

## *Monferrato Casalese - Dossier*



The Monferrato area is part of the provinces of Asti and Alessandria, in Piedmont, in the north west of Italy; the area has a favourable position, located at the center of the triangle between the main industrial cities of Turin, Milan and Genoa.



The area called Monferrato Casalese, in particular, is located between the plain of the river Po and the Monferrato hills; in this region can be found the town of Casale Monferrato (the historical capital) and about sixty municipalities, with a population of 110.000 people. Two different Unesco World Heritage Sites can also be found in the Monferrato Casalese: the Sacred Mount of Crea (that is part of the Sacred Mounts of Piedmont and Lombardy) and Monferrato of the *Infernot* (one of the six areas in The Vineyard Landscape of Piedmont: Langhe-Roero and Monferrato).



The local economy embraces all sectors. As regards the **primary sector**, vine-growing dominates the Monferrato area, where different DOC wines are produced (for example Barbera, Grignolino, etc.); the cultivation of rice and other cereals also has an important role in the local agricultural economy, as do market gardens and plain and tree crops (above all poplar trees). Not to be forgotten is the production of truffles and cognac as well as other food products.

**Industrial and service sectors** play a vital role in the local economy. Multinational companies operating in the cement and logistic fields have their headquarters in the town of Casale Monferrato. There are also successful companies operating in engineering (such as refrigeration, typographical machineries and machine tools, etc.), textile and clothing (cashmere, etc.), woodwork and paper manufacture and food conservation. Last but not least, the town of Valenza is the capital of the art of jewellery creation, well-known all over the world.

In the **tourism sector** data is positive. In fact, in recent years, both arrivals and overnight stays have increased. In particular, last year there was an increase of 7.2 per cent in arrivals and 5.2 per cent in overnight stays; the Monferrato area shows a total number of more than 40,000 arrivals and more than 80,000 overnight stays. As regards accommodation, it is important to underline that the number and capacity of B&Bs/farm holiday centers/etc. has increased in the last five years. The main countries of origin are Germany, Switzerland, France, Austria, Hollande and the United Kingdom (in Europe) and the USA, China and Canada (outside Europe).



## Legend and history in Monferrato

It was the year 1000 when Aleramo got possession of the Monferrato. The legend says that he received an area as wide as the territory he was able to cover on horseback in three days and three nights. The legend also explains the name Monferrato itself: in fact, it is said that Aleramo used a brick (*mon* in the local language) to shoe (*ferrat*) his horse.

## The town of Casale Monferrato

Casale has been the capital of Monferrato since the XV century thanks to the Paleologi Marquisate. The town has grown since the XVI century thanks to the family of Gonzaga (dukes of Mantua), until the annexation to the duchy of Savoy in 1713; in the XIX century the city was invaded by Napoleonic armies and then it played a role in the Italian *Risorgimento* with important citizens like Giovanni Lanza, Filippo Mellana and Urbano Rattazzi.



The cathedral (Ph. Leporati)



The Synagogue (Ph. Barbano)



The Civic Museum (Ph. G. Morra)



The town of Casale is one of the most interesting cultural cities in Piedmont. Not to be missed: the cathedral dedicated to St. Evasio with its splendid (and rare) narthex (dated 1107), the Romanic crucifix and a rich Museum; the baroque Jewish Synagogue, a true jewel dated 1595, it is considered to be one of the most beautiful in Europe) and has a Jewish museum annexed to it (it holds a collection of religious craftworks and an extraordinary Chanukah display); the Civic Museum (rich in works of art related to the local history and Piedmontese and Lombard art), the Bistolfi plaster casts gallery (with more than 170 sculptures made from plaster, marble and bronze) and the archaeological section; the church of San Domenico (containing valuable works by the local painter Guala) and its cloister; churches and historical residences in the town center; the Municipal Theatre, built at the end of the 18th century; the civic tower, which has ancient origins and furthermore is the emblem of Casale.



A view of the town of Casale Monferrato (Ph. The municipality of Casale Monferrato)

## Unesco World Heritage Sites in Monferrato

Two Unesco World Heritage Sites are present in the Monferrato area: the Sacred Mount of Crea (that is part of the Sacred Mounts of Piedmont and Lombardy, listed in 2003) and Monferrato of the Infernot (one of the six areas in The Vineyard Landscape of Piedmont: Langhe-Roero and Monferrato, listed in 2014).

### The Sacred Mount of Crea

The Regional Natural Park is a particularly fascinating example of the relationship between nature, religion and art: the fascination of the uncontaminated woodland countryside which offers glimpses of breathtaking scenery can be enjoyed together with the architectonic dimensions of the Sanctuary dedicated to St Mary of the Assumption and of the chapels (with works by artists of importance such as Moncalvo and Alberini) representing the salient episodes of the Gospels and culminating in the majestic and unusual “Paradise”.

The Sacred Mount of Crea consists of the Sanctuary, 23 chapels (not to be missed “*La salita al Calvario*” and “*L’incoronazione della Vergine*” – the so called “Paradise”) and five hermitages. The complex was built between 1589 and 1612, with a second building phase in the early XIX century.

The Sanctuary keeps paintings and frescos of artists of great relevance: above all, Martino d'Alba's autographic painting dedicated to the Blessed Virgin and Christ Child and the Saints (dated 1503), the series of frescos portraying St. Margherita d'Antiochia's Stories (XV century) and the wooden statue portraying the Blessed Virgin (XIV century).

