

Province of Vercelli: Big and Small Attractions

A large hourglass which contains grains of sand of infinite shapes and colours: this is the Italian province of Vercelli, a territory with unusual borders that embraces the entire course of the Sesia River from the Monte Rosa to the Po River and encloses an incredible variety of landscapes and natural environments but also those with historical and artistic elements and those with numerous and amazing cultural spots. It is just for this very reason that the entire area has so much to offer and fascinates every type of tourist including the most curious ones, the most daring ones as well as the gourmets.



The Largest and Oldest: The Sacred Mount of Varallo

The monumental complex of the Sacred Mount rises on a rocky peak which dominates Varallo and offers very atmospheric glimpses of the town below and of the entire Valsesia district and Monte Rosa. Tourists can reach the top of the mountain by a cable car. The mount is an integrated part of a Special Natural Reserve and is the oldest of the Sacred Mounts in Italy.

The artistic-religious complex comprises 44 chapels, isolated or set into more articulate architectural complexes, 800 wood and multicolored terracotta life-size statues and 400 frescoed figures highly expressive.

The sacred representation was conceived by the Franciscan monk Bernardino Caimi and built in 1491. The monk, upon returning from a journey to Palestine, wanted to reproduce the places he had seen and re-voke the Life and Passion of Christ in Varallo. A “New Jerusalem” was built in the heart

of the Valsesia district. Famous artists, and not just of local origin, worked on the project: the most important was Gaudenzio Ferrari, a painter, sculptor and architect from Valsesia.



Sacro Monte is also a beautiful example of park gardens, organised according to the model of the Italian garden, with hedges, paths and wooded areas, but also of the ideal town with its two historical squares. Since 2003 the Sacred Mount of Varallo has been inscribed on the UNESCO's World Heritage List.

Unique and Less Known Sights in the Region

Walser Museum

The Walser Museum follows the fascinating and adventurous history of the Walsers, the people of Germanic origin who between the 13th and 16th centuries colonized the Alps. Strong, determined people who learnt to live under the severe conditions in the mountains. They also invented ingenious solutions to improve the living conditions in high altitudes.

In Alagna, the most famous Walser settlement in Valsesia, there is the Museum that bears witness to the originality of the culture and traditions of this population. Situated in the hamlet of Pedemonte, it has been set up in a house dating back to 1682, altered over the centuries but restored to its original form for this purpose.

Built on three levels (animal shed level, room level and barn level), the construction is made of tree trunks, stacked on top of one another and interlocked at the corners, and is surrounded by the wide porches characteristic of Walser architecture.

The Walser Museum houses furniture, objects, furnishings and products from the period, forming an authentic historical complex and an instrument for reconstructing the sociological and anthropological aspects of the Walser culture.



Basilica di Sant'Andrea

St. Andrew's Basilica in Vercelli is the symbol of the town, a beautiful example of the passage from the Lombard-Emilian Romanesque style to the French Gothic architecture. It was built between 1219 and 1227 at the commission of Cardinal Guala Bicchieri of Vercelli, one of the most influential members of the Roman Curia, a leading protagonist of the events that marked the history of England during the hard times of John Lackland's succession to the throne.

The cabin-shaped façade, bordered by slender, elegant towers, is embellished with refined lunettes on the three portals. The central one, representing St. Andrew's martyrdom, is ascribed to Benedetto Antelami. What is interesting is that the chapter-house, one of the finest in Italy, and the rectangular cloister, with full centered arches, bear relieves, brickwork and paintings dating from the early 16th century (now nearly disappeared). In front of the Basilica is the Salone Dugentesco, the remains of an ancient Pilgrims' Hospital.

St. Christopher's Church

Within the historical centre of the town of Vercelli there's a little church which is safeguarding a patrimony of paintings from the 1500s of inestimable value and immense cultural interest: St. Christopher's Church. The building has maintained the original 16th century structure, with the nave, two aisles and transept.

The interior is characterized by a vault sumptuously trompe d'oeil frescoed: the presbytery is closed by a superb balustrade of polychromatic marbles designed by Filippo Juvarra. The choir, the pulpit, the confessionals, the sacristy furniture are made of a valuable wood. On the main altar there is a precious wooden cross. The most interesting object here is an extraordinary series of frescoes by Gaudenzio Ferrari, illuminating the chapels of the transept at the end of the aisles.

Special Natural Reserve of the Sacred Mount of Varallo

Piazza della Basilica–Casa Valgrana, Località Sacro Monte – 13019 Varallo (VC)

Tel. 0039 0163.53938–

Fax 0039 0163.54.047

Email: riservasacromonte@laproxima.it

Web: www.sacromonteverallo.eu

Walser Museum

Hamlet of Pedemonte – 13021 Alagna Valsesia (VC)

Ph. 0039 347 1377404–

Fax 0039 0163 922805

Email: info@alagna.it

Web: www.alagna.it

Basilica di Sant'Andrea

Piazza Roma – 13100 Vercelli

Tel. 0039 0161.1850019 –

Tel. 0039 0161.502460

St. Christopher's Church

Via San Cristoforo – 13100 Vercelli

Tel. 0161.258000

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