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Summer in the Brachetto d'Acqui district of Italy's Piedmont wine region.



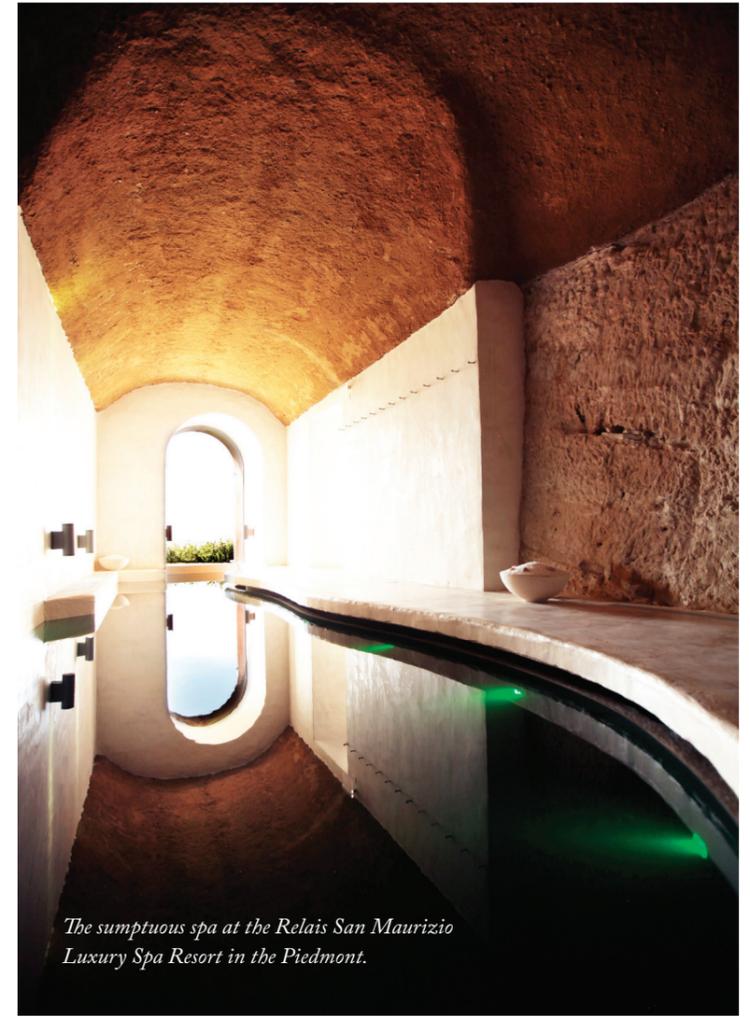
A typical street in Piedmont, this one is in Montabone.

photos: Consorzio Tutela Vini d'Acqui Archives



Susegana, one of the beautiful small towns that dot the Prosecco Superiore wine area known as the Conegliano-Valdobbiadene.

photo: (L) Conte Collalto Winery; (R) Relais San Maurizio



The sumptuous spa at the Relais San Maurizio Luxury Spa Resort in the Piedmont.

SPARKLING WONDERS

Toasting the Bubbly of Italy's Lesser-Known Wine Regions

Castello di San Salvatore and the vineyards of Conte Collalto Winery in the Prosecco Superiore region.



photo: Conte Collalto Winery

Guido da Costigliole restaurant, located in the ancient monk's wine cellar of Relais San Maurizio Luxury Spa Resort in the Piedmont.



photo: Relais San Maurizio

"The fantastically **BEAUTIFUL** Piedmont—a winemaking region deemed a UNESCO World Heritage Cultural landmark for being 'emblematic of the development of VINEYARDS and in Italian HISTORY'—is waiting."

Taking the road less traveled leads to some incredible discoveries, especially when the road winds its way through the gorgeous landscapes of the Piedmont and Treviso regions in Northern Italy. So fill your flute with a glass of Brachetto d'Acqui or Prosecco, and come along for a food and wine adventure—with a sprinkling of history and culture, of course.

First, choose a time to visit. We're partial to fall for many reasons: cooler temperatures; fewer tourists; a grape harvest in full swing; and truffles, glorious white truffles, along with porcini mushrooms—both in season.

There's never a bad time to visit this part of the world, but before you leave the U.S., book a Rail Europe Eurail Italy Pass, which makes getting around by train a snap, and rent an XCom Global mobile hotspot, which allows you to run Wi-Fi on up to 10 devices anywhere for just \$15 a day (a real steal).

