



Voghera - Varzi



A GREEN PATH TOWARDS THE APENNINES

with contributions from

Credits

Voghera - Varzi Greenway:

a green path towards the Apennines • The guide to the route is a project promoted by Provincia di Pavia in partnership with Comunità Montana dell'Oltrepò Pavese and Legambiente Lombardia, with contributions from the Fondazione Cariplo and Regione Lombardia.

Editing, design, graphics, text, layout and printing: Bell&Tany, Voghera, bell-tany.it.

Finished printing in the month of June 2021.

©Province of Pavia 2021

©Bell&Tany 2021

All rights reserved.

Any reproduction, even partial, is strictly prohibited.

www.provincia.pv.it

www.visitpavia.com

www.greenwayvogheravarzi.it



This guide is printed respecting the environment on recycled paper.





Voghera - Varzi

Exploring
Walking
Cycling
Savouring

discovering the **OLTREPÒ PAVESE**

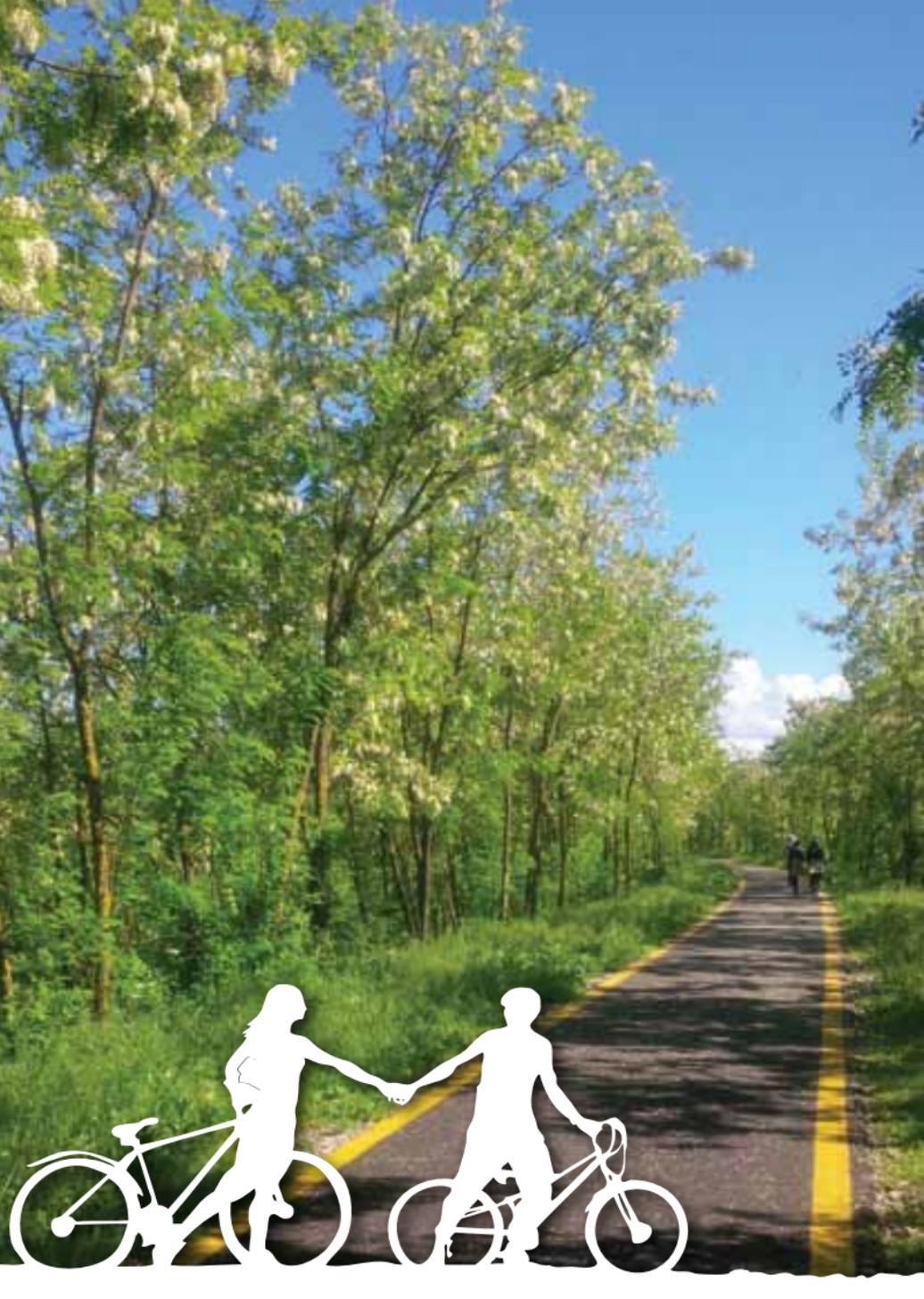


The Voghera - Varzi Greenway is ready. *It is a 33 kilometers long dream, begone when dreaming cost nothing. When thinking of recovering the old railway line was a romantic, good and appealing idea, yet so unlikely. Still we succeeded. With passion, persistence, and a lot of good will. If it is true, as Eleanor Roosevelt wrote, “that the future belongs to the ones who believe in the beauty of their dreams”, therefore today we are giving Oltrepò a little something to hope a different, better future. Discovering the territory, experiencing the natural beauty, sharing the pleasure of good food, letting the silence of unexpected and magical places conquer ourselves, being together with friend hoping the time will never pass. This is Oltrepò: it can surprise and amaze you, even when you think to be familiar with it. It is nice to think that the Greenway will accompany us on this journey, full of light and colours, in search of the most human and authentic dimension of the person.*

Vittorio Poma

President of Provincia di Pavia (Pavia Province)







INDEX



- The Voghera - Varzi path *pag. 6*
- The old Voghera - Varzi railway *pag. 10*
- Map of the path *pag. 12*
- Cycling *pag. 14*
- Walking *pag. 18*
- Exploring art and history *pag. 22*
- Exploring the environment and sport *pag. 32*
- Savouring *pag. 36*
- Travel notes *pag. 40*
- Index of photographs *pag. 45*



The

Voghera - Varzi path

*At the foot of the Apennines in Lombardy, where the plain starts to gather into hills covered by vineyards and woods, there used to be an old railway line. Today, completely restored, it has become the **Voghera - Varzi Greenway**, a path that winds through the valley of the river Staffora and lets you discover the rich charm and allure of this region.*

