



PICTURESQUE



PIEDMONT

A LAND OF MOUNTAINS, CULTURE AND GASTRONOMY, THE REGION OF PIEDMONT HAS A STRONG SPORTING TRADITION, AND THAT INCLUDES SOME OF THE BEST GOLF COURSES IN ITALY

famous German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche very famously declared 'God is dead'. But he thought Turin, the capital of Piedmont, was mighty lively. Nietzsche wrote, "Do you know Turin? Now that is a city after my heart. Palazzi that speak to the heart, not Renaissance fortresses! And the sight of the Alps from the centre of the city. I would have never thought that the light could make a city so beautiful."



Castelconturbia



Sestriere

Nietzsche was spell-bound by the city's gelato, music and calm atmosphere, and he considered the city to be the capital of discovery. That feeling is shared by the many people who visit Piedmont every year.

It is thus the perfect place for a relaxing golf holiday, to get away from it all for a while. There are more than 60 golf clubs in Piedmont, from modest 9-hole set-ups to 36-hole Championship tests. Golf is the ideal reason for a cultural excursion around one of Italy's richest regions in terms of art, history and culture. And with its unspoiled countryside, soaring Alpine peaks and wide valleys, pristine lakes and quality wine, the 'land of mountains' is not to be missed.

Piedmont is best accessed from Ireland by an Aer Lingus flight to Milan Malpensa, which is a one hour 30-minute bus ride from Turin, while hiring a car to visit the glorious countryside is highly recommended.

Turin was founded by the Celts – the Taurini tribe gave the city its name – and one of the principal courses in Piedmont has an Irish link. In 2006, Rory McIlroy won the European Amateur Championship at Golf Club Biella 'Le Betulle'. It was the biggest win in McIlroy's amateur career, and secured his place in the 2007 Open Championship, where he won the Silver Medal.

Built in the late 1950s, the course is set in the charming countryside along

the slopes of the Sierra moraine. The John Morrison parkland is located in an area of rare natural beauty. The Italian magazine *Il Mondo del Golf* has ranked the course as the best in Italy on eighteen occasions.

While at Biella, the more religiously inclined can visit the Sacro Monte di Oropa, a religious pilgrimage known for 'The Conception of Mary'.

Circolo Golf Bogogno, set in the countryside between Lake Orta and Lake Maggiore, is a fantastic 36-hole complex. Set in the foothills of the Monte Rosa Massif mountain range close to the Swiss border, both courses, Del Conte and Bonora, utilise the topography superbly. Bonora is longer and more technically challeng-

ing than the neighbouring course, but both display the flair of its designer Robert von Hagge. It is also used as the Second Stage for the European Tour's qualifying school.

Another great venue is Sestriere Golf Club, which originates from 1932, and is set on the foot of the ski slopes and follows the contours of the land. The only Italian course above 2,000 metres, it is suited to those loving cool conditions and wonderful, relaxing scenery.

Given the topography of the land, winter sports are a big part of life in Piedmont. That reached its peak in 2006, when Turin had the honour of hosting the Winter Olympic Games. The Games featured 84 medal events over 15 disciplines in seven sports.

Sixty-five sporting infrastructures, sport villages for athletes and media, and transportation infrastructures were constructed for a total of €1.7 billion. The Olympics website writes "The Olympics represented an opportunity to revamp the city's look and change its traditional image as an industrial city by showing the world its hidden side of vibrant cultural life and stunning architectures."

The main sport, however, in Pied-

PADRAIG HARRINGTON ALMOST HAD GLORY AT CIRCOLO GOLF TORINO AT THE 1999 ITALIAN OPEN, AS ONE OF FIVE SECOND-PLACE FINISHES THAT SEASON ON THE EUROPEAN TOUR

mont, just like the rest of Italy, is football and no region has won more Serie A championships than Piedmont. Much of this is due to the success of Juventus F.C., one of the world's greatest clubs. Winners of the last six Italian titles, The Old Lady as the team is affectionately called, reached the Champions League final last year, losing to Real Madrid. They have won a record-breaking 33 championships.

Their inter-city rivals Torino are also very competitive in Serie A, although not to the levels of the great Grande Torino team, which won five consecutive leagues before the entire team was tragically killed in the Superga air disaster.

They play in Stadio Olimpico Grande Torino, while Juventus play in Allianz

Stadium, which hosted the 2014 Europa League final.

So sport is at the centre of Piedmont life, and golf is no different. One of the great goals for the 2022 Ryder Cup in Italy is to have an Italian player representing Europe against the United States, and it will be a major ambition of the Molinari brothers, who have both played in the Ryder Cup in the past.

The Molinari brothers grew up in Turin and they played their golf at Circolo Golf Torino, La Mandria. "This golf club is one of the most important places in my life," says Edoardo Molinari. "Everything here is built around golf."

Circolo Golf Torino was founded in 1924 before moving to its current site in La Mandria in 1957. La Mandria is one of



Turin, Torino Province, Piedmont

GOLF IS ONLY PART OF THE OFFERING IN **WONDERFUL PIEDMONT**. SURROUNDED ON THREE SIDES BY THE **ALPS** AND BORDERED BY **FRANCE** AND **SWITZERLAND**



A Valley Church, Piedmont

the most charming regional parks in the Po river plain, and is the largest enclosed park in Europe, where fauna includes wild boards and reindeers and a 22-kilometre long creek called Ceronda gives the park a unique feel.

Ireland's Padraig Harrington almost had glory at Circolo Golf Torino at the 1999 Italian Open, as one of five second-place finishes that season on the European Tour, as he was defeated by Scotland's Dean Robertson.

