Nestled between the highest peaks in Europe and the Ligurian Sea is Piemonte (Piedmont). Piedmont is located in the northwest corner of Italy, with borders to Switzerland and France. It is the second largest region in Italy, and has the 7th largest population. True to the meaning of its name (foot of the mountain), Piedmont is a land of mountains, hills, and plains. It is surrounded on three sides by the Alps, with the highest peaks and largest glaciers in Italy. Piedmont is a melting pot of industry, agriculture, art, and technology. The many nuances of Piedmont are there to be discovered, with a range of tourist attractions, manufacturing activities, the mountains, the great food and wines of the Langhe, pre-eminent textiles, technology and car production, the Savoy palaces, the film industry and art, culture and architecture.

PLACES TO VISIT

To really discover Piedmont one should consider the distinctive historical and natural features that the many
areas of the region have to offer, each with its own traditions and characteristics.

**Alessandria:** Often referred to as the ‘halfway house’ between the Po Valley and the Apennines of Liguria, the Province of Alessandria lies in the extreme southeast of Piedmont. Flanked by hills and valleys, rivers, and the Ligurian Apennine Mountains, Alessandria is a nature lover’s paradise. From the Monferrato hills, covered by vines and rich in color, unadulterated nature, and dense woods of chestnut, oak, and beech trees, to the many natural reserves like the Parco Fluviale del Po Tratto Vercellese-Alessandrino, home to many colonies of birds, there are plenty of awe-inspiring sights to see.

**Biella:** The Province of Biella stretches across northern Piedmont and borders the Valle d’Aosta Valley to the west. Biella is a place that blends the natural wonders of the world with history, art, industry, and religion. Must sees of the area include the popular banks of Lake Viverone, the moor of the Riserva Naturale Orientata delle Baragge, the Sanctuary of San Giovanni d’Andorno in Campiglia Cervo to the grandiose Sanctuary of Oropa, the network of museums, and the wool route.

**Cuneo:** The province of Cuneo is the largest in Piedmont. From valleys filled with vibrant vegetation to patchwork hills, vineyards, and castles, there are plenty of attractions in the area. The first stop on any itinerary should be Cuneo itself, surrounded by the snow-covered Alps and dominated by the Torre Civica. Piazza Galimberti, the central square, is the point of departure for a visit to Cuneo Vecchia (or old Cuneo) with its arcades, lanes, and monuments like the Cathedral, the former Church of St. Francis, and the Civic Museum. Additionally, Cuneo boasts three UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the Royal Castle of Racconigi, the Castle of Pollenzo in the municipality of Bra, the Castle of Govone, and finally, the Savoy Residence of Valcasotto in the municipality of Garessio.

**Canavese:** In the foothills of the Alps lie the hills Canavese. Here you’ll find nature, technology, and vineyards of fine wine, more notably Erbaluce di Caluso, as well as remnants of their Medieval and Baroque past through the many castles, including: Aglié, Rivarolo,
Masino, and San Giorgio.

**Novara:** Novara is the easternmost province of Piedmont, bordering Lombardy to its east and south. Flanked by the Ticino and Sesia Rivers, it is mainly flatland in the south, hills in the center, and mountains to the north. The Province in part is home to Piedmont’s grand lakes: most of Lake Orta and the evocative village of Orta San Giulio; and the southern part of Lake Maggiore, with its renowned tourist resorts of Arona and Castelletto-above-Ticino. Novara, the capital of the province is a must see while in the region. Surrounded by fortresses and dominated by the Antonelli dome of the Basilica di San Gaudenzio, Nevara is the perfect blend of medieval castles and neoclassical structures. Next stop on the vacation-agenda should be the Province’s centerpiece, the Sacro Monte di Orta, a monumental complex of great religious and artistic importance within a conservation area named a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

**Vercelli:** Next to Novara you’ll find Vercelli, an area of equally beautiful varying landscapes and medieval and renaissance treasures. Among the various sights of this area, don’t forget the imposing Romanesque-gothic Basilica di Sant’Andrea, the Duomo with its high Medieval bell tower, and the Borgogna Museum, a collection of the most important artworks in Piedmont dating back to the Renaissance.

