



# Il Loanese & Il Pietrese

Riviera delle Palme



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# Il Loanese & Il Pietrese

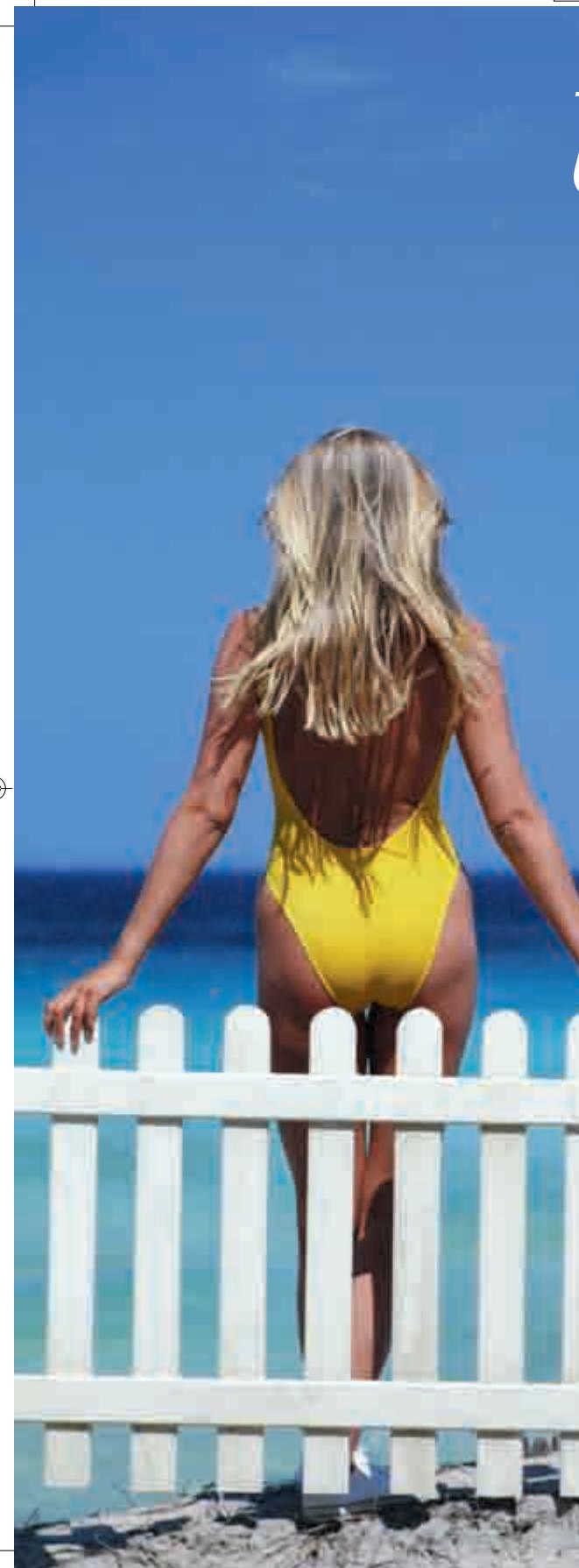
Riviera delle Palme



Borghetto Santo Spirito

Borgio Verezzi  
Loano  
Pietra Ligure

Riviera delle Palme

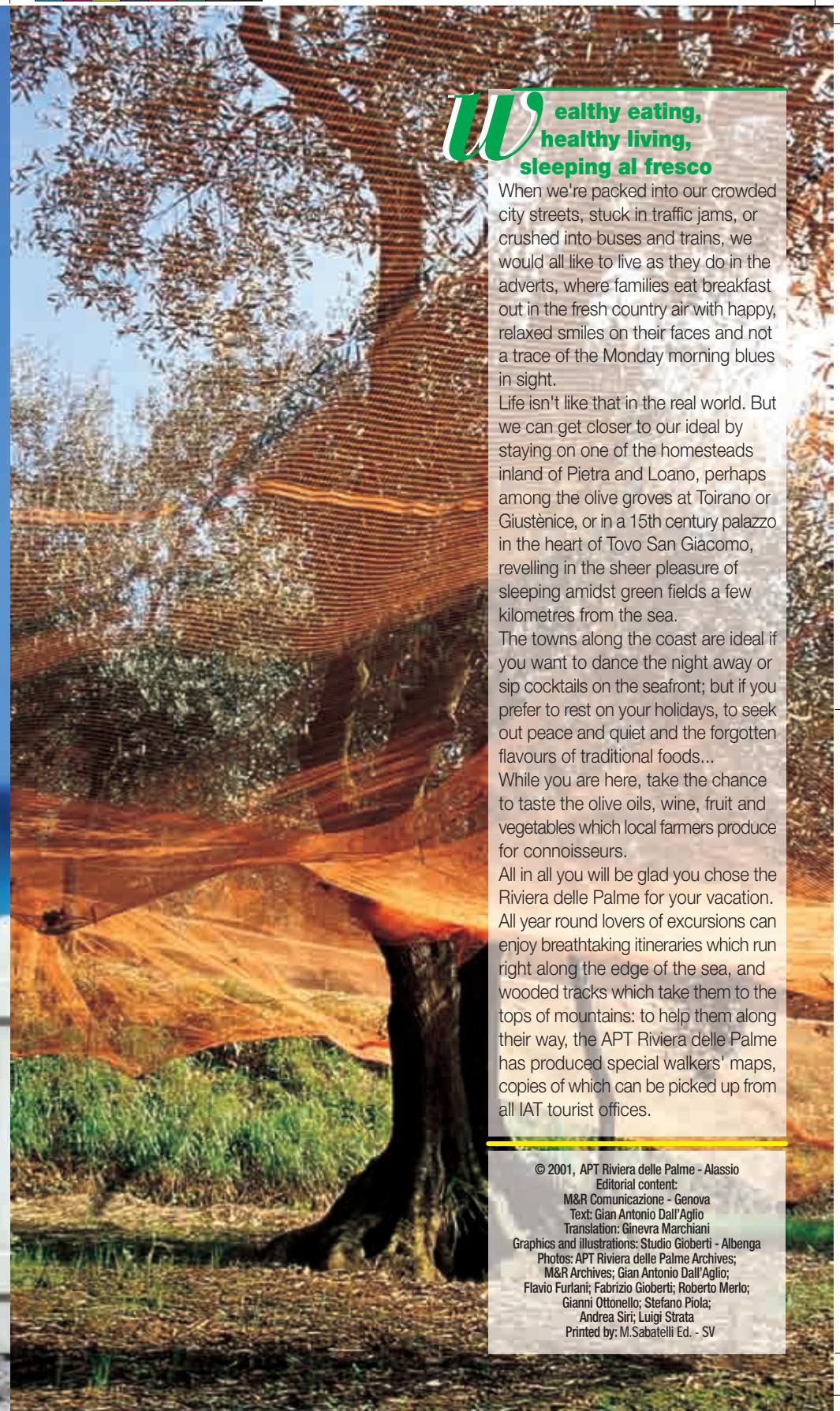


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## he short arc of land and sea

between Borgio Verezzi and Borghetto Santo Spirito epitomises all that Liguria has to offer its inhabitants and the would-be locals who love it so: crystal-clear seas, sandy beaches, ancient seaside villages and modern facilities and amenities for a fun-packed holiday. Waiting to be discovered a stone's throw from the sea lie green valleys carpeted with olive groves and pine trees, and prehistoric caves which were home to the very first Ligurians: modern-day visitors to the caves at Borgio and Toirano never fail to be mesmerised by the unexpected natural spectacle which lies in wait for them.

Lovers of open-air sports and sweeping panoramas will savour the high mountain scenery and exhilarating excursions, with visits to welcoming homesteads where they can taste and buy olive oils, local foods and wines which cannot be found on the supermarket shelf. The area around Loano and Pietra Ligure offers holiday-makers no end of entertainments, international festivals and dialect theatre seasons, cool summer nights in country villages, popular feast days with delicious treats made from wild mushrooms and fresh vegetables. While this part of the Riviera is wonderful all year round, it really comes into its own between September and June, when the climate is mild and the beaches are less crowded; it is no coincidence that tourism first began here in the winter, at the turn of the 20th century, when English and German tourists came to soak up the sun and escape the fogs and mists of the north. These rich, aristocratic globetrotters paved the way for the visitors who flock to the Riviera di Pietra e di Loano from Milan, Turin, Germany and Holland to savour sun-drenched, fun-packed vacations.



## W ealthy eating, healthy living, sleeping al fresco

When we're packed into our crowded city streets, stuck in traffic jams, or crushed into buses and trains, we would all like to live as they do in the adverts, where families eat breakfast out in the fresh country air with happy, relaxed smiles on their faces and not a trace of the Monday morning blues in sight.

Life isn't like that in the real world. But we can get closer to our ideal by staying on one of the homesteads inland of Pietra and Loano, perhaps among the olive groves at Toirano or Giustenice, or in a 15th century palazzo in the heart of Tovo San Giacomo, revelling in the sheer pleasure of sleeping amidst green fields a few kilometres from the sea.

The towns along the coast are ideal if you want to dance the night away or sip cocktails on the seafront; but if you prefer to rest on your holidays, to seek out peace and quiet and the forgotten flavours of traditional foods...

While you are here, take the chance to taste the olive oils, wine, fruit and vegetables which local farmers produce for connoisseurs.

