



A FORMER BORDER TOWN, NOW TOTALLY INTEGRATED INTO THE EUROPEAN SPIRIT

VENTIMIGLIA

A MODERN TOWN ROOTED IN ANCIENT TIMES

Ventimiglia lies along the Roia River, in the province of Imperia, and preserves both the ancient and modern charm of Western Liguria. The foundation of the farthest Italian town before the French-Italian border goes back to the Roman age. Under the Roman domination it was called Albium Intemelium, later turned into Albintimilium and, in the Middle Ages, into Ventimiglia.

VENTIMIGLIA HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The westernmost part of Liguria, inhabited since the Palaeolithic era, as shown by the Balzi Rossi, is limited by Sanremo on one side and the Principality of Monaco on the other side. Historically and geographically this area has always been dominated by Ventimiglia, the main coastal town on the mouth of the Roia River, that used to control all the traffic towards both the north and Provence.

This seaside town is surrounded by the mountains and boasts a very gentle Mediterranean climate that fosters tourism all the year round. Its hinterland, rich in history, art and natural beauties, can be easily enjoyed by a

trip along the picturesque routes of the Roia, Nervia and Crosia Valleys and their interesting villages such as Camporosso, Dolceacqua and Perinaldo.

Settled in ancient times, the original "oppidum" developed as a maritime and agricultural centre and became a bastion of the Ligurians' independence from the Greeks of Marsiglia, that had colonized the Provençal coast up to Monaco. In 180 BC it was turned into the Roman castrum of Albintimilium and, during the Roman empire, it became a flourishing town rich in public buildings, also thanks to its strategic location along the Iulia Augusta road towards Gaul.

The town experienced a period of decay after the barbarian invasions, when it was occupied by the Goths and Longobards. In the High Middle Ages, the population, to be more protected, moved to the western side of the Roia River up the fortified hill; in the 11th century the Earl of Ventimiglia, a very important feudal family, interrupted the Saracens' devastations and extended its dominion over the vast surrounding territory. It was a free Commune up to 1261 then it lost part of its territory and prestige and, for about two centuries, was subject to the Republic of Genoa. After various dominations by the Angevins, the Grimaldi, the Visconti, the Sforza and Napoleon's troops, in 1861 Ventimiglia was absorbed into the Reign of Italy.

THE GROTTOS OF "BALZI ROSSI"

Shortly before the Italian-French border, nearby Ponte San Luigi, there lies the promontory of Balzi Rossi, named after the reddish calcareous rock dropping sheer down into the sea.

The Balzi Rossi are big caves of remarkable archaeological interest, one of the most famous sanctuaries of the Mediterranean prehistory. In the middle of the 19th century, a few Italian and French researchers started the excavations and remains of animal fossils, human tombs dating back to the High Palaeolithic, flint artifacts, shell necklaces, and fossil fish were unearthed.

In 1971 various engravings on the rock were found, the first traces in northern-central Italy. Real striking evidences from the Neanderthal Man up to Cro-Magnon Man are now preserved in situ at the National Prehistoric Museum, founded by Sir Thomas Hanbury at the end of 1800.

Completed in 1994, the Museum also hosts the most ancient human bone fragment found in Italy, besides faunal remains of the Quaternary period and drawings of some engravings.

Per informazioni: Grotte dei Balzi Rossi: tel. 0184 38113.

VENTIMIGLIA: THREE TOWNS IN ONE

Over the time, Ventimiglia underwent building alterations that are witness of its historical, economical and political evolution. Indeed, its economical system, that in the past used to be based on fishing, agriculture and sheep grazing, is now turned into tourist activities and greenhouse flower-growing on the hills, where olive groves and vineyards still survive.

Today Ventimiglia welcomes tourists with its three different facets: the archaeological area, the high medieval centre and the modern coastal and tourist town.

ROMAN VENTIMIGLIA

Set in the eastern outskirts, the remains of Albintimilium - as Ventimiglia was called during the Roman Empire ages, a fortunate and happy era when it was the main village of a larger district- is an open air museum.