*The Greenways, literally “**green ways**”, are places of movement, communication and discovery; “**pleasant routes from an environmental point of view**” that can be thought of as a system of sequential territories, inter-connected, and which are protected, managed and developed in such a way as to realise **recreational, ecological and historical-cultural** benefits (Art. 1 of the Articles of the Italian Greenways Association).*

*The Voghera - Varzi Greenway is a **dedicated cycling/ pedestrian path**: passing through cultivated fields, vineyards, woods and enchanting villages, it is a sustainable journey in the*





*Oltrepò Pavese, a corner of Lombardy in the province of Pavia, on the **doorstep of Milan.***

Situated in an area known as the Four Provinces, the Oltrepò Pavese, historically, is a borderland: a place where unique traditions meet, a blend of elements from Piedmont, Lombardy, Liguria and Emilia.

*The Greenway begins in **Voghera**, in the Po Valley, south of the river Po (at **96 m a.s.l.**) and continues along a long, false plain to Salice Terme (at 180 m a.s.l.) 14 km later (with an elevation difference of 84 m and an average gradient of 0.6%).*



*In this well-known spa town in the municipality of Godiasco Salice Terme, the Apennine section begins, 19 km long, rising up to **416 m a.s.l. to Varzi**, passing through Godiasco (196 m a.s.l.), Ponte Nizza (267 m a.s.l.) and Bagnaria (333 m a.s.l.), with an elevation difference of 236 m and an average gradient of 1.24%.*

*The entire path is suited to every type of user, from families with small children - the overall elevation difference is just about **320 m over 33 km** (equal to an average gradient of 0.97%) - to sports people and expert hikers, because it connects to a dense network of gravel roads, paths and even more challenging routes.*

***Reaching the Greenway** is simplicity itself. There are numerous intersections and connections with the SS 461, which runs alongside it for large stretches, but, mostly, its starting point, Voghera, is perfectly integrated into the national transportation network.*

A few kilometres from Milan, Genoa and Turin, the Voghera - Varzi Greenway can be reached easily and conveniently:

***by train**, on the Milan-Genoa line, alighting at Voghera;*

***by car**, from the **A21** Turin-Piacenza motorway (Voghera exit) and from the **A7** Milan-Genoa motorway (Casei Gerola exit).*



The following are available in the immediate vicinity of the starting point:

the **railway station** (for rail-road travel);

the **multi-storey car park (autoporto)** (with 714 spaces);

bars, restaurants and shops in the centre of Voghera.



There are also several **car parks** along the route:

- in Voghera, on via Piacenza at the junction with strada Braide;
- in Codevilla on via IV novembre;
- in Retorbido, on the strada provinciale 1, by the entrance roundabout to the town centre;
- in Rivanazzano Terme, on piazza Cornaggia;
- in Salice Terme, on via Damiano Chiesa and on via Diviani close to the entrance roundabout to the town centre;
- in Godiasco, on via Montale and on via Piero Fontana; along the Strada Statale 461 near the junction for Cecima;
- in Ponte Nizza, near the old station;
- in Bagnaria, in the town centre on via IV novembre;
- in Varzi on via Cappuccini, on viale della Stazione and on piazza della Fiera.



The old

Voghera - Varzi railway

A little less than sixty years have passed since the last train completed its journey, having left from Varzi, entering the freight yard at the station in Voghera. It was **1966** and about thirty-five years had passed since the two centres of the Oltrepò had been connected by a **single-track railway**, which allowed people living in the high valleys to reach every corner of Italy by rail.

The **Voghera - Varzi railway was inaugurated in 1931**, on Christmas day, after approximately five years of work which began in February 1926. The plan was to replace a steam tram line which, in 1891, already connected Voghera with Rivanazzano and Salice Terme, extending its length in order to permit travel between the highest points of the Apennines and the Po Valley.

This was a fully-fledged, state-of-the-art railway line: the **gauge was standard**, the same adopted for the national lines operated by the State Railway Company (Ferrovie dello Stato), and the trains were exclusively electric; in fact, the entire 33 km of track were **electrified** with direct current at 3,000 volts. Power to the lines was delivered by an electric sub-station, located just outside Salice Terme, which is still visible from the Greenway now.

A little after the sub-station, the route forked and a branch line entered the army fuel depot, halfway between Salice and Godiasco, allowing it to be supplied by means of tankers. Trains ran at rather tame speeds: 70 km/h between Voghera and Godiasco and 60 km/h on the following





steep section. There were **many stations and stops**: after the terminus at Voghera there were stops at Cadè (Torrazza Coste), Codevilla, Retorbido, Rivanazzano, Salice Terme, Godiasco, San Desiderio, Pozzol Groppo (in the province of Alessandria), Cecima, Ponte Nizza, San Ponzo, Bagnaria, Ponte Crenna, Varzi. Some of the historic station buildings still remain; in some cases they have been transformed into private homes or commercial premises. In Ponte Nizza, though, precisely in the vicinity of the old station, a **museum dedicated to the former railway** has been established, bursting with images from the period and information on the rolling stock used.

In 1966, the Voghera - Varzi train service was replaced with a bus service and the tracks were removed; today, after more than fifty years, the route has been restored with contributions from numerous businesses and, once more, connects the two Oltrepadana centres in the name of sustainable mobility



discovering the
OLTREPÒ PAVESE

Exploring - Walking
Cycling - Savouring
map of the path

- Greenway Voghera – Varzi**
-  Cultural/historic attraction
 -  Environmental attraction
 -  Sport attraction
 -  Historic/traditional event
 -  Municipalities of CMOP network of paths



Legend

Map of the path

Cycling



The Voghera - Varzi Greenway is a **mixed, dedicated** cycling/ pedestrian path, perfect for any type of cyclist, thanks to the gentle gradient and the route's **safety**, being completely covered with asphalt and equipped with horizontal and vertical signs.

The route starts near the Voghera railway station. To discover the region by bicycle, you can either choose to arrive directly by train with your own bicycle or you can leave your car in the town's large, multi-storey car park, which also boasts a "velo station".

