

REGIONS OF ITALY



Piedmont/Piemonte (Piedmont will be used) is a region in northwestern Italy. It is the nation's second-largest region and borders Switzerland to the northeast and France to the west. It also borders the Liguria region to the south, the Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna regions to the east and the Aosta Valley region to the northwest.

It has an area of 9,808 square miles and a population of 4,377,941. This area is home to one third of the population of Italy!

The name Piedmont comes from the medieval Latin word *Pedemontium* or *Pedemontis* meaning "at the foot of the mountains". It is surrounded on three sides by the Alps with the highest peaks and largest glaciers in Italy. The capital of Piedmont is Turin.

Turin derives its name from the Celtic word *tau* which means mountain. Turin was founded almost 2400 years ago by a Celtic tribe, the Taurini. In Italian, Turin means "little bull". The bull is still part of the city standard (flag) to this day.

A Quick History Lesson

Piedmont was inhabited in early historic times by Celtic-Ligurian tribes such as the Taurini and the Salassi. They were later subdued by the Romans (c. 220 BC) who founded several colonies there including *Augusta Taurinorum* (Turin) and *Eporedia* (Ivrea). After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the region was successively invaded by the Burgundians, the Ostrogoths (5th century), East Romans, Lombards (6th century), and Franks (773). In the 9th–10th centuries, there were further incursions by the Magyars, Saracens and Muslim Moors. At the time, Piedmont, as part of the Kingdom of Italy within the Holy Roman Empire, was subdivided into several duchies.

In 1046, Oddo of Savoy added Piedmont to their main territory of Savoy, with a capital at Chambéry (now in France). Other areas remained independent,

such as the powerful municipalities of Asti, Alessandria, Saluzzo and Montferrat. In 1280, when Turin was finally conquered by the Savoy family dynasty, its regional prominence began. The history of Turin for the next 600 years is wedded to that of the House of Savoy. Emanuele Filiberto, a Duke from the House of Savoy, made Turin the capital of his duchy in 1560. Emanuele founded the order of the Knights of St. Maurice with the Pope's blessing. The Sacred Shroud of Turin, a cloth which is said to bear the likeness of Christ, was brought to the city during Emanuele's reign. Emanuele Filiberto's great-grandson, Carlo Emanuele II, was also a defender of the faith. He helped eradicate the Waldensian heresy from the Piedmont region and assured that Turin would remain a Catholic city.

The Savoys are also credited with bringing art, culture and architecture to Turin. The Italian royal family certainly spared no expense to make Turin beautiful. To this day, the vestiges of Savoy rule can be found in the palaces, the grand boulevards, squares and streets of Turin. During the 17th century, Turin became quite the center for Baroque architecture in Europe. It is still largely regarded as one of the finest Baroque cities and attracts many tourists for this reason alone. Despite their best efforts to 'Italianize' the city, Turin's layout is more often compared to Paris than to any Italian city.

The Congress of Vienna resulted in the re-creation of the Kingdom of Sardinia when the late 17th to early 18th Century French occupation ended.

Piedmont was a springboard for Italy's unification in 1859–1861 following earlier unsuccessful wars against the Austrian Empire in 1820–1821 and 1848–1849. This process is sometimes referred to as Piedmontisation.

In 1861, the House of Savoy became the rulers of Italy. Vittorio Emanuele II was crowned king. During this time, Turin was the capital of all of Italy and, as one can imagine, a center for Italian nationalism. Vittorio

Emanuele II ruled over a 'united Italy' as well as Sicily due to the successful conquests of his predecessors. In 1864, the capital moved to Florence. Rome became Italy's permanent capital in 1871. When the Italian capital was moved to Florence and then to Rome, the administrative and institutional importance of Piedmont was deeply reduced and the only remaining recognition to Piedmont's historical role was that the crown prince of Italy was known as the Prince of Piedmont. The Savoy would reign over Italy until the end of the Second World War when a national referendum chose the Republic as the national form of government. However, the family's rule upon the country had in truth ended with the advent of Fascism and the power of Benito Mussolini.

Cuisine and Wine

Piedmont is one of the great wine-growing regions in Italy. With over 170,000 acres of vineyards, it produces some of Italy's best and most robust red wines.