All in all you will be glad you chose the Riviera delle Palme for your vacation. All year round lovers of excursions can enjoy breathtaking itineraries which run right along the edge of the sea, and wooded tracks which take them to the tops of mountains: to help them along their way, the APT Riviera delle Palme has produced special walkers' maps, copies of which can be picked up from all IAT tourist offices.

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# Borgio Verezzi

## A double name

### for a double village

Half on the sea, half on the hills: here is Borgio Verezzi, a place with multiple aspects. Borgio is a very well preserved ancient borgo, it lies on a small hill very close to the sea, surrounded by

vegetable gardens and orchards. Its cobbled streets lead to the sloping Piazza San Pietro and to its white eighteenth century church and, beyond, to the sixteenth century, defense keep one of many you can find on the coast of Liguria, which

for long centuries was exposed to the risk of incursions by saracen pirates. Between the hill of the ancient borgo and the beach, the flat, modern town has all the necessary facilities to make the stay of tourists pleasant: beach resorts, restaurants,





promenades, bars to drink cocktails in the full moonlight. Naturally, in front of Borgio there's the sea, it is characterized by shallow waters and a rocky shoal covered with sand at a depth of only half a metre, it is very rich

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in marine flora and fauna, a joy for scuba divers and for those who love to browse around the coloured submarine world with respirator and flippers. It is also useful for fishermen who supply fresh fish to restaurants that still propose the *Ciùpin*, the tasty local fish soup prepared by cooking slowly the fish in a terracotta bowl with tomatoes and other vegetables and then pouring the cream in soup plates over roasted bread.

To reach the other half of this wonderful town, it is

necessary to climb some panoramic hairpin bends: Verezzi is on the top, 200 metres above sea level, with its four old borgos that are more than 900 years old, scattered groups of houses made of stone, houses as clear as the rock of the terraces on which they stand, cultivated fields where olives and even carob trees grow, with cobbled alleys, arches and little squares, lazy cats, vineyards, stone seats and washing troughs; on top of the hill there is also a mill, called phoenician



### Theatre in square

In the borgo Piazza di Verezzi, in Sant'Agostino square, it's more than 30 years that the International Festival of Theatre and the National Award "Veretium" take place.

In the sunset, while actors rehearse the show that they will perform at night, among curious cats and the clink of the restaurant dishes, with the scent of the salted water in the air... every year in Verezzi a wedding between nature and culture is celebrated.

Piazza di Verezzi. Saint Augustin Chapel is the backstage of the famous International Festival of Theatre. Some views of the borgo looking over the sea



because of its building technique. They are named Poggio, Piazza,

Roccaro, and Crosa the four borgos of Verezzi: little balconies facing the sun and the sea; at the beginning of the second millennium Saracens already loved this corner of Riviera, infact the architectural style in which these houses are built is called "saracen".