Those wishing to explore the region on the flat part of the plain can easily head north, taking quiet, internal roads by following the signs for **Cervesina, Pancarana and Bastida Pancarana**, to the bridge over the **Po**.

Continuing along, in a few kilometres, you reach Pavia and the **cycle path that runs along the Naviglio Pavese** reaching as far as Milan. Along the way, you can take a detour into the Vernavola Park to cycle the ring that makes up the **Battaglia Greenway** (Via Verde Della Battaglia). Furthermore, on the Po, you can access the **VenTo**, a cycle path of over 700 km, mostly along the banks of the river, which runs from Turin to Venice.

Lovers of more rugged roads can use the Greenway as a starting point for various routes. Upon reaching Godiasco, you can





choose to climb the **Ardivestra Valley**, on the side of the river Staffora, by following signs for **Montesegale** and **Fortunago** and, from here, drop once more along the Valle Coppa (following signs for Montebello della Battaglia) or climb to the Passo del Carmine (600 m a.s.l.). On the edge of Casa Cucchi, you can go up to the village of **Cecima** and, from here, head towards **Cà del Monte** (700 m a.s.l.) along a panoramic ring. From Ponte Nizza, right next to the station, you can follow the **Val di Nizza** road to Sant'Albano (600 m a.s.l.): from here, you can head towards Poggio Ferrato and the Castello di Oramala to then drop down into Varzi, or you can continue on towards Valverde, Zavattarello and the **Tidone Valley**, up to Romagnese and the **Penice Pass** (1149 m a.s.l.). At Varzi, you can set out to explore the highest part of the Oltrepò.

By keeping to the paved roads, you climb to the **Brallo Pass** (951 m a.s.l.), from which you descend into Val Trebbia, or you can head for the **Colletta Peak** (Cima Colletta) (1493

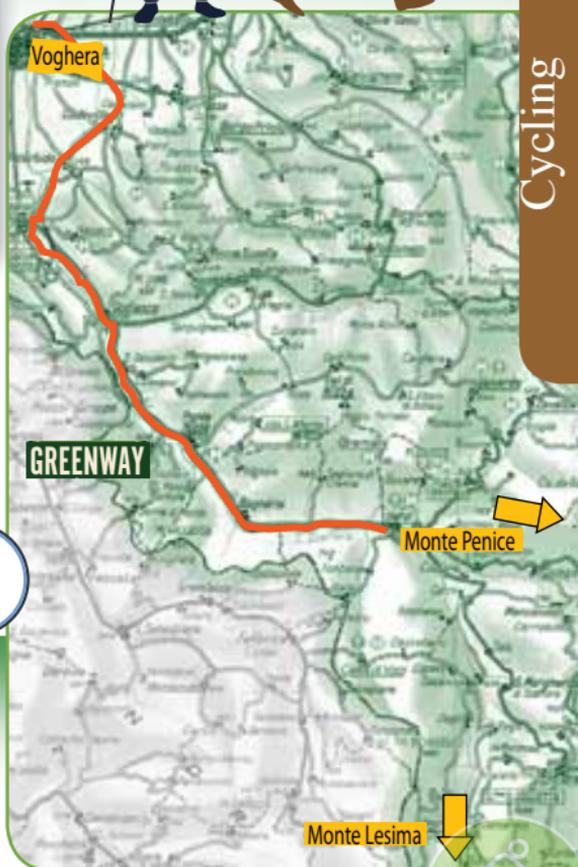
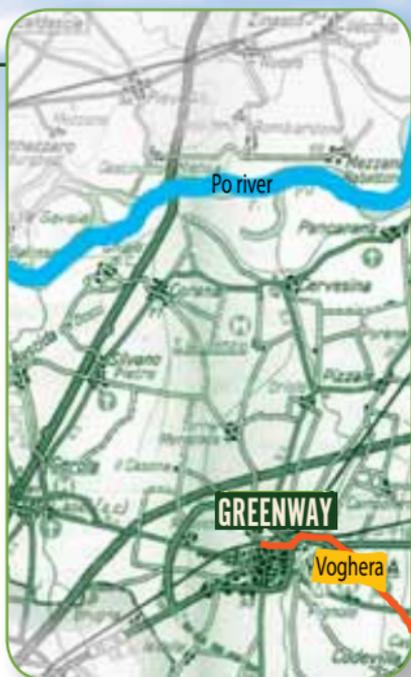


*m a.s.l.) continuing alongside it up to **Pian del Poggio** (1330 m a.s.l.), to then return to Varzi through the many delightful hamlets of Santa Margherita di Staffora, just to give you one example. Also challenging and panoramic is the climb from Varzi to **Pietragavina** (752 m a.s.l.), or, through the woods, the road that leads to **Castellaro** (756 m a.s.l.).*

*For those who prefer **mountain bikes** and dirt roads, still on the hills, there are many “strade bianche” (gravel roads) between Torrazza Coste, Codevilla and Retorbido that cross the region of the **Prima Collina Ecomuseum**. In the middle and upper Staffora Valley, on the other hand, you can follow various **paths**, all signposted, which wind their way between **Monte Boglelio** (1492 m a.s.l.), **Monte Chiappo** (1699 m a.s.l.), **Monte Lesima** (1724 m a.s.l.) with Le Torraie Nature Reserve and **Monte Alpe** (1253 m a.s.l.) with the Reserve of the same name. Enthusiasts of **Downhill Mountain Biking** can enjoy the Bike Park at Pian del Poggio, with a track that is also used for the world championships.*

*In the Oltrepò Pavese region, between Voghera and Varzi, you can also find many **services dedicated to bicycles**: scan the QR-code for an updated list of them.*





Cycling



Walking



The Voghera - Varzi Greenway is perfect for anyone looking for a relaxing, healthy walk in nature, with the option of walking exclusively on the plain or in the hills, thanks to gentle, not too demanding slopes.

