



Above: Asti's Palio horse race predates Siena's by 400 years

Far left: the town of Cuneo shrouded in fog, or *nebbia*, as it is known in Italy, after which the Nebbiolo grape of Barolo (left) is named



Six of the best wineries to visit

All wineries require visits to be made by prior appointment

★ Albino Rocca, Barbaresco

Angelo Rocca has become a central figure in the Barbaresco landscape. His welcoming estate produces some of the top wines in this prestigious appellation. www.roccaalbino.com

★ Fratelli Barale, Barolo

A traditional, family-run winery that had been producing elegant Barolo, Barbaresco and Arneis since 1870, located in the town centre. www.baralefratelli.it

★ Bartolo Mascarello, Barolo

The late Bartolo Mascarello was a winemaking legend in Italy and beyond – one of the founding fathers of modern Barolo. His daughter, Maria Teresa, now runs the family estate, producing some of Italy's most iconic wines in large wooden casks. **Tel: +39 0173 56125**

★ La Spinetta, Campè, Grinzane Cavour

The Rivetti family is among Piedmont's superstar producers and owns two wineries in the region, making fabulous Barolo and Barbaresco, most with the iconic Albrecht Dürer rhinos and lions on the labels. www.la-spinetta.com

★ GD Vajra, Vergne, Barolo

Aldo and Milena Vajra are two of Langhe's most hospitable winemakers. They aim to reduce the use of tractors and chemicals, and increase reliance on natural yeasts. It results in wines of finesse and character. www.gdvajra.it

★ Poderi Einaudi, Dogliani

The historic estate of former Italian president and economist, Luigi Einaudi, is now run by his grandchildren. Its boasts a vaulted cellar, fine wines and views of the hills, as well as a 10-room agriturismo. www.poderieinaudi.com

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day when a northerly wind is blowing. To the northeast are the flat fields of the Po valley that are home to VerCELLI, one of Italy's primary rice-growing zones. Go south across the Apennines and you quickly descend to the sea at Genova, the steep and powerful Mediterranean port.

Only a short drive south-east from Turin, Langhe is easy to reach; it has the added advantage of being less well known to foreigners than some of Italy's other top winemaking areas. Yet the region is not short on sights – viticultural and otherwise – or terrific restaurants, hotels and agriturismo stays. Busy market towns such as Alba, Asti, Bra and Cuneo are full of life, and offer good bases from which to tour small roads and villages, ideally by car, bike or even on foot.

Mention Langhe to any Italian and their eyes light up at the thought of the delicious wines and foods produced there. Barbaresco, Barolo, La Morra, Serralunga... these legendary names recur on top restaurant wine lists across Italy. They represent the villages, hamlets and castles whose names have been given to wines produced on specific slopes or hillsides – Italy's first 'crus'. Indeed,

noodles or local beef braised in a fine Barolo or Barbaresco – Nebbiolo wines *per eccellenza*.

Wine has been made here since Roman times. The royal house of Savoy, living in spectacular palaces in and around Turin, were fond of the long-established Barolo, as was the court of Louis XIV. France's historical influence on Piedmont extended to its winemaking: the Piedmontese statesman and architect of Italy's unification, Camillo Cavour, dabbled in viticulture to ensure a steady supply at his table.

Sights to behold

The Langhe hills, and their extensions into Monferrato and Roero, are a self-contained enclave thanks to their distinct geography. To their north and west are the glacier-sculpted mountains of the Alps – a backdrop that comes into focus on a clear

The Decanter travel guide to

Langhe, Piedmont, Italy



Planted area: 6,800 hectares
Main grapes: Nebbiolo, Barbera, Dolcetto
Soils: Mainly limestone and clay. The subsoil is clay, limestone marl, tuff, siliceous sands and chalk. It is the layering of these different elements that gives the wines their elegance and structure

Carla Capalbo finds the moody landscape of rolling vineyards a picturesque backdrop to the Barolo, truffles, pasta and other regional delights on offer here

FEW GRAPE NAMES conjure so well the atmosphere from which they originate as Nebbiolo, the main native grape of central Piedmont. *Nebbia* means fog in Italian, and *le Langhe*, as the gentle hills that Nebbiolo likes best are called, are often shrouded in mist. Far from being a visual deterrent, the fog softens contours and colours, and adds an air of mystery to hilltop castles and sloping vineyards. Nothing can beat a foggy evening spent in the comfort of a local *osteria*, eating truffle-topped



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winemakers are now producing affordable, fruity reds from Dolcetto, long considered Nebbiolo's poor cousin. Barbera, a grape with higher acidity, has been mellowed by warm summers, too. There are wines for every taste, from those aged traditionally in large barrels to wines produced in barriques and using modern technology.

Bring your appetite

Piedmont is foodie heaven. Alba is known for its heady white truffles, so go in autumn to take advantage of them on everything from eggs to risotto. The truffle season runs over six or seven weeks, from October to mid-November, with the best time around mid-October. Game and wild mushrooms are other autumn treats.

The lower slopes of hills planted to vines are used to cultivate prestigious hazelnuts – *tonda gentile delle Langhe*. These are folded into nougat, pounded into cookies and confections, and often married to chocolate. Nutella and its nobler versions originate here, and Cuneo is famous for its *Cuneese* – hazelnut and rum-scented chocolates.