**The Monferrato:** Known as one of the most important wine districts in Italy, Monferrato is home to lush gardens, orchards and vines, which produce excellent wines such as Grignolino, Dolcetto, Barbera, Freisa, and more notably, Moscato. Casale Monferrato is a small town with a historical past that is worth a visit. Asti province is the perfect choice in the area, home to many wines and the ancient Palio that dates back to the town’s glory days in the middle ages, and the Romanesque Abbey of Vezzolano, there are plenty of historical sites to visit.

**Langhe:** Immortalized by works of Cesare Pavese and Beppe Fenoglio in the early 20th-century, the Langhe hills offer some of the best panoramic views in Italy. Known most famously for their wines, cheeses, and Abla White Truffles, there are many cultural experiences to be appreciated in this area. High on a balcony of patchwork hills there are castles and towns overlooking the Alps and open to the South towards the sea. Here you can visit the gorgeous towns of La Morra, Barolo (also the name of Langhe’s best known wine), Monforte, Serralunga, and Grinzane Cavour.

**MUST SEES**

**The Savoy palaces:** Inhabited by the noble Savoy family, the last monarch of Italy, the palaces of Savoy are known for their architectural variety and size. Scattered throughout Piedmont, with a concentration in Turin, the first capital of Italy, visitors can explore the many wonders each castle has to offer. At the top of the list of palaces to see, starting in Turin, are Palazzo Reale, Palazzo Madama, Palazzo Carignano, Castello del Valentino, and Villa della Regina. Once those have whet your appetite, venture onward neighboring provinces and to see the rest. Additionally, there are also numerous houses in the surrounding area, including Venaria, La Mandria, Rivoli Castle, now a museum of contemporary art, the Hunting Lodge in Stupinigi, and Moncalieri castle.

**Alpine fortresses in the Olympic Valleys:** Also known as the Watchmen, the Alpine
fortresses are military installations that are of great significance to the history of Italy— from Napoleon times, and earlier. Surrounding the Susa, Pellice, and Chisone valleys where the Winter Olympics were held in 2006, many of the forts are open to the public, most notably Fenestrelle, Exilles, and Bramafam.

La Via Francigena: La Via Francigena (The Road from France), is a pilgrimage route that dates back to medieval times. Running through England, France, Switzerland, and Italy, this road was set for the Holy See of Rome. Today, travelers can hike through the trails and spot various structures erected along the way, including the Monastery of Sant’Antonio di Ranverso, the Sacra di San Michele, perched on Monte Pirchiriano, the Roman city of Susa, and Novalesa abbey.

The Great Lakes: Consisting of three major lakes: Orta, Mergozzo, and Maggiore, these large bodies of water at the foot of Monte Rosa are surrounded by parks, churches, and villas. The main attractions are the island of San Giulio at the center of Lake Orta, Verbania on the western banks of Lake Maggiore, and Stresa with its glorious panoramic views.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Bra Slow Food Cheese Festival: If you’re looking to really experience the cheese of the region, the Bra Slow Food Cheese Festival will offer you the best of the region. This international show in Bra (Cuneo) is not only the sector’s leading event in Italy, but also represents an outstanding showcase for the development of the Piedmont’s industry.

Fiera Internazionale del Tartufo Bianco di Alba: The international auction of the White Truffle of Alba (Cuneo) is held every year in Grinzane Castle from October to November (peak season for the truffle). Started by leading Alba personality Giacomo Morra in 1929, this fair has garnered worldwide attention, for many reasons. One of the highlights of the fair is the famous donkey race, held the first weekend in October. The race is held essentially to mock the neighboring town of Asti, the race is a certifiable comedy of errors. Preceded by a lavish medieval procession and theatrical pageantry reenacting key moments of Alba’s history, the race itself is quite the spectacle – the stubborn donkeys often refuse to move, bite their riders, and are eventually dragged across the finish line by their desperate jockeys.