*Along the first stretch, just outside Voghera, you can take a detour along the **pleasant gravel tracks between the fields**, such as Strada Cà Bianca and Strà ad l'om mort (literally the "dead man's road", which intersects the old Statale dei Giovi before the junction for Torrazza Coste). From Codevilla, you can climb the **Mondondone hill**, through gorgeous vineyards, whilst at Retorbido it's worth going through the valley of the **river Rile**, which is overlooked by the first - and for now, the only - **Big Bench** of the Oltrepò Pavese. At Rivanazzano Terme you can leave the Greenway to visit the charming little village of **Nazzano** and then head towards **Buscofà** (both boasting incredible panoramic views over the Po Valley). Meanwhile, from Salice Terme, with a short walk at the foot of the Rocca di Montalfeo, you climb to **Alta Collina**, passing through beautiful lavender fields, especially so when in bloom, in the months of June and July.*



*In the well-known spa town, where the steepest section of the Greenway starts, the land of the Mountain Community of the Oltrepò Pavese (Comunità Montana dell'Oltrepò Pavese) begins. Here, tens of kilometres of trails spread out, all well-signposted and mapped, which let you choose from excursions of varying degrees of difficulty (yet never excessive) in the pristine countryside of the Apennines. To learn more and to see all the routes available in the **Oltrepadana network of paths**, we recommend visiting the official website, **sentierioltrepopavese.it**, which contains maps, GPS trails, average travel times and lots of tips and advice. Alternatively, download the app, “I sentieri dell'Oltrepo Pavese”.*

*The ascent to the **summit of Monte Lesima** is going to be on the bucket list of the fittest and best trained: at 1724 m it is the highest peak in the province of Pavia and one of the highest*



in the Ligurian Apennine range.

Among the most fascinating paths, also due to their intrinsic historic value, which can be taken by starting from the Greenway, two in particular are worth mentioning. The first is the **Via del sale lombarda** (the Lombardy Salt Road), the medieval route travelled by caravans of merchants who took salt from Genoa to Pavia and Milan and, on the way back, brought products from the plain and hills to sell in the markets of Genoa. Following this path today, which, in the mountain section starting from Varzi (descending towards Voghera, coinciding substantially with the Greenway itself), means climbing the Apennine ridges that intersect four regions: Lombardy, Liguria, Piedmont and Emilia Romagna.

The second path is the ancient **Cammino di San Colombano**





(The Columban Way), which, from Switzerland, reaches as far as Bobbio. In this case, still from Varzi, you can climb the paths that lead to the nature area of Monte Alpe, in the municipality of Menconico, and, from here, you can push on to Romagnese, where you rejoin the path that passes Monte Penice. You then come down to the ancient Columban Abbey of Bobbio.

*For those who love walking and following established, integrated itineraries, the province's central position, with respect to some of the major **European trails**, is definitely worthy of note. Just a few kilometres from the Greenway, for example, are such trails as the Via Francigena and the Via delle Gallie, both just to the north of the Po.*



Exploring

art and history



Taking the Voghera - Varzi Greenway, if only for a short stretch, lets you explore a region steeped in rich, fascinating history and art, which tell the tales of the Staffora Valley, squeezed between different worlds and cultures. Indeed, the entire area of the Oltrepò Pavese is wedged between four regions, four provinces that, over the centuries, suffered different fates, making this area a sort of borderland, open to influences that have contributed to its particular culture.

*The exploration begins on the plain, at **Voghera**, the Greenway's starting point and the Oltrepò's largest urban centre, with just under 40,000 inhabitants. In Roman times, according to the most reliable sources, Voghera was Iria, a thriving municipium which was overwhelmed by the barbarian invasions; the area, though, near the bridge on the Staffora of the important via Postumia, was not abandoned and a village flourished, Vicus Iriae, which gradually expanded over the Middle Ages and its name changed into Viqueria and then, Voqueria. The **Duomo**, the San Lorenzo Collegiate Church, owes its current structure to the rebuilding of the pre-existing parish church built in the XVII century and*



completed with the façade designed in 1881 by Maciachini. The interior, recently restored, boasts a complex cycle of frescoes on the dome and vaults, a work mostly completed by the painters, Gambarini and Morgari. Previously, however, the fresco of the **Madonna del Soccorso**, painted by the fourteenth century, Andrino di Edesia, was torn from the first temple and relocated to the new church. The main altar, in polychrome marble, houses the urn that preserves the body of San Bovo, a Provençal knight who died here, on the way to Rome, in the X century. At the centre of the main nave, above the presbytery, is a tabernacle that preserves the relic of the Sacra Spina (Holy Thorn), which, according to legend, was a gift from Queen Teodolinda and placed in a precious reliquary donated by Gian Galeazzo Visconti. Visconti was also the main architect, with his father, Galeazzo II, of the **Castello Visconteo**, which probably started as early as the IX or the X century, but was completely changed by the Viscontis. Inside, you can admire fragments of frescoes by Bartolomeo Suardi, known as





Bramantino, as well as the reconstruction of the first permanent **Camera Obscura** in Italy, an optical device and forerunner to the camera perfected by **Leonardo da Vinci**.

The city also hosts the former **Caserma di Cavalleria** (cavalry barracks) of Vittorio Emanuele II. The restored parts are home to the **Beccari Historical Museum** (that mainly preserves military uniforms, insignia, medals and military memorabilia) and the **Orlandi Museum of Natural Sciences**. Walking through the city, there are numerous historical buildings, overlooking the streets, that are well worth a visit. First of all, there is Casa Gallini: here, the engineer, **Carlo Gallini**, amateur painter and founder of the foundation and agricultural educational institute bearing his name, collected valuable works of art, including a sleeping Endymion, attributed to Guercino and a collection of Flemish landscapes. At the **Palazzo Gounela**, home to the town hall, you can admire decorations by the Milanese, Angelo Moia, and the great vault painted by Paolo Emilio Morgari which captures the elevation of Voghera to a city in 1771. There are also several wonderful churches worth seeing. In **San Rocco**, a relic of the saint's arm is still preserved: what is left of the important thaumaturgist or miracle worker from Montpellier, who died in Voghera, before the body was stolen and taken to Venice, where a grandiose Baroque church was built. Near the church is the convent of **Santa Maria delle Grazie**, which hosted a very



young Antonio Ghislieri (the future Pope Pius V) for his studies, where you can admire a fascinating fifteenth century fresco. The Baroque **San Giuseppe** preserves valuable works by the eighteenth century painter, Paolo Borroni, whilst **Santa Maria del Carmine** has managed to keep, practically unaltered, its late Renaissance appearance. In the oratory of **San Giovanni** is an interesting Nativity of Saint John the Baptist by Carlo Francesco Nuvolone and the oldest preserved pipe organ in the province, a



Cornetti from 1724, restored by Mascioni in recent years. Leaving Voghera and exploring the area of the surrounding plain, at **Pizzale** you come across the village of Porana with the Grattoni villa, the engineer behind the Frejus railway tunnel, now known as Meroni. In nearby **Casei Gerola** you can admire the Saint John the Baptist Collegiate Church, built in the XIV century and a rare example of Lombardy Gothic architecture in the Oltrepò Pavese. In **Cervesina** stands the Castello di San Gaudenzio, commissioned by the Beccaria family.