Don't miss thin handmade egg noodles, *tajarin*. Yolk-yellow, they are fabulously rich topped with melted butter, meat sauces or porcini mushrooms. *Agnolotti*, local ravioli stuffed with mixed meats, are also local to Langhe. Meats here are often braised slowly in red wine – not food for the faint hearted, but they go well with the local red wines.



A long walk in the vineyards after lunch will bring you back feeling surprisingly ready for dinner.

There are many other reasons to visit Langhe in autumn. Medieval Asti holds an annual Palio horse race and pageant in September that predates Siena's by 400 years. Slow Food organises a superb cheese extravaganza in alternate years to the Salone del Gusto (see August 2011 issue for an interview with Slow Food founder Carla Petrini). 'Cheese', as the festival is called, will be held in Bra in September 2011 and makes a great focus to a trip, with hundreds of stalls of unique dairy products, as well as demonstrations, tasting seminars and chef-cooked cheese meals.

In October and November, Alba holds an annual truffle fair and international auction: last year the most expensive lot (less than 1.4kg of the precious white fungus) sold for \$330,000. Much smaller pieces are on offer in all the local restaurants; a little shaved over a plate of pasta can go a long way.

Hotels and tourist offices in every town are well informed on local walking and wine routes and will make cellar reservations for visitors. All you need is the time to meander through the countryside, and the inclination to enjoy the wines. **D**



Left: to go with your *agnolotti* – a Langhe stuffed pasta – seek out Barolos and Barbarescos from (above) Poderi Einaudi, La Spinetta and Fratelli Barale, among others

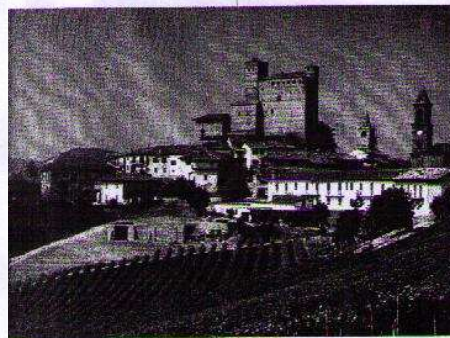
Top left: the busy market town of Cuneo is a great base from which to tour the Langhe region

Carla Capalbo is based in Italy and leads gastronomic tours of the Langhe for Martin Randall Travel (www.martinrandall.com). Her latest book, Collio: Fine Wines and Foods from Italy's North-East, won the André Simon Award for Best Wine Book of 2009



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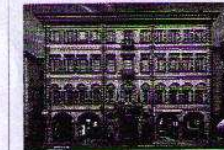
Below: on a clear day, visitors can get superb panoramic views from atop the 14th-century castle of Serralunga d'Alba



Langhe

WHERE TO STAY, SHOP, EAT AND RELAX
From corkscrews to castles and bountiful Piedmontese hospitality

HOTELS & RESTAURANTS
Hotel Palazzo Lovera



Explore the Roero area and Cuneo from a family-run hotel situated in a historic palazzo in the heart of this vibrant market town. www.palazzolovera.com

Hotel Cantine Ascheri

Located in Bra, above Ascheri's handsome winery, this modern designer hotel makes a comfortable base for touring wine country, and includes its own delicious Osteria Murivecchi. Wine tastings are held in the spectacular cellars below. www.ascherihotel.it

Palas Cerequio

Immerse yourself in Barolo vineyards at the luxurious country house spa opened by notable Langhe producer Michele Chiaro. Sample many of the area's best wines here while enjoying the comfortably designed suites. Opens early September 2011. www.palascerequio.com



Hotel Restaurant Barolo

Stay in the centre of Barolo village, with great views over the vineyards, and try the handmade noodles in the restaurant. www.hotelbarolo.it

Enoteca di Canale

This fabulous wine shop sells all the area's wines, and houses star chef Davide Palluda's modernist restaurant. www.davidepalluda.it

Osteria Boccondivino

Bra is the operational centre of Slow Food and this is its in-house restaurant, open to all for great local dishes and atmosphere. www.boccondivinoslow.it

Piazza Duomo



Top chef Enrico Crippa cooks creatively at this stylish two Michelin-starred restaurant overlooking Alba's Duomo. Or eat downstairs, at his more relaxed, affordable bistro, La Piola. www.piazza-duomoalba.it

SHOPS AND SIGHTS
Agenzia di Pollenzo

The House of Savoy's magnificent royal estate (pictured, top) has recently been completely restored and now houses Slow Food's

Gastronomic Sciences university, Wine Bank, Hotel dell'Agenzia and the elegant Guido restaurant. This UNESCO World Patrimony site is a one-stop must for all the gastronomic senses. www.agenziaadipollenzo.com

Castle of Serralunga d'Alba

Spectacular views of the Langhe from atop this high 14th-century medieval castle. For the sure of foot only. www.castellilinghe.roero.it/welcome_eng.lasso

Corkscrew Museum



This unique corkscrew collection housed in central Barolo is fun to visit and gives an overview of how wine drinking customs have changed over the centuries. www.museodeicavatappi.it

Nougat

Visit Davide Barbero's old-fashioned candy factory in central Asti, making nougat from Langhe hazelnuts – Italy's finest. www.barberodavide.it

For more information about tourism and wine roads in the area, visit www.langheroero.it