Turned into Urban Archaeological Park in 2004, it is one of the most important excavation areas of Liguria unearthed ever since 1877.

The town, that was big and important in the Empire epoch, also thanks to its location along the Iulia Augusta road, underwent a period of decay together with the fall of the Roman Empire and was finally abandoned in the 7th century.

You can now admire part of the Roman baths with the mosaics of pavement, the ruins of the walls, the "insulae" (typical dwellings) and the theatre.

A large number of remains of the ancient town of Albintimilium is now preserved at the Archaeological Museum dedicated to Girolamo Rossi (1831-1914), an expert of history, author of various publications and, in 1876, discoverer of the Roman theatre.

The Museum is hosted in the former Fortezza Sabauda dell'Annunziata and contains, besides some funeral equipments, ancient glasses, sculptures, epigraphs and tombs, a precious silver travelling service.

**AREA
ARCHEOLOGICA
DI
ALBINTIMILIUM**

Tel. 0184 252320

**MUSEO
ARCHEOLOGICO GIROLAMO ROSSI**

Tel. 0184 351181

UPPER VENTIMIGLIA

To visit to the medieval area of Ventimiglia, standing further up the hill on the right side of the Roia River, we would suggest that you started from Passeggiata Colla - a viewpoint rich in maritime pines, established in the last century, that allows you to enjoy a splendid panorama from the French coast up to Bordighera.

The town, like other typical medieval villages of Liguria, is a dense network of narrow steep lanes, arcades, stone houses, archivolts and, along the main road, aristocratic palazzi with marble entrances and stairs, adorned with noble coat of arms and bas-reliefs.

Piazza della Cattedrale, the monumental centre of the upper town, that you can see from far away together with its massive walls and some ancient passages (Porta Piemonte and Porta Nizza), preserves unique historical evidences: the Cattedrale dell'Assunta, the octagonal shaped Battistero, the Palazzo Pubblico and the Palazzo Vescovile, besides the vast monastic complex of the Canonichesse. Built in the 11th century on the site of the ancient Earl Castle, it has two flights of stairs leading to a portico with three arches on its façade dating back to the 17th century.

The Cattedrale dell'Assunta, erected in the 11th-13th centuries on the site of an ancient pagan temple, is among the most important Romanesque monuments of Liguria. A magnificent splayed portal with ogival arches leads to the interior, with a nave and side aisles, that after the recent restorations has regained its original aspect.

Following the 16th-century walls up to the end of the inhabited centre, you can admire the Church of San Michele built around 1100 on the site of a chapel of the 10th century, with the central apse, round arches and narrow windows. In the centre of the church a flight of steps leads down to the crypt below that has a vault supported by columns, some of which were part of the former temple dedicated to Castore e Polluce.

THE CIVICA BIBLIOTECA APROSIANA

The Civica Biblioteca Aprosiana (Aprosiana Civic Library), housed in the former Teatro Comunale, stands among the buildings of Via Garibaldi, the main street of the medieval Ventimiglia. It was the first public library in Liguria founded in 1648 by the Frate Agostiniano Angelico Aprosio. About 7000 volumes are preserved in the two rooms of the "Fondo Antico" while the modern part is home to 19000 volumes. Civica Bibliotrca Aprosiana - via Garibaldi, 10 – 18039 Ventimiglia (Centro Storico) Telefono: 0184 351209 Fax: 0184 238863. - Winter/school opening times: Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays 8.30 a.m./1.30 p.m.; Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays 2.00 - 7.30 p.m. Summer opening times: from Monday to Saturday 8.30 a.m. /1.30 p.m.

MODERN VENTIMIGLIA

The modern area of Ventimiglia extends towards the town centre and the seafront, towards Nice and France and towards Piemonte through Colle di Tenda.