Continuing along the Greenway, you reach **Codevilla**, a town of just under a thousand inhabitants. Here, the **Rossi Collection**, recently refurbished, is definitely worth a visit. It houses a collection of contemporary art by artists such as Guttuso, Rotella and Mucchi, donated to the municipality by Maria Maddalena Rossi. Also worth seeing is the San Bartolomeo church at Mondondone, the former oratory of the castle (long since disappeared) dating back to the X century.

In **Retorbido** you will find the seventeenth century church of the *Natività della Beata Vergine Maria* (Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary), but the visit to the municipality is worth a visit, especially for the various monuments dedicated to **Bertoldo**, the astute farmer known for his adventures with the Lombard king, Alboino, who, according to legend, was born here.

Rivanazzano Terme welcomes visitors with its pentagonal medieval tower, dating to the XIV century, which stands in the centre of the main piazza, and with the church of San Germano, a XVII century reconstruction of the older parish church. Sitting on the hills that overlook the opening to the Staffora Valley is the village of **Nazzano**: the cobbled streets wind between the ancient church, the Malaspina Castle from the XI century and the charming Villa Sanpietro, surrounded by story-book, terraced, Italian gardens.

After **Salice Terme**, where the villas and main buildings of the



*Thermal Baths, in their Art Nouveau style, transport you to the 1900s, you can take a detour for an excursion on foot to the **Rocca di Montalfeo**, a medieval Malaspinian fortification, recently restored. A little further on, **Godiasco** retains its appearance of a medieval town with two Malaspina palaces and the remains of the XIII century wall, right next to the Greenway. **Malaspina** is the name that most characterises the history of this part of the Oltrepò: the marquises, heirs of the ancient Lombard Obertenghi family, created a vast Apennine domain which spanned from the Staffora Valley to the sea and Tuscany. Indeed, the particular nature of this land's history is largely due to them since the Malaspinian fiefs were "separate fiefs", that is, directly subject to imperial authority whilst, in fact, they were part of the Principality of Pavia, thus guaranteeing a certain independence from the events in Lombardy. On the hydrographic right of the Staffora Valley, entering Godiasco is the Ardivestra, a small river around which a green valley opens up with the municipalities of **Rocca Susella** and **Montesegale**. The ancient **parish church of San Zaccaria** is unquestionably worth visiting. Dating to the XII century, in Romanesque style, it features the recognisable façade in alternating horizontal bands in terracotta and sandstone. A little further on, **Rocca de' Ghislanzoni**, a castle from the XI century, transformed into a country residence during the nineteenth century, is surmounted by a slim tower with Ghibelline battlements. In the centre of the*



valley stands the imposing **Montesegale Castle**, commissioned by the Gambarana counts, which today often hosts events linked with contemporary art.

Rejoining the path on the Greenway, after Godiasco you can walk to the fascinating medieval village of **Cecima**, hugging the church of San Martino, built in the XV century and featuring a salient



sandstone façade and terracotta decorations.

Once in Ponte Nizza, in

addition to the already-mentioned museum to the former railway, you can go up the valley of the same name and discover some of the places in the Oltrepò with the richest history and charm, both linked to events involving the Malaspina family. The first is the **Eremo di Sant'Alberto di Butrio** (the Hermitage of Saint Alberto of Butrio). At 687 m a.s.l., Alberto, who may also have been a Malaspina, started construction in 1030, having selected these places in which to live the life of a hermit; he miraculously healed the son of the Marquis of Casalasco and thus gained the support of the powerful family and the creation of the first church. The hermitage became very well-known and hosted, amongst



others, Dante and the emperor, Federico Barbarossa; here, in the fourteenth century, as a fugitive, King Edward II of England almost certainly died and the first sarcophagus can still be seen in the cloister. The church is actually formed by three ancient oratories and a chapel, mostly richly decorated with frescoes from 1484 which also portray events in the saint's life, in a rather particular style, with Gothic and other, more naïve elements, to suggest the existence of an independent Oltrepadana art school. In the municipality of **Val di Nizza**, sitting at 758 m a.s.l., is **Oramala Castle**. Ancestral home of the Malaspina, it was, for centuries, an important fortress and refined residence, which hosted artists, Provençal troubadours and poets including Dante. The building dates to the XI century, although the current building is largely due to the modifications made in the fifteenth century, including the iconic half-moon tower, with walls almost two and a half metres thick.

Returning to the Staffora Valley, leaving Ponte Nizza behind, you reach the hamlet of **San Ponso**: you can visit the Romanesque church, rebuilt in the XV century on an even older site and, just outside the residential area, is another hermitage - a cave - where the saint lived.

You then arrive in **Bagnaria**, another delightful medieval village, with its characteristic narrow streets that twist and turn around the ancient church of San Bartolomeo (which features a fine, coffered ceiling) and the ruins of Fieschi-Doria Castle, from the X century. And, finally, we reach the terminus, Varzi. Before entering the town, you pass the **church of the Cappuccini**, dedicated to San Germano.





It was built in the XII century, in a Romanesque style with the first transitional elements to the Gothic style, on the ruins of an even older parish church from the V century and was the main place of worship in the valley until it was replaced by the current parish church at the end of the sixteenth century.