Such names as Barolo and Barbaresco are world famous, long-aged and intense wines along with the local favorite, Barbera D'Asti, a delicious and affordable wine to accompany most meals, with a fast-growing international recognition.

Piedmont is renowned for its most famous grape variety of the region, the thick-skinned Nebbiolo. For many, the Nebbiolo wine is the greatest wine from Piedmont. Nebbiolo is a high tannin grape with red cherry, tar, and rose flavors. The Nebbiolo wines of Barolo are barrel-aged for at least 18 months and are released after a total of 3+ years. White wines of Piedmont feature Asti Spumante, a fully bubbly sweet sparkling ("Spumante") wine and Moscato d'Asti, a barely bubbly ('Frizzante') wine.

La Cucina Piemontese is a mixture of rich French-influenced (think butter) cuisine centered on the former royal court in Turin coupled with humbler peasant seasonal hearty food.

No meal will start without several antipasti (appetizers), both hot and cold, giving the chef

the chance to show off one's skills. The first course can be a risotto dish, since rice has been grown on the flood plains of the Po River around Vercelli for centuries, agnolotti, the local stuffed raviolis (homemade of course) or tajarin, thin homemade tagliatelle. Piedmon-

tese recipes often feature their prized cattle. The main dish may be Brasato al Barolo, braised beef cooked in Barolo wine, bollito misto, a huge array of boiled meats with relishes or vitello tonnato, a summer dish of cold roast veal with tuna sauce. The beef may also be grilled or roasted. Veal calves, lamb and kid are also popular red meats. Game birds, poultry and rabbits round out the selection of meats in the diet.

A winter specialty which can be served as a starter, main course or entire meal is Bagna Cauda, a hot dip made from anchovies, olive oil and garlic. The French influence on this region manifests itself with the wide use of butter in place of or along with olive oil. There is an astonishingly wide range of delicious local cheeses including Bra, Raschera, Robiola and many types of Toma as well as Gorgonzolain in the northeast part of the region.

Fresh fish is plentiful, coming from rivers, lakes and from nearby Liguria, which has also influenced southern Piedmontese cuisine.

The Swiss/French influence can also be seen with the local variation of fonduta. This egg yolk enriched dish is made with Fontina cheese, milk, plenty of butter, and sometimes garnished with shaved white truffle.

"Grissini", the traditional Turin's breadsticks now common all over Italy, are a good example of how Piedmontese cuisine mixes the simple ingenuity of its farming communities with the cosmopolitan sophistication of its regional capital.

Other commonly eaten hot appetizers include fiori di zucca ripieni, fried stuffed squash blossoms, cavolo verza ripieno, stuffed Savoy cabbage, and crocchette, rice or potatoes croquettes with cheese. Eggs are fried with truffles and cooked with onions to make egg tarts called tartrà piemontese or made into crustless, baked vegetable omelets known as frittate.

Many filling meat dishes are served as appetizers in Piemonte's cuisine. Vitello tonnato, or veal with tuna sauce, is prepared by simmering veal in vegetable broth before thinly slicing it and serving it cold with a capers and tuna flavored mayonnaise.

Organ meats are often prepared as part of the antipasti course, including tongue and tripe. Finanziera is a dish of mixed organ meats and mushrooms flavored with Marsala, garlic and vinegar. Terrines and pâtés contain game birds and liver. (Note:

My Sicilian grandfather and father's favorite dish) Salami, or preserved meats, from Piedmont include salami aged in pottery vases full of lard and sanguinacci, or blood sausages. Salami are not only made from pork



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Brasato al Barolo



Finanziera alla Piemontese

in Piedmont cooking. They often contain trout, beef, goose, or even potatoes. Pigs' feet are fried and referred to as batsoa, or silk stockings, taken from the French bas de soie. Marinated rabbit is cooked until as tender as tuna and is appropriately named tonno di coniglio.

In Piedmont's cooking, the preferred pasta is a narrow handmade noodle called tajarin. They are often simmered in beef broth and topped with butter, grated Grana Padano cheese and shaved truffles with nutmeat. Agnolotti piemontesi, like ravioli, are also popular. These meat and herb filled dumplings are generally served with fresh sage fried in butter and topped with Parmigiano Reggiano.