Walking on a sunny day along paths and tortuous roads that climb this rocky and green hill, better if in winter or in spring, far from the heart of summer, allows to deeply understand all the charm of the Mediterranean and of the Riviera delle Palme and to realize with wonder and joy what living in Liguria means.



All mums of the world are beautiful

And the parson of Verezzi knows it very well, infact he rings the "mum's bell" every evening at 19 to remember all mums of the world.



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### The camel in the cave

In one of his songs Franco Battiato says he feels "like a camel in a gutter", it must not be very comfortable, poor camel. Not to mention the famous camel in the eye of the needle. And how would a camel in a cave feel?

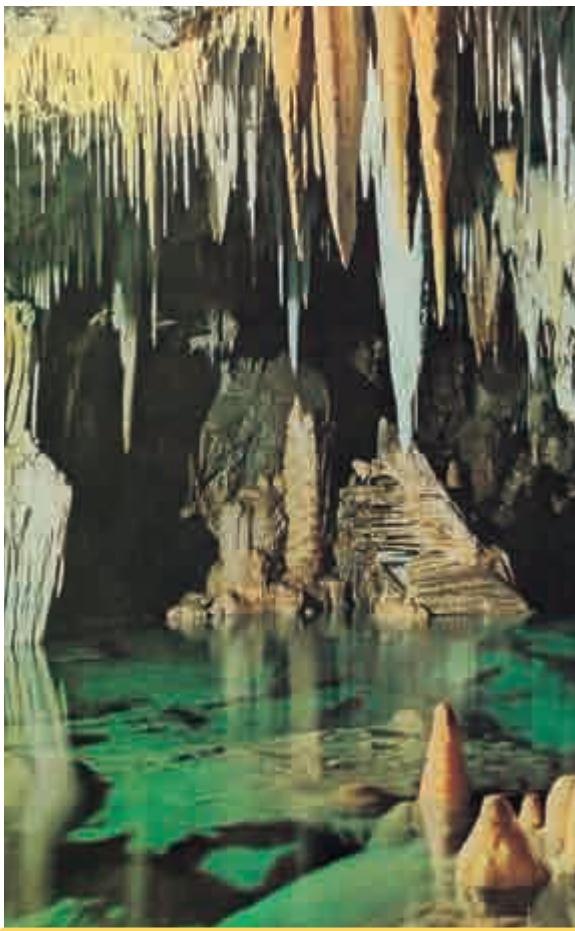
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Oh, it feels very well, also because it isn't a camel with hair and humps, but a strange rocky formation.

The limestone rocks of this strip of Riviera are full of caves and ravines, excavated by the water in the course of millenniums. And when water and limestone play together, they can be great artists. The caves of Borgio are an underground labyrinth, it is a few kilometres long and it can be visited under the guide of speleologists. The first haul, 800 metres long, has been opened



**Just outside Borgio, in the borgo cemetery, there's a beautiful, ancient church: it was founded with the name of San Pietro on the path of a Roman road and it is now dedicated to Saint Stephen; it is medieval and romantic and it has an inside wall that, it is said, had the function to separate men from women during services. May be in Borgio there was someone who went to mass for love reasons instead of to pray?**



● Playing fountains and limestone shapes in Valdemino Cave: dreamy, fanciful figures, in which chemistry interprets the queer creativity of nature



## Eating and drinking ligure

Here the kitchen mixes sea with land: let's try the Ciùpin, the fish soup, but don't forget the sage ravioli, the bruschetta (roasted bread with oil, garlic and tomato), the cima ripiena (a meat roll with a stuffing of vegetables, eggs and meat) and the snails in zimino (a chickpeas soup). Limited quantities of a white wine called "lumassina" are produced in Verezzi. It is an amber-coloured wine, with a scent of almonds and pine-seed. When it matures, it becomes sparkling and even more scented.



The hill of Verezzi is a world made of candid stone, filled with sun and sea salt: it is the true Mediterranean

to the public since 1970: the entrance is 36 metres above sea level, inside there is a constant temperature of 16 degrees centigrade and a 90% humidity; these are characteristics which benefit the visitors' respiratory system. The limestone of the rock contains small quantities of iron materials which give to the cave walls red and yellow shades. From the ceiling of the cave the "spaghetti" dangle, they are vibrant threadlike

stalactites, while other formations enchant with their winding drapery. Then you meet small lakes created by the rain that seeps through the rock chinks and other oddities which seem carved by a visionary sculptor: there's the Camel, and there are the Waterfall, the Torso of Pope John XXIII, the Lighthouse, the Samurai.... It is up to your sensitivity to find out other shapes carved by the fantasy of nature.

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# Pietra Ligure

## A Pria: from rock to town

It is a big limestone rock that stands very close to the sea: on the big rock, in an uncertain date, the *Castrum Petrae* was built, a fortified site used by the bizantines as defense against the longobards in

the early Middle Ages. Then it was feud of Albenga bishops and in 1385 it became an independent community under Genoa's jurisdiction. The place had been well chosen: high and rich mountains at the back to protect against the winds

ensure a mild climate all year long and provided good wood, long and sandy beaches, an ideal site to build shipyards and to engage in maritime commerce. The ancient tradition of shipyards is still alive, commerce has been



flanked by tourism. Thanks to tourism, today Pietra has a wonderful palm-lined promenade and modern seaside facilities which enrich the long beach where you can sunbathe in peace, eat, enjoy surfing and swimming courses and water sports competitions,



practise aqua-gym while leaving your children to the baby-sitting service. And for those who have a four-legged friend, in Pietra there is one of the first beaches in Liguria with dogs facilities. And when the sun goes down or when it is too hot to lie on the beach, there is only to choose among tennis and bowls fields, open air discos, pianobars, beach parties, festivals, the antiques market (every last weekend of the month), classical and dialectal theatre performances



and live music (the oldest Italian Filarmonic Society was born in Pietra in 1518). Pietra is a place for people of every age and every need.



