

Walking Tour in Piedmont: Alba and the Langhe Hills

The tour starts in beautiful Alba, 95 kilometres south of Turin. A handsome town of Roman origin, Alba is the 'capital' of the Langhe, a close-knit range of hills and valleys which are crowded with impeccably tended rows of nebbiolo vines, the source of some of Italy's finest wines. They form a unique and striking landscape, so much so that the district was recently listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site, Italy's 50th:

"The Piedmont vineyard landscapes constitute an outstanding example of man's interaction with his natural environment, outstanding for its harmony; the balance between the aesthetic qualities of its landscapes; the architectural and historical diversity of the built elements associated with the wine production activities and an authentic and ancient art of winemaking". UNESCO citation, June 2014

The walks

The trails are well-marked and generally follow unsealed country roads and lanes that take you over rolling hills often through vineyards and orchards regularly passing through towns and villages. There are the occasional rougher sections and a bit of asphalt walking into and out of the larger towns as well. As each day's walk is between 12 and 18 kilometres and there are some long steep hills this is a Grade 4 walk, however, *please note, that all the walks can be shortened.*

The accommodation

Alba and the Langhe have a long history of hospitality and offer a range of very comfortable and welcoming accommodation. During the walk you will stay in a variety of accommodation including 4-star hotels (in Alba on Days 1 and 7 and on Day 5); an ex-castle/vineyard which once belonged to the king of Italy (Day 2); a lovely small hotel in the heart of the prettiest village in the district (Day 6) and a bed and breakfast/trattoria in a small hilltop village that has been in the same family for 4 generations (Day 4). All the accommodation has ensuite services. See the itinerary for details.

The food

Alba and the Langhe is one of Italy's gastronomic and wine capitals so you will eat and drink very well during this tour (just as well there are some long walks!). According to Pliny the Elder and Strabo, this area was producing fine wines in Roman times. It's modern manifestation started in the mid-1800s with the introduction of production techniques from nearby France. Big, bold Barolo, the flagship wine, is recognised as one of the finest reds in Europe.

What's included in this walk?

- seven nights' accommodation
- all breakfasts (dinners are a recommended option)
- recommendations for lunch
- reading lists and historical and cultural notes and maps and detailed walking instructions
- daily transfers of baggage between hotels
- Transfer from Turin to Alba on Day 1 and transfer from Alba back to Turin on Day 8.
- 24 hour backup from local manager

Piedmont Alba itinerary

Day 1

You will be taken by private transfer from Turin to beautiful Alba, 95 kilometres south. The plan of the historic centre of Alba reflects its Roman origins (an orderly grid tucked behind defensive walls) while its narrow streets are decidedly medieval, complete with a five brick tower-houses that date from the 13th century. Your accommodation is in a traditional hotel (opened in 1866) in the historic centre of the town.

Day 2

You leave Alba heading south-west, passing the Ferrero chocolate factory (home of Nutella) and then follow an easy path along the left bank of the Tanaro River, before turning south and climbing up to a small hilltop village that is famous for its truffles and the 'universita dei cani': a school for truffle dogs that has been running since 1880 (a private truffle hunt and/or degustation of local products can be arranged) – a good place for lunch. The second half of the walk takes you through vineyards to another lovely hilltop town, with a ruined castle from where you have a breathtaking view south over all the Langhe hills. Your accommodation is in a grand home in the centre of the village that was once owned by the king of Italy. 4 hrs 14 kms.

Day 3

Today's walk takes you through the heart of Barolo country following lanes that cut through the middle of some of the finest and most famous vineyards in Italy such as 'Cannubi' and 'Sori', passing through the town of Barolo itself (where you can have lunch and visit one of the cantine and/or its Oenological Museum). After passing through more vineyards, you arrive at another charming hilltop town, which has also Roman origins but has retained a medieval aspect, with a maze of narrow lanes climbing the hill to the ruins of another castle. Your accommodation is in a welcoming family-run 3-star hotel on the main piazza. 3.5 hrs 13 kms.

Day 4

Today's walk takes you out of the wine growing area and into the Alta Langhe, the slightly 'wilder' (relatively!) part of the district which is characterised by steeper hills, hazelnut and fruit orchards and tracts of chestnut forests. On the way you will pass several small towns including one of which has one of the best preserved and most beautiful castles in the Langhe: built in the 13th century, with a series of 14th century frescos. The village that is squeezed around the castle also has an excellent 'Bottega del Vino' where local produce can be tasted and bought. The walk finishes in another small hilltop village overlooking the Belbo River valley. Accommodation is in a small family-run bed and breakfast which has an excellent trattoria attached. 4.5 hrs 17 kms (*please note, this walk can be shortened*).

Day 5

The walk today takes heads north following a ridge above the Belbo River, passing through long tracts of forest and orchards with extensive views south over the Alta Langhe. It passes through a number of small villages where you can break for lunch. Your accommodation tonight is in a 4-star hotel in a restored 18th century estate with a swimming pool, generous grounds and a Michelin-starred restaurant. 4 hrs 14 kms.

Day 6

Leaving your accommodation the trail further along the ridge through forests and orchards, passing close to Santo Stefano Belbo, the home of one of the Langhe's favourite sons: Cesare Pavese (1908 to 1950). A poet, novelist, critic and translator who is considered one of Italy's major 20th century writers, his novels (such as *The Moon and the Bonfires*) and poetry speak lovingly of the area that you are walking through. The second part of today's walk takes you back into the sweet rolling hills of the wine country, through vineyards dedicated to Barbaresco, a light version of Barolo, to one of the prettiest and best preserved villages in the area, staying at a lovely small hotel in the heart of the village, with a famous restaurant.. 18.5 kms. 5.5 hrs (*please note, this walk can be shortened*).

Day 7

The last walk of your visit takes you back to Alba. It loops around through more vineyards, passing a number of settlements, including the town of Barbaresco itself, before entering forest and following the banks of the Tanaro River along a trail that is dedicated to Beppe Fenoglio (1922 to 1963), another beloved local writer who fought the German occupation during World War II, immortalising his experiences in the posthumously published book *Johnny the Partisan*. Your last night is spent in Alba. 11.5 kms 3 hrs.

Day 8

After breakfast, you will be taken by private vehicle back to Turin, a 95 kilometres drive north.