà 300 - Tel. 0161.649306
https://www.facebook.com/MAC-Vercelli2016



14 Castello Visconteo. Of quadrangular plan, this castle was built from 1290 on, at Matteo Visconti's command. Later it became the Savoy's dwelling place. The Blessed Amedeo died here in 1472 and was buried in the chapel in the Cathedral. Spoiled after the Spanish attack in 1638, it was used as military headquarters during the Napoleonic period; in 1832 it was changed into a prison and then into law-court from 1838.

Nearby... Turning right on Via Duomo you'll find **Santa Maria Maggiore**, the first Christian church built in Vercelli (4th century). After the rebuilding of the 12th century the church was restored and embellished according to the time's taste, until when, in 1777, it was destroyed and built again by order of the Jesuits on the place where it is today.

15 Hospitale S. Eusebi, welcoming pilgrims of the Via Francigena.

16 Il Museo Leone, founded by the Vercelli notary Camillo Leone (1830-1907), is housed in the Renaissance Casa Alciati, connected to the 18th-century Palazzo Langosco by a siding built in 1939. The first rooms display artifacts from the Paleolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, and Iron Age and objects from Egyptian and Etruscan tombs. The Roman room houses the oldest records of Vercelli's history, including the bilingual Celto-Latin stele, while the Lapidarium preserves inscriptions from the Vercelli area (2nd-century B.C.-2nd century A.D.). There are various evidences of early Christian Vercelli. Of interest are the series of incunabula and cinquecentine, printed by printers from Vercelli and Trino, and the collection of furniture, paintings, ceramics bronzes, glassware, majolica, and 18th-century clothing. **Tel. 0161.253204 - 379.2834818 - www.museoleone.it**



17 Teatro Civico. Located in Via Monte di Pietà, a few meters from the Museo Leone, is home of major theater, opera and concert seasons. It was built in 1812 after a project by Nicola Nervi; in 1923 a fire destroyed it; it was rebuilt by Guido Allorio, Paolo Verzone and Giuseppe Rosso.

18 Palazzo Arcivescovile and Museo del Tesoro del Duomo. The Palace is the set of the Museo del Tesoro del Duomo, which contains shrines of great value dating from the 7th to the 16th century, urns, busts and silver chalices. At the entrance you

can see the original filling of the Cathedral Cross, found during the long lasting restoration work. The Capitular Library, displays different collections of manuscripts, among which you can find the *Codex Evangeliorum*, the oldest Latin translation of the Gospels and the *C Codex* with sumptuous miniatures. The most widely known item of the library is the *Vercelli Book*, a 10th century manuscript written in Old English on parchment. **Tel. 0161.51650 - 0161.1851884 - www.tesorodelduomovc.it**



19 Cattedrale di Sant'Eusebio. The Cathedral was built as a cemeterial basilica, probably by Eusebius himself, and it was rebuilt for the first time in the 5th century; the Medieval bell tower is the only remaining part of this first period of reconstruction. The second rebuilding began in 1570 following a plan of Pellegrino Tibaldi and was concluded at the end of the 19th century. The choir loft, the presbytery and the sacristy date from the late 16th century; the Blessed Amedeo's chapel dates from the end of the 17th century. The well lit chapel of St. Eusebius (where the mortal remains of the bishop are worshipped) and the dome (1860) to the 19th century. The impressive façade with neo-classical entrance hall by Benedetto Alfieri leads to the grand interior with Latin cross and three naves. In the presbytery, in the middle of the central nave, hangs a beautiful silver leaf Cross. Thanks to a recent restoration, made after a dreadful act of vandalism, this work was definitely dated to Leo's episcopate (999 - 1026). The Chapel of Blessed Amedeo of Savoy, built by Michelangelo Garove (a Guarini's pupil) between 1682 and 1685, is extremely interesting; here you can find the tombs of the Dukes of Savoy and the urn containing the mortal remains of Amedeo the IX of the house of Savoy. In the cathedral there are also paintings by Pier Francesco Guala and the statue of *Madonna dello Schiaffo*, a marble statue from the 13th century. **Tel. 0161.51650 - 0161.1851884 - www.tesorodelduomovc.it**



20 Seminario Arcivescovile. The Archbishop's Seminary was founded in 1572-87 by the bishop of Vercelli Francesco Bonomi. Eusebius Hall there are frescos with scenes from the Eneid, ascribed to Bernardino Lanino. The Seminary includes a Library of about 30.000 volumes.