● *The tropical vegetation casts long shadows on the sea walk of Pietra, while the fine Liberty windows of XIX century palaces in the borgo shine under the autumn sun*



### Ancient names for ancient roads

What is more personal, familiar, traditional for a population or a community than its dialect? It's a pity that the use and the knowledge of the many Italian dialects is slowly going lost and the number of those who speak and understand dialects among

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**Industry, art, engineering, handicraft, all this is the shipbuilding; a challenge to nature, that decided for men a land existence. Sailing has been one of the pillars of Ligurian culture for at least 1000 years. The coast towns which during the centuries had little or big shipyards along the beaches are many, there it was simple to build and launch galleys, caravels, gozzi, steamers, vessels and motorboats, under sail or engine.**

Pietra has a respectable shipbuilding tradition, which comes from the centuries of the Genoa Republic. Today it is specialized in the building of fast ferryboats.

new generations is decreasing. A dialect that disappears is like a typical dish whose recipe has gone lost, a wine whose grapewine has been rooted out, a patron saint's festival that is not celebrated anymore. Finally, it is a little cultural and spiritual death, an extinction from which it is impossible to come back. Here in Pietra, or better in Pria, people care about their dialect and do all that is possible to avoid it is forgotten and to let traditional names of places and roads alive. Walking through the Caruggi, on the

colored walls of the old houses it is easy to find plates of pink stone which show the dialectal names of roads and squares.

### Walking through the caruggi

Just leave sea and amusements for a while and let's walk trough the



When the tourists go back to the city, the fishermen with their nets, the "leudi", the "gozzi" covered with salt get back the beach. And to share their dominion, the lazy cats, lords of the beach and the boats all over the Riviera

centre of Pietra: the Borgo Vecchio dates from the Middle Ages and, just like many other borgos of Liguria, it sprawls thin and straight along the coast and the seafront with its narrow caruggi. Why did people of Liguria in the Middle Ages live in such narrow roads? Just think of the dangers of those times: saracen pirates, German mercenaries, belligerent feudal lords. In narrow roads like labyrinths, it was simpler to defend and to confuse the enemy. Then there is the Borgo Nuovo that dates from the



Renaissance. The Marina, between the promenade and the shipyards dates from the nineteenth century. Walking through the centre we meet some wonderful palaces which date from the Middle Ages and the XVIII century, the most important of them is Leale-Franchelli palace, it dates from the XVIII century, it has beautiful painted a fresco rooms, a rich library,

porcelains and prints collections. Two beautiful churches are the Annunziata, with its Madonna del Rosario by A.M. Maragliano, and the parish of San Nicolò di Bari,



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## Discovering PIETRA LIGURE



this great church dates from the XVIII century with two bell towers, it is rich in masterpieces. The "bronzo di San Nicolò" is loved by people of Pietra, it is a bell that in 1525 sounded to announce the end of a tremendous pestilence; it is on the bell tower of the Oratorio dei Bianchi.



### Halloween of old times

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It is not completely true that the celtic Halloween celebrated the first of November, recently imported from America, is not linked at all with Italian traditions about the dead and Saints: in a lot of places of Liguria on the second of November it was customary to go from house to house asking to collect offerings for the souls of the dead; chestnuts, sweet dried figs; in Pietra, in Loano and elsewhere children went from door to door, exactly like Charlie Brown and his friends.



● What is a "caruggio"?  
It is the essence itself, the soul place of Ligurian borgos. Take the caruggi away and Liguria would cease to exist.  
With no high, coloured houses, no vaulted buttresses, no cobbled streets, no shade and sunshine playing on the roofs... what would these towns become?



# V al Maremola

## On the mountains of Pietra

Among the mountains around Pietra which make its climate so mild, there are two fresh, woody, short valleys: Val Maremola and Valle di Giustenice, with their heritage of history, art and curiosities. Along

pinewood avenue leads toward the Val Maremola, where history and art meet in particular in the sanctuary of Nostra Signora del Soccorso, at the feet of the Grosso mountain. It has been wanted by the people of Pietra and by the Doria

family lords of Loano at the beginning of the seventeenth century and it hosts a fresco of the Madonna painted in the fifteenth century. A little higher, Tovo San Giacomo and the scattered Magliolo borgos maintain the features of the typical



borgos of Liguria, untouched landscapes and ancient architectures while the valley becomes wild, among beautiful pathes and of ornamental evergreens (used by florists) several cultivations. The road that twists and turns towards Isallo, a small Magliolo borgo surrounded by woods which climb to the Melogno ridge, where around 1750 an iron mine was installed. Today there are the ruins to testify the

past industrial activity of the valley. Around here, those who love mountain biking will find plenty of paths right for them. *Justenens*, instead, was the place for justice. Once a month the mayor of Pietra Ligure climbed to San Lorenzo, a Giustenice borgo in the namesake valley, to judge and to pass sentences; in the Piazza del Costino, in front of the municipality, there still is the stone seat for the mayor. In reality it is not exactly a throne

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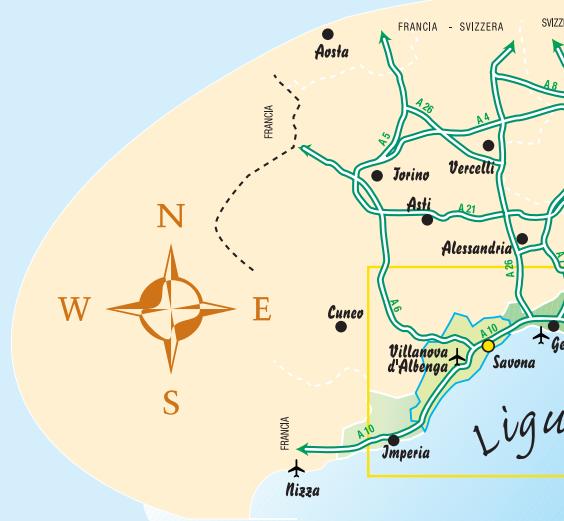
**Ancient wars**  
An episode of Giustenice history revives every year in July through the costume remembrance of the battle of 1448 between the troops of the Genoa Republic and the ones of the Marquis Giovanni del Carretto, the lord of the place, whose castle was besieged and destroyed.