Gnocchi alla bava, or potato dumplings, are garnished with Fontina, Grana Padano and melted butter. Cornmeal is cooked into a comforting winter dish by mixing it with Toma and Fontina cheeses and garnishing it with grated Grana Padano and butter to make polenta cùnsa. Filling bean soups, such as cisrà and tôleja, are flavored with pork or pork rind.

The flatlands of Piedmont are Europe's prominent supplier of Carnaroli rice, prized for creamy risotto. It may be cooked with butter and shaved truffles or made into panissa, a risotto flavored with red borlotti beans, Salam d'la Duja and pork rind. Frogs, meat or vegetable sauces may also be used with the luscious rice dishes.

Fresh fish is not used in most Piemonte recipes, though anchovies and tuna flavor many dishes and freshwater trout is popular. Brook trout is simmered in a vinegar and white wine bath flavored with sage and bay leaves.

The province's outstanding desserts include bonèt, a custard cake flavored with coffee or chocolate. Panna cotta is a silky custard made with cream and caramel thickened with gelatin. Candied chestnuts, known as marron glacés, are famous worldwide. Corn flour is used to make meliga cookies. Torta gianduia is a decadent hazelnut and chocolate torte, a kind of dense cake made with ground nuts instead of flour. Zabaione (or sanbajon) is a light custard made with Marsala wine and sweetened egg yolks, sometimes used to flavor semifreddo or ice creams.

Did You Know

Piedmont produces large numbers of high-quality hazelnuts. These nuts are put to good use in cakes and pastries as well as torrone nougat and chocolates. The best use for hazelnuts was by Pietro Ferrero, a pastry maker from Alba, Piedmont. Following the end of World War II, cocoa was in short supply so he decided to use the abundant hazelnuts available in the area to make a sweet paste which would use just a little of the precious cocoa. Initially, this paste was a solid block.

A few years later, Ferrero transformed his creation into a creamy version that could be spread on bread and named it SuperCrema. In 1963, Ferrero's son, Michele, introduced an improved recipe for Supercrema with the intention of marketing it throughout Europe. The new hazelnut and cocoa cream was named Nutella. The immediately recognizable jars first left the Ferrero's Alba factory in 1964. Nutella was an immediate success, expanding into Europe in the 1960s, and into the rest of the world during the 1970s. Nutella is so loved around the world that we now even have a World Nutella Day, celebrated on February 5th. Michele's death in 2014 soon caused the sale of the company to Keebler Inc. which continues to make their chocolate/hazelnut products at the Alba factory.



The region contains major industrial centers, the main of which is Turin, home to the FIAT automobile works. Fiat, the great Italian car company, still calls Turin its home base even after it was acquired by the USA based Chrysler Corporation. The name **FIAT stands for Fabbrica Italiana Automobili Turin (Italian Car Company of Turin)**. It was founded by a group of investors in 1899. In 1961, the Italia 61 complex was built as part of the city's centenary celebrations for Italian unification. It remains an industrial center and one if not the most labor union friendly Italian cities.

The economy of Piedmont is also anchored in a rich history of state support for excellence in higher education.

The Piedmont valley is home to the famous University of Turin, the

Polytechnic University of Turin, the University of Eastern Piedmont and, more recently, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute.

Palio di Asti is a traditional weeklong festival of Medieval origins and features the oldest recorded bareback horse race in Italy running continuously since 1275. Similar events are held in other Italian cities such as Siena-theirs made more famous in a recent James Bond film. The Palio di Asti takes place on the first weekend of every September and culminates in a saddle-free showdown between 21 riders representing the city's 6 districts, 8 villages, and 7 municipalities, which bring their colors to the most awaited event in the city of Asti. The medieval festival, which attracts thousands to Asti, culminates with the victor receiving the so-called "Palio" (Championship Banner) that will be prominently displayed in their area to symbolize victory.

Every year in the days preceding Fat Tuesday/Ash Wednesday, townspeople of Ivrea divide up into nine different squads. Dressed in their battle attire, they make



The Fiat Factory-Racetrack on Roof



their way to certain streets of Ivrea that are designated for war. the citizens remember their liberation from oppressive rulers with the ***Battle of the Oranges***. Teams of

aranceri (orange handlers) on foot throw oranges (representing old weapons and stones) against aranceri riding in carts (representing the tyrant's ranks). Over the course of the next three days leading up to the holiday, men, women and children hurl oranges at each other, attempting to "kill" the other teams.