The blue riband golf event in Italy has been in La Mandria seven times in total, in 2013, where again there was an Irishman second as David Higgins finished behind Julien Quesne, and 2014 at Torino, while the tournament was hosted at Royal Park Golf & Country Club (Royal Park i Roveri) from 2009-12.

Royal Park Golf & Country Club is one of two Robert Trent Jones Sr designs in the region. The American has designed courses from Hazeltine National to Firestone Country Club, from Valderrama to Spyglass Hill, and Royal Park and Castelconturbia, are two more gems from his impressive repertoire.

Some of the accolades for the world-renowned Royal Park Golf & Country Club course include 'Best Italian Course' by World's Leading Golf and Golfbreaks.com, while the 17th hole has been described as "the best hole in Italy" by Gazzetta dello Sport.

Its striking location makes it unique in Europe: surrounded by the Olympic Alps and immersed in the La Mandria Park. It is characterised by its innovative use of bunkers and water hazards, requiring careful strategy. It also boasts the new Pramerica Course, created by Dr Michael Hurdzan and Dan Fry in 2006.

Near Royal Park Golf & Country Club is the Royal Palace of Venaria, one of the Residences of the Royal House of Savoy, which was a base for the hunting expeditions of duke Charles Emmanuel II.

Castelconturbia Golf Club, a one hour 30-minute drive from Turin, is one of Italy's most challenging tests. Constructed over an area of over one million square metres, it is the ideal area among centuries-old trees, streams, ponds and light ripples on the ground. Large greens are difficult to read on this strategic and varied course, which showed its pedigree by hosting two Italian Opens, in 1991 and 1998.

Head south of Turin and you will find Golf Club Villa Carolina, which is a 36-hole resort, set in a 200-year old park where the villa has been used as a country house by the nobility since the early 19th century.

La Margherita GC is considered



Torino La Mandria

among the top 20 courses in the country by the industry rankings and this course designed by Marco Croze is well maintained, with plentiful water hazards and firm greens. GC I Girasoli is a natural 18-hole par 71 set-up surrounded by forests, vineyards and orchards in a gently hilly countryside.

The 36-hole Magara GC offers unspoilt scenery, making it the ideal place for those wishing to escape to a relaxing country atmosphere. The local cuisine featured in the clubhouse includes the renowned wines from the Monferrato and Langhe territories.

But golf is only part of the offering in wonderful Piedmont. Surrounded on three sides by the Alps and bordered by France and Switzerland, it is the second largest region in Italy after Sicily. The River Po dominates the region, rising from the slopes of Monviso, Italy's largest region.

This fertile agricultural region is renowned for its winegrowing, some of the wines that originate from Piedmont include Barolo, Barbaresco and Moscato d'Asti. Alba and Asti are at the heart of the region's wine industry, where the likes of Giuseppe Garibaldi have owned vineyards in Piedmont in the past. Barolo produces 500,000 cases of wine annually.

In Alba, it is possible to experience 'la dolce vita' as in 2009, it was voted as the best Italian commune with more than ten thousand inhabitants for Quality of Life. There are 290 wineries that cultivate 700 hectares of land. As well as tasting glorious wine, Alba is also home to the world-renowned confectionery brand

Ferrero, which produce the luxury chocolate Ferrero Rocher, as well as the likes of Nutella, Tic Tac and Kinder Bueno.

Gastronomically, Alba also excels with its white truffles found mainly in the surrounding Langhe and Montferat areas. Every year it hosts a Truffle Festival to celebrate the delicacy.

Other than wine, there are many sights to see in Asti, where sections of the ancient city walls remain on the north side of the city, and the area to the northwest is rich in medieval palaces and merchant houses. The Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta is one of the biggest in Piedmont, where the monumental belfry is from 1266, and the façade is characterized by three portals, each surmounted by a big rose-window.

Like many other northern regions, the 'Lake District' is popular with tourists and Piedmont features the western half of Lake Maggiore, centred around the lovely town of Arona, as well as the picturesque Lake Orta. The hills and the mountains are close here, which lends to a fairytale atmosphere in the villages around the lake. San Giulio Island can be accessed from a ferry, where in the 12th-century Romanesque church there is one of the outstanding works of medieval sculpture in northern Italy.

For motor enthusiasts, Turin is home to Fiat, the largest automobile manufacturer in Italy, which began 118 years ago, and the Museo Nazionale dell'Automobile. It is one of many museums and galleries in the capital from the Puppet Museum to the Museum of Human Anatomy Luigi Rolando.

One of the best of the lot is the Egyptian Museum of Turin, which is home to what is regarded as one of the largest collections of Egyptian antiquities outside of Egypt. Meanwhile, the Shroud of Turin is a famous monument, a linen cloth bearing the image of a man who is alleged to be Jesus of Nazareth. It is kept in the royal chapel of the Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist in Turin, northern Italy.

Indeed, Turin boasts an artistic and architectonic heritage that covers the entire spectrum from Ancient Egypt to La Belle Époque. The essence of Turin can be captured by visiting the symbols of the House of Savoy, a family that grew in power from ruling a small county in the Alps of northern Italy and eventually ruled the Kingdom of Italy from 1861 to 1946.

The Palazzo Reale (Royal Palace) is a sight to behold, while the Biblioteca Reale (Royal Library) features a collection of Leonardo da Vinci drawings, including a self-portrait, his study for the angel in the first version of his Virgin of the Rocks, and his study for the angel in Verrocchio's The Baptism of Christ.

The Galleria Sabauda (Sabauda Gallery) is an art collection amassed by the House of Savoy, while the Armeria Reale (Royal Armory) features important relics such as Charles V's 16th century pistol, Henry II's parade shield and a sword used by Napoleon during his campaign in Egypt. **G**

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