After the "battle", a "medieval" dinner with a historical menu and a football match in the Florentine style, close the historical day.



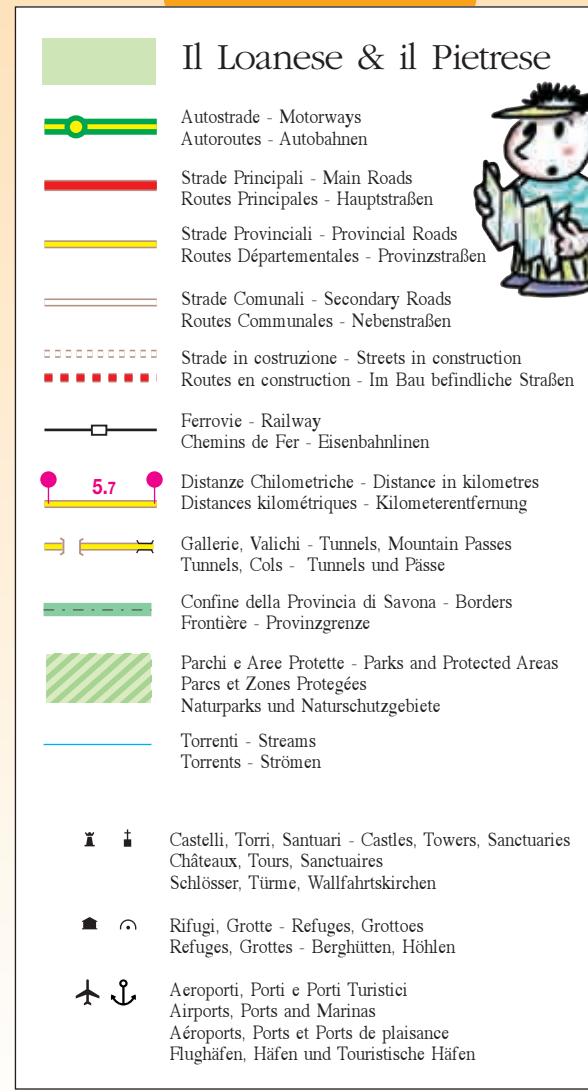
● A stony remnant of an ancient castle, the stone of an oil-press, the nets unfolded to gather the ripe olives. This is the Liguria of dales, where the sea is a large strip projected on the horizon, half-screened by the green olive-trees and holm oaks, with the scent of salt carried by the hot sirocco wind







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## around and about

### IL SAVONÉSE & IL VARAZZINO

#### *The caruggi of Varazze and Celle*



Two ancient Ligurian seaside villages with alleyways running parallel to the beach and tall, narrow houses with painted facades. The stone vaults of the caruggi and palm-lined promenade encapsulate all the colours, sounds and perfumes of Mediterranean Liguria.

#### *The ceramics of Albisola*

A world-famous, centuries-old art form, with traditional patterns and colours passed down the generations. Vases, ornaments, tiles, statuettes, plates, nativity figurines: Albisola has been a European capital of ceramics since the 1400s.



#### *Farinata from Savona and wines from Quiliano*

They come from the southern Mediterranean, but have many fans in Liguria: chickpeas, essential ingredients in farinata and panissa, a culinary delight in Liguria and Savona. A slice of *fainâ* and a glass of Granaccia or Buzzetto, ancient and noble country wines, and the holiday goes on.



#### *The rivers of the Beigua*

Cool waters, woods filled with foliage and birdsong, lakes where you can swim alongside trout in the summer sun, abandoned watermills.

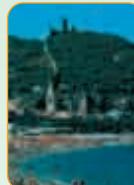
The semi-deserted valleys around

Mount Beigua are now protected by the Beigua Regional Nature Park, helping keep the natural environment intact.



### IL FINALESE

#### *The maritime republic of Noli*



An ancient borgo, surrounded by walls and watched over by high towers, proud of the independence which it won during the first crusade and maintained for the following 700 years. Porticos, centuries-old lanes and a beach where local fishermen gather every morning to sell last night's catch, fresh from the sea.

#### *Varigotti, Mediterranean borgo*

Low-built painted houses which line the beach among gardens and lemon trees: here the architecture is southern



Mediterranean in style, evoking the eternal geographical and cultural ties which unite the two shores of *Mare Nostrum*.

#### *The Altopiano delle Manie*

Untainted nature and real evidence of Roman history lie waiting to be discovered on this verdant upland plateau, carved out by deep valleys and caves. Sports lovers from all over Europe flock to its limestone rocks for free climbing and hang-gliding over Finale down towards the sea.



#### *Mushrooming in Val Bormida*

The genuine, traditional pleasures of Liguria's mountain cuisine, "poor" yet deliciously tasty, a plethora of porcini mushrooms, chestnuts, vegetable and game pies, made with ingredients which grow wild in the higher inland areas, flourishing in the beech and chestnut woods.



### ALESSIO & LE BAIE DEL SOLE

#### *Albenga's historic centre*

A free Commune, a diocese of note, a rich city; Medieval Albenga, heir to the Roman Albingaunum, has left behind a priceless artistic legacy. The cathedral of San Michele, the baptistery with its Byzantine mosaics, tiny Piazza dei Leoni and the towers built by local families make Albenga one of northern Italy's most important Medieval towns



#### *Seasonal delights from the Piana*

Not just olive oil and wine from the hillside terraces: from Roman times to the third millennium, the Piana di Albenga, Liguria's only lowland area, has been providing fruit, vegetables and seasonal delicacies for the tables of Ligurians and visitors alike.



#### *Alassio's "budello"*

The budello or caruggio is the narrow road which crosses the centre of Alassio, the bustling, thriving heart and thoroughfare of this elegant town, the grand dame of tourism along the Riviera di Ponente. The ancient road is hemmed in between the Riviera's finest beach and the Muretto, a wall decorated and signed by famous names from the spheres of art, showbusiness and sport from the 1950s onwards.