Ease out of your jet lag with a stay at the Four Seasons Milan, a former 15th century convent repurposed to perfectly blend old world and new. Shop the famed Corso Vittorio Emanuele and Via Della Spiga nearby; visit the imposing cathedral, Milan Duomo; and dine at the hotel's exemplary restaurant, La Veranda, which plates to-die-for osso buco. FourSeasons.com/Milan

But as the fantastically beautiful Piedmont—a winemaking region deemed a UNESCO World Heritage Cultural landmark for being "emblematic of the development of vineyards and in Italian history"—is waiting, catch the train for a quick trip to the province and let the bubbly fun begin.

Let the Relais San Maurizio luxury spa resort be your home base. At this stunning monastery-turned-resort, perched high in the hills, you'll find incredible views; impeccable service; a unique, water-centric spa; and the Michelin-starred restaurant, Guido da Costigliole, which is well worth visiting. RelaisSanMaurizio.it

Although the Piedmont is known for its big red B's—Barolo and Barbaresco—we adore the region's sparkling red iteration: Brachetto d'Acqui, which only grows here and is a light, aromatic bubbly made in the Acqua Terme area since Roman times. Blended to be imbibed when young, these delicately delicious wines usually offer up flavors of roses, raspberries and strawberries. Look for the Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita (DOCG) designation on the bottle, which indicates that 100 percent Brachetto grapes were used in its creation.

To taste *spumante* ("sparkling wine" in Italian) gems, make sure to visit some of its best producers: Bersano, also home to a fascinating museum; Braida, with a beautiful tasting room; Tre Secoli, the hilly vineyards of which yield some intensely delicious Brachettos; Cuvage, a modern addition to the more venerable wineries in the area; and Banfi, whose luscious Rosa Regale is the best-known Brachetto d'Acqui sold in America.

Along the way, watch for castles, churches and other picturesque sights around

every turn. All of these pepper this picture perfect region; and take pause to savor all the locally-sourced cuisine, too. In Asti, seek out award-winning Ristorante Gener Neuv and taste the white-truffle-laden homemade pasta; and, in Acqui Terme, sample a spectacular antipasto platter of local meats and cheeses that you'll dream about for weeks at Ristorante Enoteca La Curia. RistoranteLaCuria.com

Next, move on to the Treviso region—and, more specifically, the Conegliano-Valdobbiadene area within it. This is the home of Prosecco, Italy's most famous *spumante*, which, like France's Champagne, is a term only to be used for sparkling wine made in the specific Denominazione di Origine Controllata (DOC, the regional classification) of Prosecco from the Glera grape. Take the train across the breathtaking countryside of Conegliano and end up in Follina. Here, unpack at the lovely Hotel Villa Abbazia, a Relais & Chateaux property created from a 17th-century estate that boasts the one-star Michelin restaurant, La Corte.

Luckily, from here you'll be in the center of the Prosecco Superiore DOCG, where Italy's best bubbly is produced. With similarly lush vineyards built on very steep slopes, the region is Piedmont's equal in beauty. There's even a Wine Road (Italy's first, dating from 1966) that takes travelers right through the heart of this beautiful country.

Beginning at the iconic medieval castle Castello di San Salvatore, in Susegana, visit the Conte Collalto Winery, where the castle's owners have made wine since the Middle Ages. Nowadays, their Spumante Brut Prosecco literally has tiny bubbles and wondrous tastes of pear and apple. The family-run BiancaVigna may not have a castle, but its varied Proseccos are some of the area's best. Be sure to add Bortolotti Winery in Valdobbiadene to your agenda and stop at Bortolin Winery, in a picturesque little village. Then, just wander, for there are more than 100 wineries in Conegliano-Valdobbiadene, and you're sure to discover many new loves along the way.

Finally, chase the bubbles all the way to Venice, just 40 miles south of the Prosecco Superiore region. Perhaps the most incredible city on the planet, it's just the place for a fine finish. Stay at the Metropole Hotel, near St. Mark's Square, and dine at its renowned Met Restaurant, or eat nearby at the Ristorante Wildner, where the slow food-localvore movement is in full swing, with outstanding results. HotelMetropole.com

Toast to bittersweet endings with a glass of Brachetto d'Acqui or Prosecco Superiore on the deck of the wonderful Centurio Palace Hotel's Antinoo's Restaurant, perched right on the Grand Canal (and sleep at the hotel, too, in one of its eye-popping suites featuring expansive views). SinaHotels.com

That experience truly is a perfect way to conclude an unforgettable journey across some of Italy's less-traveled, wine-filled landscapes. One that will most certainly sparkle in memory for years to come.