The centre of the modern town hosts elegant palazzi, rich shops and qualified accommodation facilities as well as the Chiesa di Sant'Agostino and its beautiful monasterial cloister that invites people to enjoy 16th-17th centuries paintings. The seafront is enriched with palm trees, gardens, equipped beaches, entertainment places, restaurants and trattorie. Indeed, the local economy is mainly based on the summer tourism and on flower trade, being one of the largest producers worldwide.

The traditional big market taking place on Fridays is mainly attended by French people who often seize this opportunity to visit the monuments of the town.

Ventimiglia is also home to some traditional events such as the "Battaglia dei Fiori" (end of June) and the "Agosto Medievale", a competition among the town cantons staged in August.

"The Battaglia di Fiori" (Battle of Flowers) is a parade where fantasy, skill and beauty are blended into an unforgettable harmony of colours and aromas.

Various groups parade according to a chosen theme (this year's theme is "Myths and Legends") and set up floats accompanied by folk bands and groups throwing flowers to the spectators. Resumed after a pause of ten years, this event distinguishes itself from the others of the Ligurian Riviera towns because of its unique elegant flowered mosaic.

Each float with 3-dimensional characters is enriched with a hundred thousand carnation wreaths and takes about 3-months for the realization of the work.

HANBURY BOTANICAL GARDENS

Nearby the Balzi Rossi, at Mortola Inferiore, the Hanbury Gardens and the former Villa dei Lanteri, now Villa dei Marchesi Orengo, form an outstanding artistic and naturalistic complex extending over an 18-hectare parkland on the grassy slopes of Capo Mortola.

The promontory can boast an exceptionally gentle climate, with winter temperatures rarely going down to 0°C.

In 1867, the young Thomas Hanbury, struck by the beauty of the promontory of Mortola, decided to buy it and turn it into a place for the acclimatising of exotic plants from all over the world, together with an area where the local vegetation was allowed to grow freely and also preserving the route of the Iulia Augusta road and the old supporting walls. In this way the Mediterranean scrub has grown mixed up with various exotic plants in open air: about 7000 plants form one of the most famous botanical gardens worldwide.

The Roses Collection, the Japanese Garden, the Australian Forest and the Garden of Perfumes are among the richest species.

The Gardens are also embellished with various sculptures such as shrines, stone benches and fountains.

They were bought by the Italian State in 1960 and in 1987 the Istituto di Botanica dell'Università di Genova was entrusted with their management.

Giardini Hanbury

Corso Montecarlo, 43
Mortola Inferiore - 18039 Ventimiglia.
Tel. 0184 229507
Open every day
from 9:30 a.m.
to 5:30 p.m.

Cuisine

A Ventimiglia possiamo gustare i caratteristici piatti locali: i ravioli ripieni di zucca fritti nell'olio (barbagiuai), At Ventimiglia you can taste various typical local dishes, such as the "ravioli" stuffed with pumpkin and fried in oil (barbagiuai), the "pizza" with anchovies and onions (pisciadella), rabbit or gilthead "alla ventimigliese", cake stuffed with vegetables (il tortello), "baccalà in agliata" and, among the desserts, "castagnole" and "canestrelli".

The food is accompanied with Rossese and Vermentino, the excellent local wines.

Baccalà in agliata: soak the baccalà in water for 24 hours, often changing the soaking water, then cut it into pieces to be floured and fried. Prepare the "agliata" by soaking some crumbs of bread in vinegar, then add 2 minced cloves of garlic. Serve the baccalà covered with the "agliata".

Pissaladière: let 500g of white onions gentle wither, then add a little of sugar, salt and pepper. Knead the dough with 2 spoons of oil, put it into an oiled baking tin, cover it with onions, 12 anchovies and 100g of black olives. Bake it at 220° for about 25 minutes.

Getting to Ventimiglia

By car: Aurelia Provincial Road. A10 Motorway Genova–Ventimiglia, E80 internal segment route.

By train: FS Genova-Ventimiglia line (continuing to France) and Torino-Cuneo line.

By air: International airports of Genova and Nice.

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