#### *Castelvecchio di Rocca Barbena*

A 13th century borgo surrounded by walls and low porticos, whose most famous daughter rests eternally in Lucca cathedral, immortalised in sculpture by Jacopo della Quercia. A castle dominates the steep hill around which this village of stone houses and layered terraces winds itself precariously. The sea is a mirage from here.



# L oano

## City of Princes

Loano, as well as Pietra, has an ancient, noble history, which led it from capital of a small principality to an outstanding seaside resort, thanks to the beauties that nature bestowed on it: the sea,

the beach, a mild climate, the earth's fertility.

A city of Roman origin, in the Middle Ages Loano was the see of Albenga bishops, was later handed to the Doria family in 1263 and remained under the rule of this influential family, almost

with no interruption, till 1737, when it was sold to the Savoias.

The Dorias were munificent and generous lords who embellished Loano with monuments and art works.

The Roman age left us the Pontasso, a stone





like the one of Charlemagne, it is just an askew stone.

After having ruled, condemned or acquitted, the mayor of Pietra was invited for lunch by the villagers: in the valley of the Giustenice river, olives and grapevines are still cultivated, and in the council hall some stone measures from 1606 for wine and oil are still preserved. On the other side of the valley, the San Michele borgo towers on a dizzy top, dominated

by the charming ruins of the Castle and of the church dating from the XIV century obviously dedicated to San Michele. In reality, hereabouts life was already present a long time before mayors and castles. Infact, on the Varé promontory, that separates the Val Maremola from the Val di Giustenice, ruins of Roman graves have been found.



**Saint Augustin used to say that he knew what is time, but was not able to explain it: the Bergallo family can certainly say they are able to measure it**

## Tic tac, cloc, cucù



The most curious curiosity of the Val Maremola is in Bardino Nuovo, a borgo of Tovo San Giacomo, where there is a museum, may be the only one in Italy, dedicated to tower clocks. Since 1860 the Bergallo family, has worked in monumental watchmaking and this museum is the curious evidence of this artistic passion: watches and machineries, of every age and style, built to tell time, decorated and colored to sweeten to people the unavoidable passing of time.

**WORTH VISITING:**  
*The Museum of the Tower Clock  
In Bardino Nuovo.*



bridge, now buried along the Roman street which runs to the west of the city, and a II century mosaic floor, today in the main hall of Palazzo Doria, the elegant city palace built in 1578, with balconies, loggias, a walled garden and a 1608 pentagonal tower which was erected against the pirates.



● Look at Loano with your nose upwards: the fine, multi-coloured façades and windows looking over its caruggi are little art masterpieces. They create a perfect match with the coloured cheerfulness of open beach umbrellas



Close to Palazzo Doria, we find the XVII century Palazzo del Comandante, with its beautifully ornated façade. Nor can we neglect another Doria building, the Castle, built in the XVII century, which today is a gorgeous XVIII century villa plunged in a park looking over the sea. All around it, Borgo Castello is the mediaeval walled heart of the city. In the linear borgo lying parallel to the coast and visible from the sea, the XVII century parish church of



S. Giovanni Battista has a twelve-side shape and is enriched with paintings by Genoese masters and a late XIX century iron dome, strengthened with an antiseismic structure. We are not less indebted to the Doria family for the two great XVII century convents: S. Agostino, in the very heart of the city, and the Monte Carmelo monastery on a panoramic hill, both of which are rich in art works. On Monte Carmelo, the Dorias built their tombs till 1793.





A remnant of Savoia rule over the city is the Clock Tower, erected in 1774 on the Pastorino Gate to celebrate Vittorio Amedeo III. We can meet the tower if, leaving the city centre, we walk to the sea.

But the most important date with history for Loano was the battle the French revolutionary army fought, and won, with the Austrian and Savoia armies on 23th

and 24th November 1795. It was the first battle in the long campaign which was to give Napoleon power and glory, and although the fight took place rather on the surrounding hills than in Loano itself, the inhabitants are proud to recollect this old, important episode of their history: after all, the name of the city is inscribed on the Arc de Triomphe, in Paris...

#### ...and fun

Today, Loano is one of the liveliest seaside resorts in the Riviera. Its long, sandy

beach is lined by the beautiful sea walk and shadowed by palm trees on which the sun shines in summer and in winter. The beach life offers many opportunities for fun and sport: swimming, surf, aquagym, baby club, not to mention the evening parties, the concerts, the discos, the barbecues in the open air. And to sea dogs, Loano holds out a modern, well-equipped tourist harbour.

Those who leave the sea behind themselves bearing the taste of salt on their skin can stroll

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## Discovering LOANO



around in the intricacy of carrugi north of the sea walk, in the historic center, or go shopping



### The Madonna on the shoulders

**On July the 2th, in honour of the Madonna del Rosario, the members of brotherhoods bring the Cross and the statue of Mary, covered with gold and enthroned, in procession. And the night before, a devoted wake of the Virgin's statue is organized.**

in the charming small shops, looking for the agricultural products which are still cultivated in the country around the city. There were many vegetable and fruit gardens in the plain of Nimbalto stream, just around old Loano. But still today, no matter if holiday houses have spread all about, the fertile earth of the plain brings forth tasteful vegetables and fruits.



### Monte Carmo or the sky over Loano

Let's forget cars, of which modern tourists sometimes make an improper use, just put on a good, solid pair of shoes, and, with a rucksack on our shoulders, climb up some green, windy mountains. Such as Monte Carmo, 1389 metres of rocks and sparse woods only one step far from the sky over Loano: a mountain which offers one of the most enchanting panoramas in Liguria.



Go, leave the cheerful bustling of the crowded beaches behind you and ascend to the sky, passing by the stony houses of Carpe up the Val Varatella provincial route, to the Giogo di Toirano (800 m); here, get off your cars and start walking up an easy path, a section of the Alta Via of Ligurian Alps, which, in no more than 2 hours, leads you to the great cross on the summit of Monte Carmo.



If you have bumped into a pure-aired day (winter and spring are better seasons than summer), you can take in a single look a great part of northern Italy, from Genoa to the Alpi Maritime and Monte Rosa, from the Piedmont plain to the Lombardy Alps and Adamello, the entire Ligurian sea with the long, grey outline of Corsica floating in the deep blue and the indented Côte d'Azur at the farthest occidental extremity.

