

THE VERMENAGNA VALLEY

The Vermenagna valley is located between the Maritime Alps and the Ligurian ones and it stretches for 20 km from the French border. The **Col de Tende**, which offers a breathtaking panorama, is a natural passage: on the one side, the Roya Valley runs towards the sea while on the other side it descends towards the Po Valley. To the right and left there are the ancient **Salt Roads** (Vie del Sale) and the routes towards the **Valley of Wonders** (Valle delle Meraviglie).

This is the ideal place for those looking for the right compromise between sport and relaxation. Here you can choose among: downhill skiing, mountain biking, hiking and climbing, but also excellent chalet (baita) lunches just a stone's throw from elegant SPAs.

The historic railway line connecting Cuneo to Ventimiglia and Nice, the so called "**Train of Wonders**", is one of the most daring stretches in Europe. It was inaugurated in 1928 and it allowed convoys to travel from San Remo or the Côte d'Azur to Bern and from there to Northern

Europe. This work of flair and engineering excellence boasts numerous **helical tunnels** and vertiginous **viaducts** from which you can admire spectacular landscapes.

This cultural heritage tells the story of a cross-border community through its **forts on the hill** built by the Italians and now standing on French soil, as well as through the historical organs, the medieval and baroque testimonies, which are part of a widespread heritage on both sides.

The Italian side is characterised by: the ancient town of **Limone Piemonte**; the hamlet of **Vernante** dotted with murals telling the story of Pinocchio; the hamlet of **Robilante** with its three museums including one dedicated to its railway and finally, the hamlet of **Roccavione** with its numerous Art Nouveau villas and the prehistoric settlement of **Bèc Bèrchasa**.



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THE GESSO VALLEY

The Gesso valley consists of a range of smaller valleys to explore. Its valuable natural heritage is protected by the **Maritime Alps Natural Park**, which is the largest in Piedmont with its 28,000 hectares.

The area is dominated by the highest peaks of the Maritime Alps, including the **Argentera** (3,297 m), the **Matto** (3097 m) and the **Gèlas** (3,143 m) and counts over eighty lakes and waterfalls.

Its extensive network of hiking trails is largely made up of ex-military and mule tracks built in the second half of the 19th century, when the upper valley became the Royal Hunting and Fishing Reserve of the Savoy family, and was home to the Savoy royal family for many decades.

In addition to numerous rare botanical species and wild animals, such as chamois and ibex, the valley is home to the **Centro Faunistico Uomini e Lupi (Men and Wolves Fauna Centre)** in Entracque, where you can observe these predators. Not far from the hamlet, there is the

largest hydroelectric power station in Italy, which is also one of the most powerful in Europe. Its visitor centre tells the history of this power station and hosts also an exhibition on the evolution of climate and glaciers in the Maritime Alps.

An ancient necropolis has been discovered in **Valdieri** and you can visit its archaeological excavation site and the hut reproductions. In the centre of the hamlet, a museum houses its finds.

Those in search of relaxation and wellness can take advantage of the curative sulphurous waters of the **Terme Reali (Royal SPA) in Valdieri**.

Many itineraries are available for ski mountaineering and snowshoeing enthusiasts. In the hamlet of **Entracque** there is one of the best equipped Nordic skiing centres in the Western Alps, as well as some downhill skiing facilities.



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THE STURA VALLEY

The Stura Valley of Demonte is the largest among the Cuneo valleys and it has always been a transit territory: the **Colle della Maddalena** (1,996 metres) is open all year round and it marks the border with the French Ubaye Valley; but that is not all, as the upper valley is in fact the meeting point between the Maritime Alps on the orographic right and the Cottian Alps on the left.

This is a land of passage traversed by men, animals and armies. The first evidence of this dates back to the Neolithic and it is attested by the **Aisone caves**, which were inhabited seasonally by nomadic shepherds. The first document mentioning a small chapel in the Orgials valley dates back to the beginning of the 12th century. Today this chapel is better known as the **Sanctuary of Sant'Anna di Vinadio**, a well-known pilgrimage destination. The imposing **Forte Albertino (Albertinian Fortress) in Vinadio** was built in the first half

of the 19th century and today the many **fortifications of the Alpine Wall (Vallo Alpino)** scattered throughout the upper and middle valleys bear witness to the military past of this land. In the hamlet of **Demonte**, the elegant arcades evoke the atmosphere of the Middle Ages.

The valley offers sport and unspoilt nature, thanks to the footpaths and mountain bike trails that can satisfy the needs of all visitors, as well as the **Stura river**, where you can try adrenaline-filled rafting or canoeing descents.

Local gastronomic excellences will satisfy even the most demanding palates and some examples are: the Sambucano lamb, a Slow Food presidium; the traditional types of fresh pasta such as Crousét or Valaourian raviolas, as well as alpine cheeses to name but a few.



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