*Varzi is the main centre in the upper Staffora Valley and enchants visitors thanks to its inner part which still fully reflects its original medieval layout, largely closed within two turreted gates, **Porta Soprana** and **Porta Sottana**, to which is also connected the eighteenth century complex (today mainly in the Art Nouveau style) of **Villa Leveratto-Mangini**. In the centre, you can admire two exquisite oratories: one at the Santissima Trinità and Santi Rocco e Sebastiano, known as the **church of the Reds**, built in the seventeenth century, and one at the Compagnia dei Battuti and the Arciconfraternita del Gonfalone di Roma, known as the **church of the Whites**, also built in the seventeenth century, featuring a curious, four-lobed central plan in a late Renaissance character. Not far away stands the current **church of San Germano**, built between the end of the XVI century and the start of the XVII century, starting from the oldest oratory of San Salvatore: inside, it has frescoes by Gambini and fine works of eighteenth century cabinet-making. In the highest part, you will find the grand **Malaspina Castle**, flanked by the **Tower of the Streghe**, both dating to the XIII century; the interesting name of the tower is linked to a trial for witchcraft (in Italian, “streghe” means witches) which, in 1460, involved 25 people, both women and men.*

Leaving the capital, heading towards the watershed with the



Tidone Valley, you can admire **Pietragavina Castle**, from the XII century, whilst in the opposite direction, towards the Curone Valley, in the hamlet of Cella, you will find the **Tempio della Fraternità dei Popoli** (the Temple of the Fraternity of Peoples), an interesting and evoking sanctuary built in the middle of the twentieth century by Don Adamo Accosa, with the help of the future Pope, John XXIII, using military artefacts from World War II, including parts of weapons.

Having finished the Greenway at Varzi, to complete the exploration of the art and history of the Staffora Valley, you can go back to discover **Menconico**, with the sixteenth century church of San Giorgio, or go to **Santa Margherita di Staffora**, a municipality which, in a small hamlet, features the ancient **Fornace romana di Massinigo** (Roman kiln at Massinigo), a well-preserved example of a kiln from the early years of the I century AD. In the many small hamlets that nestle in the woods are even more churches and country oratories, some very old indeed. In the municipality of **Brallo di Pregola**, from which you descend into the Trebbia Valley, it is well worth visiting the church of Sant'Agata, in Pregola, not far from the place where the Malaspinian castle - razed to the ground in 1571 - once stood, and the **parish church of Someglio**, clinging to the side of Monte Lesima. This church, dedicated to the Saints Gervasio and Protasio, is considered by many to be the oldest one in the entire area and, although historic documents are not clear, it would appear to date to the XII century. It is a building made entirely in local stone, with a single nave, flanked by the tall bell tower that, perhaps, was once used as a look-out by the Malaspinian Marquises given its strategic position.



Exploring



the environment and sport

The Voghera - Varzi Greenway also connects natural oases and places of great charm, where you can discover the sky or indulge in a sport.

Nature

*At the gates of Voghera, there are three areas that deserve to be explored by those who want to discover the typical environment of the Oltrepadana plain. Close to Casei Gerola, you can find the **Parco delle Fologhe** which, like the nearby **Riserva Naturale “degli Stagni”** at Lungavilla, consists of clay pits which have been filled with water due to the rising of the fault line, becoming important nesting areas for several species of bird. In both places, you can take guided tours and activity trails are available for children. Not far from where the Staffora flows into the river Po, at Pancarana, 84 abandoned hectares have been restored and reforested, giving life to the **Arcadia Wood**, a multi-functional wood with numerous places to sit and rest.*

*At the opposite end of the cycling/pedestrian path, you will find two huge areas. The first is the **Riserva Naturale di Monte Alpe**, between the municipalities of Menconico and Romagnese. 320 hectares, between 762 m a.s.l. and 1254 m a.s.l. close to Monte Penice, with large chestnut and beech woods, meadows and conifers such as black pine, Scots pine and larch. It will not be hard to see, amongst other species, fallow deer, squirrels, edible dormice, sparrow hawks, buzzards, tawny owls, greater spotted woodpeckers, just to mention a small portion of the rich fauna in this oasis in the Apennines.*

Higher up, in the municipality of Brallo di Pregola, there are 588 hectares lying between 500 m a.s.l. and 1724 m a.s.l., the top of Monte Lesima, which have recently been placed under protection



with the establishment of the **Riserva Naturale Le Torraie**. Here, where four regions meet, you can see beech, hornbeam, huge meadows and several varieties of orchid. Among the fauna there are golden eagles and short-toed eagles, wolves and deer, as well as over 80 different species of moth and butterfly. Not too far away, in Romagna, the **Giardino Alpino di Pietracorva** (Alpine Garden of Pietracorva) is an oasis at an altitude of 1000 m above sea level that is home to hundreds of different alpine botanical species, which can be visited in summer months.





Sport

Following the Greenway route, especially between Voghera and Salice Terme, you will find a wide range of facilities dedicated to sport (from tennis to water sports), as well as a nine-hole **golf course** in the municipality of Rivanazzano Terme. Lovers of **horse riding** have a huge choice before them, with riding stables, horseback riding and also, large, competitive facilities at Voghera.

In the Ardivestra Valley, at Fornace di Montesegele, you can try your hand at **archery** with the Associazione Arcieri Ardivestra (Ardivestra Archers' Association), also used by the Olympic champion, Mauro Nespoli. In the area close to Cà del Monte, between Cecima and Bagnaria, you will see the three peaks of the **Monte Vallassa**, located at around 700 m a.s.l., ideal for enthusiasts of **rock climbing and bouldering** - thanks to the various rock walls - as well as **paragliding**.

At the top of the valley, there are ski lifts for **winter sports** on Monte Chiappo, where the pistes, in summer months, turn into **Downhill Mountain Biking** trails.





Sky

A unique feature of this region, crossed by the Voghera - Varzi Greenway, is the particular bond with the stars and the sky which, especially in the more isolated areas, far from major centres, appears extraordinarily clear.

In **Cà del Monte**, in the municipality of Cecima, the Mountain Community of the Oltrepò Pavese (Comunità Montana dell'Oltrepò Pavese) has built an important **Planetarium and Astronomical Observatory**, which offers didactic activities, workshops for adults and children, courses and initiatives to observe the night and day sky.

In the hamlet of Colleri, in Brallo di Pregola, there is the **AstroBrallo**, an astronomical park with two fixed domes and various instrumentation, including meteorological instruments, where events take place and you can take observations.