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**Boissano:** scent of olive trees.

You only have to leave Loano and direct yourselves inland, to pass by the highway, and here is Boissano, a rural borgo with its scattered small groups of houses. The names of the hamlets, Pogli, Mogli, Gandolfi, Berruti, are those of the families that are native of this area. Almost all of them still live in their little domains. Many houses in Boissano do not have tiled roofs: the roof-terraces were used to collect rainwater. In the parish church, dedicated to Mary Magdalene, there is a wooden statue of Saint Mary attributed to Maragliano. The City Hall, also known as "Ca' di Gatti", rises imposingly at the centre of the village.



The sunny, arid top of Monte Carmo offers a wonderful point of view on the Riviera and the sea, beyond which, now and then, the gray outline of Corsica appears, wrapped in the mist, half-way between the Not-Found-Island and the Island-Which-Does Not Exist



# Borghetto S. Spirito

## Two thousand years of tourism

If Toirano caves were the first "Ligurian borgo" of the Riviera, we can say that the first tourist to build a holiday house around here was a Roman citizen, one P. Didius Callinicus, who

chose the cape of Borghetto as a shelter for his idle rests. We do not dispose of a great amount of details about him, but are informed that he probably had a villa whose remnants consist of a small altar, dedicated to the Matron

goddesses, now in the garden of the XIX century Castle Borelli, just on the cape, among the pine trees. There is no saying that Callinicus' choice was a shrewd one: a position slightly elevated, a few steps away from the sea.

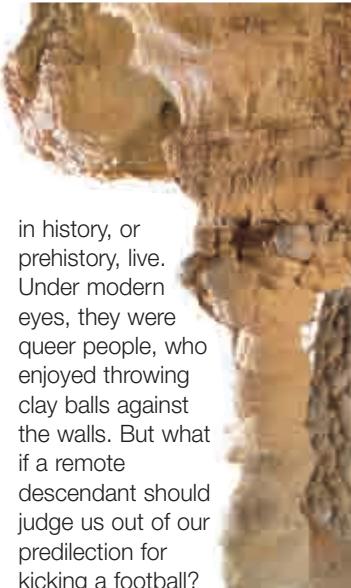


At his age, there may have not been seaside resorts, the mediaeval borgo, restaurants, but the climate was good, the view delightful... Borghetto was born after 1260 around the Santo Spirito Hospital as an Albenga bridgehead established in the Finale territory; its historic centre retains its original rectangular shape and some sections of

the walls as well as two towers and the south gate, which was rebuilt during the baroque age. Surrounding the modern city, olive tree groves and greenhouses full of fruits announce that the fertile plain of Albenga is near by.

### **TOIRANO: THE GREAT GRANDFATHERS' HOUSE**

We could even more properly define it the house of grandfathers' great grandfathers: in fact, here, in the caves which dig up the hills behind Loano, did the most ancient Ligurians



in history, or prehistory, live. Under modern eyes, they were queer people, who enjoyed throwing clay balls against the walls. But what if a remote descendant should judge us out of our predilection for kicking a football?



● *The entrance gate to the historic centre of Borghetto Santo spirito is not closed at nightfall to protect the inhabitants from the pirates' attacks, but welcomes the tourists who go sipping their drinks around the small square*



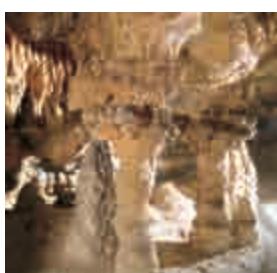
In these deep hollows, there are as many as 50 caves: 1280 metres of underground tunnels, dug by the action of water on limestone.

Toirano caves are a wonder of nature, one of the ten most beautiful caves in Italy. The most famous one is the Grotta della Básura: the básuras were the witches, who, as is well known, lived in underground holes connected to hell and defended by spellbinding-eyed ocellatae lizards (they are the biggest lizards in Europe, 60 centimetres long). Modern people do

not believe these devilish stories: the visit of the Básura takes one hour and a half, passing through the bears' cemetery, covered with bones of *Ursus spelaeus* (the bear of the caves); the gallery of prints, left by the nails of bears and the feet of men (Neanderthal? who, carrying torches and spears with them, hunted the wild beasts; and the puzzling room of the mysteries, where we find the clay balls thrown on the walls by our unknown ancestors for some social or religious reasons



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● The first apartment block, the first hotel in Liguria were the Toirano Caves, a dark mineral world, a hunting place and prayer sanctuary for our unknown forefathers

which we ignore.

An artificial passage links the Básura to santa

Lucia caves: the lower cave is a triumph of subterranean nature, with wonderful stalactites and stalagmites, whereas, in the upper cave, we can admire a sanctuary sculpted in the stone, with the front dropping sheer over the valley and a beautiful panorama. Behind the altar, a miraculous well: Lucy



is the patron saint of eye illnesses.

### A land of oil, wine and paper

From the XIII century on, this was the wealth of the old borgo of Toirano. Till before the modern era of tourism appeared. Toirano, like many other towns in the zone, has Roman origins. Later, in the early Middle Ages, it became a fortress on the frontier between Longobards and Byzantians; thereafter

Toirano was the see of Albenga bishops.

The structure of the borgo has not changed since the Middle Ages: Toracco is the oldest part of the town, with its high buildings and small lanes. Under the porticos, small shops open their windows; just a little farther, the entrance of the ancient parish church, close



### The route of oil



It is a tasteful and inebriating route, well marked and as winding as a mountain bike race. It runs along the valleys of the Riviera, silvered with olive trees and green with fat grapes of Pigato and Vermentino wines. There, you can see olive trees clutched to stone walls, which must be looked at as masterpieces of peasant engineering and vineyards made of few ranges of grape-vines and supported by wooden poles.