Although the origins are historically unclear, a popular account has it that the battle commemorates the city's defiance against the city's evil ruler and now remains the largest food fight in Italy. Though not as large as Spain's La Tomatina, the battle does use over 500,000 pounds of oranges that are destroyed during the "battles".

On January 27, 2007, Oscar Farinetti opened the first ***Eataly*** in Turin, Italy. Based on a concept that it would be much more than a store, he wanted to create a school, a market, a table to gather around: a place to learn about food and, through food, about life. Today there are more than 37 locations across the world, from New York City to Milano to Dubai.

While each store follows the original philosophy of being a place where people can eat, shop, and learn about good food, each is completely unique. Before Oscar opened ***Eataly Turin***, he traveled across Italy's 20 regions to find the best local producers who follow the Slow Food partner's qualifications for food that is good, clean, and fair. More than a market, Eataly has become an experience. Just as Oscar had intended, it is a place where you can eat, shop, and learn. Eataly has been described as a megastore that combines elements of a bustling European open market, a Whole Foods-style supermarket, a high-end food court and a New Age learning center. In the rush of a fast-paced (and occasionally fast-food) world, the best of us can forget to slow down and smell the tomatoes. To counteract this chaos, the ***Slow Food movement*** was born also in Turin. This is an international organization dedicated to defending local food traditions, preserving food biodiversity, and promoting quality artisanal products. It was started as a grass-roots movement in 1989 to counteract the sweeping fast-food epidemic across Italy, which was leading to the fading of local food traditions and a dwindling interest in food and where it comes from, how it tastes, and how our food choices affect the rest of the world.

Sites to See

Turin is one of Italy's remarkable cities and despite the numerous attractions and star turn as host of the 2006

Olympics, it remains a lesser-known destination for many American travelers. As Italy's first capital (and unofficial chocolate capital), the seat of its royal family for centuries and its automotive core, Turin serves up an intriguing mix of cultural offerings, from the glories of ancient Egypt to the razzle-dazzle of contemporary cinema.

The amazing ***Palazzo Reale*** was the place from which the Kings of Piedmont exercised their power. There's a lot to see in the complex with regal reception rooms (even chambers for footmen and pageboys were grand), an armory gallery (Armeria Reale), the Galleria Sabauda housing the Savoy family's important art collections with works by Van Dyck, Botticelli, Tiepolo, Fra Angelico and Bellini and a museum (Museo di Antichità) showcasing Roman and Greek artifacts. The sumptuous interiors and elegant gardens are open to the public. Luxurious and ornate are also the other Savoy residences surrounding the city, all included in the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites.

In the Renaissance Cathedral of Saint John, the Baptist, one will find the ***Holy Shroud of Turin***.



Cathedral of St. John The Baptist

A visit to the Palazzo Madama, which Napoleon once claimed for himself, is like taking an art history survey course. Here, among the 70,000-piece collection in the Museo Civico, you'll come across art, artifacts and decorative objects ranging from the Middle Ages to the Baroque period in an exquisite space that was once home to the powerful Savoy rulers.

Italy's best-known film center remains the Cinecittà studios in Rome, but Turin played a key role in the evolution of the country's movie industry. Here you'll find Italy's most extensive film museum, a visual extravaganza.

Turin was a key city for Italy's 19th-century unification movement and became the country's first capital, so it's not surprising that you'll find the national museum commemorating the creation of the modern Italian state here/ with its noteworthy gilded boiseries, mirrored rooms and elaborate frescoes.

Providing extraordinary insights into to the world of the ancients beyond Rome and Greece, ***the Museo Egizio*** is the largest repository devoted to Egyptian antiquities outside Cairo and it is among Italy's most visited museums.

About a forty-five-minute drive from Turin, the ***Venaria*** palace is part of a group of Savoy royal residences that has UNESCO World Heritage designation and ranks among the most popular museums in Italy. Even though it was conceived as a country retreat and hunting lodge, Venaria is one of Europe's largest palaces and a Baroque masterwork.

On the outbreak of World War Two, The Italian resistance movement had its roots here, which continued the fight against the Nazis right up until its liberation.