Savouring



*The Oltrepò Pavese, the land that the Voghera - Varzi Greenway crosses, as well as the whole province of Pavia, is a treasure trove of unique flavours and aromas. A land still firmly agricultural, in which wine and food have a huge significance, including from a cultural, social and economic perspective. It is precisely in the **traditions around food and wine** that, together with some elements of folklore, music and dance, the nature of the border with, and the contact of, the four provinces finds the greatest expression, with a huge variety of food and drink products. The most important of these is, without question, **wine**. In the Oltrepò, the cultivation of vines has been documented, historically, for more than 2000 years and, not by chance, this is the leading wine-making area in Lombardy in terms of the registered surface area of vineyards classified as “denominazioni di origine protetta” (Protected Designation of Origin).*

*Wine means, above all, Croatia as well as native vines such as Vespolina and Uva Rara which, with Barbera, are the basis for the most historic production: **Bonarda**, Ferma or Mossa, **Buttafuoco** and **Sangue di Giuda**. The most widely-grown vine, though, is international: Pinot noir. The surface area covered by this divine, whimsical variety is second only to that of Burgundy in France. Here, it is mainly used as a sparkling base, more rarely as a red*



wine. The *Oltrepò Pavese*, right in Codevilla, is the historic home in Italy of the **Metodo Classico** (Classic Method): here, in the middle of the nineteenth century, the engineer, Mazza, bottled what was then called *Champagne dell'Oltrepò Pavese*.

The Staffora Valley, from a wine-making perspective, is rather special, because it is beginning to present characteristics similar to the neighbouring Tortonesi Hills, especially on the eastern side. Since this land rapidly forms hills and rises steeply, the cultivation of wine is done exclusively on the early, lower slopes. The *Oltrepò*, and in particular the Staffora Valley, is also known for its cured meats, particularly the **DOP Salami of Varzi**. This salami, which bears the name of the medieval town, can only be produced in 15 municipalities and is made with noble cuts of pork, garlic, spices and red wine: it matures slowly, in well-aerated cellars, enjoying the fresh Apennine breezes and winds which come off the Ligurian Sea, taking on a unique character, perfect to enjoy with **Micca** (or even *Tresa*), the typical, *Oltrepadana* bread with a golden crust and a soft, white crumb.

Other traditional forms of cured meat are the *coppa*, such as *Mundiöla De.Co. di Montesegele*





(also passed in wine), rolled pancetta, salàm da còta and cotechino.

And there is no shortage of cheeses, mainly cow and goat milk cheeses, among which are three unique types: **Pizzocorno**, which takes its name from the hamlet of Ponte Nizza, in a quadrangular shape, made with raw cow's milk, **Nisso di Menconico**, soft and creamy with a spicy flavour, **Molana del Brallo**, a cow's milk cheese aged for a short time.

There are also many typical crops. In the Voghera area, you can find **Golden Onions**, with a very strong flavour and, above all, **Voghera Peppers**, a particular, indigenous, pale green-yellow variety, noted for its fragrance and the body of its pulp, ideal for cooking the classic risotto alla vogherese. Near Lungavilla, the **Berrettina Squash** is grown, sweet and instantly recognisable from its shape. In the plain, the cultivation of cereals is very widespread, as are the subsequent milling operations. Along the entire intermediate stretch of the Staffora Valley and in Val di Nizza, the **Pomella Genovese** apple is grown, a small specimen that takes its name from the market for which it was destined. The symbolic fruit of **Bagnaria** is the **cherry**, sweet and aromatic, and is celebrated with an important festival in its name. Finally, in the mountain lands of Brallo di Pregola, grows the **Brallo Potato**.

Various baked items can be bought and enjoyed along the Greenway. In addition to the already-mentioned Micca, there is the **Pizzetta di Salice Terme De.Co.**, perfect for a snack, the **Baci di Godiasco De.Co.**, with almonds and chocolate, the characteristic **Torte di Mandorle of Montesegale and of Varzi**. Among the deserts, not to be missed are the **Zuppa vogherese**,

with cream, coffee and pastry cream between layers of sponge cake, and the **Stracchino di Voghera**, semi-freddo that contrasts the bitterness of the cacao with the sweetness of zabaglione.

The Oltrepadana gastronomy, in general, offers very rich dishes that reflect the rural traditions of places that have always been linked to life working the land. The **malfatti**, in Rivanazzano Terme and Fortunago, for example, are a sort of elongated dumpling made just with herbs (originally wild herbs but now chard and spinach), ricotta, eggs and Parmesan, boiled and seasoned with butter and sage, meat sauce or porcini mushroom sauce, which are abundant in the upper valley. Also worth trying are the traditional **Agnolotti di Voghera**, filled with stew and seasoned with the same or with mushrooms, as well as risotto with peppers. Among the second courses, mixed boiled meat is not to be missed, very similar to that found in nearby Piedmont, combined with various sauces and, in particular, with the **Mostarda di Voghera De.Co.**, candied mustard fruit whose origins date back to the Middle Ages, excellent with soft cheese.