It is a way through Ligurian civilization and its poor but healthy and scented cooking.





to the XVII century church dedicated to S. Martin, and the XIV century tower, the sole to survive among

the towers of the city walls; there is also a beautiful XII century stone bridge that crosses the stream. Ah do not forget to have a look at the building of the rulers: the Bishop's Palace and the Palace of the Marquises Del Carretto, the rulers of Finale, who, before 1385,

disputed the possession of the land to Genoa. We spoke of oil, wine and paper: Toirano was an industrial centre of some importance. Today, it is up to the Ethnographical Museum, with its nine sections, to keep alive the recollection of these traditional activities and of men and women who practised them.

#### *WORTH VISITING:*

*Ethnographical Museum of the Val Varatella in Toirano*

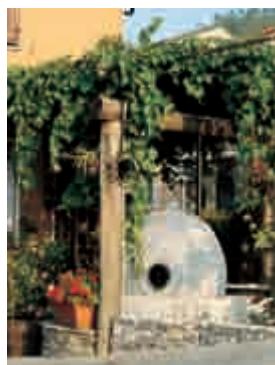


### The feast of gumbi

Between July and August, in Toirano, people celebrate the oil with one of the most sincere and attended popular festivals in Liguria: the festival of *gumbi*, a term which, in the local dialect, means olive-press. It is a festival for Toirano natives, of course, but tourists are welcome. To tell the truth, many a family from southern Italy comes to Toirano to take part in *gumbi*, to sign an ideal friendship pact between the different Italian oil lands. What do people do, during the festival? They gather in the cellars and oil mills to taste the farinata, the panizza, the apple sweets and to drink the delicious local wine.

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● In the caruggi of Toirano, the "gumbi", the olive presses, work to produce olive oil, which is a first-class, healthy ingredient of the Mediterranean diet



## THE STRONGHOLD OF BALESTRINO

In a sideways dale of the Varatella River, on a hill which dominates the Borgo of Balestrino, this castle was built, partly ruler's palace, partly stronghold. Its owners were the marquises Del Carretto,

who, till the XVIII century, governed Finale and other scattered towns. Like Loano, Balestrino never belonged to the republic of Genoa, although the small borough was encircled by the Genoese territory: it was a "concentric state".

The castle and the town of Balestrino were occupied and sacked in 1795 by the French revolutionary troops who, a year

later, won the battle of Loano; later, the castle was restored.

It is said that, out of an old privilege, those who grasped its gratings were freed from any criminal charge; this may be the origin of the Italian game "Liberi tutti" (similar to English hide and seek) that all Italian people played when they were children. Now the old borgo, which grew grape-like on the slopes of





### Walking on the mountains: the path of "Terre Alte"

**The path of Terre Alte leads the trekking fans from Toirano to the Colle del Melogno (1028 m) passing by the shelter Pian delle Bosse (841 m) in the upper Val Nimbalto and flying over the Val Maremola. On the summit of Melogno, the path gets to the Alta Via dei Monti Liguri, which is the "highway" of the mountains of Liguria and the state route connecting Finale to the upper Val Bormida. The path is divided into three stages: the tour Toirano-Balestrino-Toirano which will take three hours and a half to be completed; the stage Toirano-Pian delle Bosse, a four-hour-and-a-half walk; the tour Pian delle Bosse-Melogno, which can be achieved in six hours. You know, Liguria is really a land made of sea and mountains. If you are not yet tired and the mountain landscape is your passion, why do not walk on from Colle del Melogno along the Alta Via for three hours, in the deep silence of the woods of upper Val Bormida ridge?**



the castle hill, has been abandoned because of the risk of landslips, and a new borgo has been rebuilt a little farther. It is not possible to walk along the lanes of the old borgo, which is unsafe and fenced. It can only be looked at from the cobbled streets that cross it; and this vision is magical and painful at the same time. Do not miss it. Also because the times of desolation and neglect may soon be over for this ancient village: modern soil consolidation techniques may bring

back life to the old houses made of stone and wooden beams. A project financed by the Liguria Region, by the Municipality and by private donors, perhaps even by the European Union, will restore about 350 buildings. It will again be possible to live in this neighbourhood of small squares and alleys: a way of life that, despite all modern comforts, will closely resemble that of the original inhabitants of Balestrino at the time of the marquises Del Carretto.



● *The borgo of Balestrino, which was a human community, houses, churches, shops, will be brought to life again thanks to a project of consolidation of soil and buildings*





# V al Varatella

It can seem incredible that at such a short distance from an animated, hot, vivid, blue coast full of sounds, voices, music, there are sloping mountains, covered with woods, deprived of men's presence and manufactures, where the air is full of a deep silence which the wind or the rare flights of birds can hardly break. The primitive, wild enchantment of Ligurian

mountains is mainly founded on that: the indescribable contrast between the beaches, the narrow coastal plain, endlessly sparkling with life, and the highlands which seem to live out of time and history. But, in fact, they are so near that a few turns on the provincial route are sufficient to get to them. It is charming to look at the sea from above, from the paths cutting the

hinterland mountains, opening their way among pine trees and the songs of cicadas. Varatella valley is one of the most inaccessible and enchanting valleys in Liguria, narrow, sloping, panoramic as can be expected from a Ligurian valley, which, from the rocky limestone summits, falls onto the sea with an infinite series of meadows, ravines, pine trees and olive trees.

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Judging by the today's conditions, it is difficult to become aware of the importance the monastery had for six hundred years. Rather, a stronger impact on visitors is made by the silent environment, enriched with beautiful views on sunny days. Melancholy prevails upon the rest of the scene when the south-east wind blows and the coast below disappears in the fog.

The Benedictine monastery of San Pietro di Varatella, 890 m. over Toirano, was founded in the IX century by the Emperor Charles the Great, although the legend says that Saint Peter and his family sojourned here on their way from Palestine to Rome and built the first church in Liguria. The monks of San Pietro acquired a great power, had estates scattered between Albenga and the Langhe and improved life

conditions of the region by supporting its agricultural and industrial development, introducing the cultivation of olive trees and vineyards to Liguria and building flour and oil mills. The Abbey of San Pietro in Varatella is still a destination for hikers and pilgrims alike: each year a procession climbs up from Toirano on the first of May.

A monastery dedicated to San Pietro