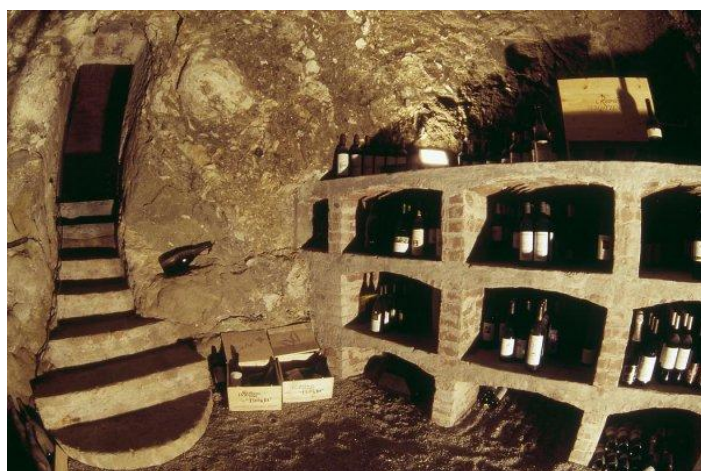
Groups of statues made in stained terracotta (most of which were made by the Flemish sculptors Giovanni and Nicola De Wespín, known as Tabacchetti) are displayed in the 23 chapels, together with frescos by Giorgio Alberini and paintings by Brilla, Maggi, Latini, Capra and Morgari.



One of the 23 chapels (Ph. Archivio)

## Il Monferrato degli Infernot

The area is characterized by a singular type of architectural construction: the infernot. These underground rooms were dug into a particular geological formation called Cantoni Stone. This is the origin of cellar extensions, dug and sculpted under the old houses. The extraordinary characteristic is that these cellars were built in order to preserve wine bottles in an environment without natural light and air circulation.



Infernot (Ph. Ecomuseo della Pietra da Cantoni)

The infernot are used for the domestic storage of bottles and represent veritable works of art created with local know-how. The area selected comprises the main quarries where the stone, that also characterises the prestigious architecture of the hill villages, was quarried. There is a very close connection with the vineyards, historically linked to the cultivation of the Barbera grape-variety – vinified here mainly as Barbera del Monferrato DOCG – and of other minor grape-varieties that characterise Piedmont's varietal heritage.

Mon.D.O. Consortium has agreed to the proposal put forward by the municipalities in the Unesco area in order to collaborate (together with the association Paesaggi Vitivinicoli di Langhe-Roero e Monferrato) to achieve coordination in the promotional and communicational activities in the areas of Langhe-Roero and Monferrato.

Towns and villages in the so called "Core Zone" are Camagna, Cella Monte, Frassinello Monferrato, Olivola, Ottiglio, Ozzano Monferrato, Rosignano Monferrato, Sala Monferrato, Vignale Monferrato.

Towns and villages in the so called "Buffer Zone" are Altavilla Monferrato, Casale Monferrato, Casorzo, Castelletto Merli, Cereseto, Conzano, Cuccaro Monferrato, Fubine, Grana, Grazzano Badoglio, Lu, Moncalvo, Occimiano, Penango, Ponzano Monferrato, Serralunga di Crea, Terruggia, Treville.



## Nature trails: the Park of the Rivers Po and Orba

The Park is made up of 8 Natural Reserves and the Natural Park of *Bosco delle Sorti della Partecipanza* in Trino. The objectives of the Park are: conservation of the environment; education; environmental recovery and research. The most interesting part from the point of view of the flora and fauna is that positioned between Pontestura and Gabiano, while the tract through the Valenza area is particularly interesting.



Nature trails (Ph. Parco del Po)

The stretch of the River Po Park

in the Monferrato Casalese area offers many opportunities for fun and adventure near and on the water: walking, cycling, canoeing, using the typical *Barcé* or going easy rafting; birdwatching or simply stopping for a picnic at the picnic areas. At the Visitors' Center and with the Park Guides you will be able to experience the unique aspects of this area rich in biodiversity.

## The typical food and wines in the Monferrato Casalese area



Enoteca Regionale del Monferrato

### Monferrato is a land of wines

The Monferrato Casalese is one of the main wine producing areas in Piedmont; just look at the rows of vines on the hillsides to understand the economic and social importance of wine in this area. Barbera and Grignolino are the most important varieties of vine in Monferrato and most of the production is concentrated on these two grapes. Passion and quality live in Monferrato: this is evident from the large cultivated areas, the wine producers and distilleries, the farmers, the wine experts and the associations promoting wine.

### Italian De.Co. in Monferrato

De.Co. is a quality trademark conferred by Italian municipalities in order to certify the origin of a certain product (both in food & wine and the craft sector). In Monferrato, some of "De.Co. products" are: Krumiri Rossi (typical biscuits) and La Torre's Agnolotti (a kind of pasta) in Casale Monferrato; the locally known *Tirà ad Mirabé* (a dessert) and the ragù made from snails in Mirabello Monferrato; the Agnolotti (a kind of pasta) made in Pontestura; the *Giardiniera* (that is pickled vegetables), the locally known *Friciulin cun al Surcli* (a kind of rissole) and the cake made in Vignale Monferrato.

## Other specialities

Apart from DOC and DOCG wines and De.Co. products, the Monferrato area is rich in other specialities, such as: grappa, spirits, rice, the typical Muletta (a kind of salami), truffles, fritto misto (a deep fried mixture of meats), *Bagna Cauda* (a sauce with anchovies and garlic), boiled meats with three different sauces and *bunet* (a dessert).

### What is MON.D.O.

Mon.D.O (Monferrato Domanda Offerta – Monferrato Supply and Demand) is a consortium limited company with mixed public – private capital, made up of Communes of the Casale Monferrato region and the surrounding area of the Plain of the river Po, public institutions and a pool of private bodies. The consortium is not for profit and its purpose is to promote the image of the region and encourage tourism in the area.

Consorzio Turistico Mon.D.O. (Monferrato Domanda Offerta)

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