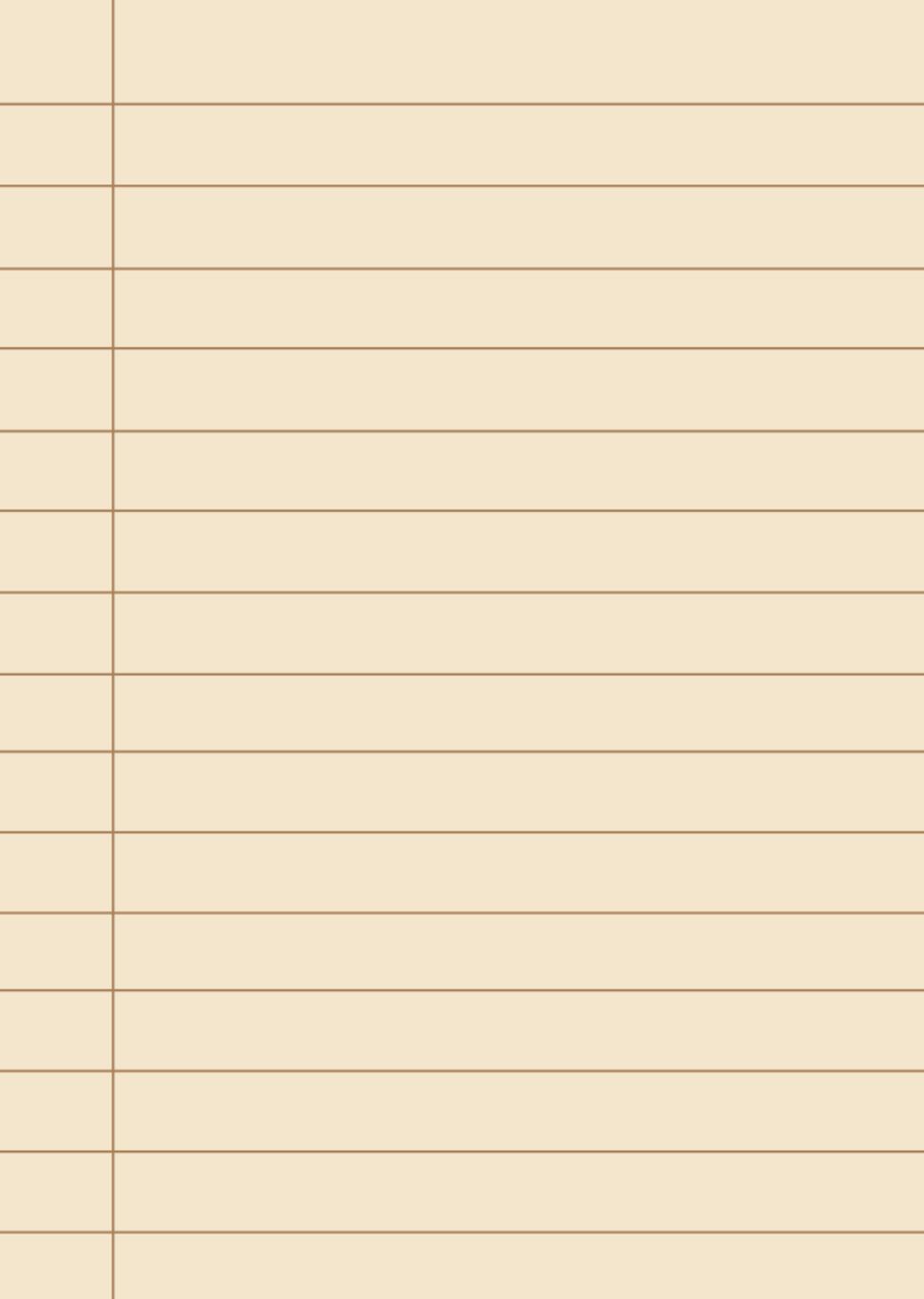


Travel

notes

A series of horizontal lines on a light beige background, providing a space for writing notes.









Index of photographs



- p. 2 • Nazzano panorama (Rivanazzano Terme) ©Bell&Tany.
Small: the stretch of the Greenway to Retorbido ©Bell&Tany.
- p. 5 • Starting point of the dedicated track to Voghera ©Bell&Tany.
- p. 11 • Historic image of the station at Varzi ©WikimediaCommons.
- pp. 12-13 • From left: a stretch of the Greenway ©UmbertoBarcella;
Bagnaria panorama ©ComuneBagnaria; oratory of Sant'Antonio in Fortunago ©GianniSantolin;
San Pozzo cave (Ponte Nizza) ©UmbertoBarcella; Oramala castle (Val di Nizza) ©UmbertoBarcella.
- p. 14 • Gambarana Castle in Montesegele ©Bell&Tany.
- p. 15 • Panorama over the Ardivestra Valley ©FabioDealberti.
- p. 16 • From left: path in the Riserva del Monte Alpe (Menconico) ©Bell&Tany;
panorama of Pian del Poggio (Santa Margherita Staffora) ©WikimediaCommons.
- p. 18 • The Greenway in a part of the plain ©Bell&Tany.
- p. 19 • Path to the top of Monte Lesima ©FabioDealberti.
- pp. 20-21 • Lavender field in Godiasco (Godiasco Salice Terme) ©GianniSantolin.
Small, from left: runner on a stretch of the Greenway ©Bell&Tany;
banks of the river Staffora ©Bell&Tany.
- p. 22 • Façade and interior of the Duomo in Voghera ©Bell&Tany.
- p. 23 • Viscontis' castle in Voghera ©UmbertoBarcella.
- p. 24 • From left: inside Casa Gallini in Voghera ©Bell&Tany;
façade of the church of Santa Maria del Carmine in Voghera ©Bell&Tany.
- p. 25 • Church of San Crispino in Porana (Pizzale) ©UmbertoBarcella.
- p. 26 • Panorama from Mondondone (Codevilla) ©Visitpavia.
- p. 27 • Parish church of San Zaccaria in Rocca Susella ©FabioDealberti.
- p. 28 • Hermitage of Sant'Alberto di Butrio: cloister and fresco detail ©UmbertoBarcella.
- p. 29 • From left: tower of the Oramala Castle (Val di Nizza) ©UmbertoBarcella;
San Pozzo cave (Ponte Nizza) ©UmbertoBarcella.
- p. 30 • Panorama of Varzi ©UmbertoBarcella.
- p. 31 • From left: Tempio della Fraternità in Cella (Varzi) ©UmbertoBarcella;
church of Sant'Agata in Pregola (Brallo di Pregola) ©UmbertoBarcella.
- p. 33 • Parco delle Fologhe in Casei Gerola ©Visitpavia.
Small: path in the Riserva del Monte Alpe (Menconico) ©Visitpavia.
- p. 34 • Panorama of Monte Vallassa (Bagnaria) ©Bell&Tany.
- p. 35 • Guardamonte Observatory (Cecima) ©G. Giacometti.
- p. 36 • From left: vineyards in Codevilla ©UmbertoBarcella; Oltrepò Pavese wine ©Bell&Tany.
- p. 37 • From left: DOP Salami of Varzi ©UmbertoBarcella; Oltrepò Pavese Micca ©UmbertoBarcella;
Oltrepò Pavese coppa ©Bell&Tany.
- p. 38 • From left: form of Pizzocorno ©UmbertoBarcella;
Bagnaria cherries with Voghera pepper and Pomelle Genovese apples ©Bell&Tany.
- p. 39 • From top: Almond tart from Varzi ©Bell&Tany; Malfatti from Rivanazzano Terme ©Bell&Tany;
Agnolotti from Voghera ©Bell&Tany; Stracchino from Voghera ©Bell&Tany;
Mostarda from Voghera ©UmbertoBarcella.



