



The city of Biella develops on three distinct

levels. It starts at the Cervo stream, with its impressive testimonies of industrial archaeology. Just above is Biella Piano, the stately 19th-century town, and, perched atop the hill, the medieval district of Piazza. So set out to discover a city rich in history, art and culture. And feel free to ask as many questions as you like.

Where was the first core of Biella established?

The city of Biella has very ancient origins, dating back to the Bronze Age. The first core arose in the lower part of the city: around today's Via Italia, there was a settlement and two Roman necropolises. On the other hand, the Christian core developed around the parish church of Santo Stefano (today's Piazza Duomo) around the 5th century.

Where does the name Biella come from?

It comes from the ancient name Bugella, used in the Middle Ages. The origin of Bugella is very uncertain: according to some, it would derive from 'bi-ula', meaning 'birch'; to others,

from 'bug', meaning 'beech'. And why not from Bruticella, no less a reference to Decimus Brutus, one of the conspirators against Caesar, who is said to have taken refuge in ancient Biella itself?

Why is the medieval district of Piazza located on a hill?

The Piazza was founded in 1160 by the bishop of Vercelli Uguccione, who wanted a castle in a safe place to take refuge from the fighting between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines. At that time, the city of Biella was located on the Piano, and Piazza was just a cultivated hill. The bishop tried to attract new inhabitants by granting three privileges: the weekly market, meat slaughtering and the administration of justice. The new district developed quickly and was the heart of Biella until the 18th century when the administrative center moved to Piano. Because of this loss of importance, Piazza has preserved its medieval appearance well, with low arcades, old aristocratic buildings, terracotta arches and even a half-timbered house.

Why was Biella awarded UNESCO Creative City status?

As of 2019, the City of Biella has been awarded the prestigious status of UNESCO Creative City, joining the network of 295 cities, 13 of which are

in Italy, that share the goal of placing creativity as an engine of local economic development and actively collaborating on joint projects at the international level. Furthermore, UNESCO has recognized the culture and heritage of textile knowledge in manufacturing as a universal intangible heritage.

How do you reach the Piazza?

On foot, climbing up one of the 'coasts', the steep cobblestone streets connecting the lower and upper cities. Or, better yet, by the historic funicular railway inaugurated in 1886, one of the oldest in Italy. A few years ago, the system was completely restored and transformed into an inclined elevator, yet it retains its old-fashioned atmosphere. On the way up, observe the view, houses and gardens climbing along the coasts. The ride is free of charge. If you do not want to give up your car, the best option is the large parking lot at the gates of the Borgo, accessed from Via Mentegazzi.

What needs to be seen at the Piazza?

Start at the Late Medieval half-timbered house and admire the spectacular view of the Elvo and Oropa valleys from Piazzetta Cucco. Continue under the medieval arcades to the elegant Piazza Cisterna, the heart of the neighbor-

hood; observe the terracotta arches of Casa Teccio and the 16th-century facade of the Palazzo dei Principi Dal Pozzo della Cisterna. On the left is the church of San Giacomo, the oldest in Biella, and the old Ospedale degli Esposti. Returning to the square is the Palazzo dell'Antico Comune (which now houses a restaurant) with its finely frescoed porticoes. Continuing, you reach Palazzo La Marmora and Palazzo Ferrero. The opposite is Palazzo Gromo Losa, which houses a music academy and has a magnificent garden. These three historic mansions make up the Cultural Hub of Biella Piazza, home to frequent exhibitions. Piazza was also home to the old Jewish ghetto, and there is still a synagogue, which is worth visiting on some occasions.

What is the symbol of Biella?

The Baptistery dating back to the early 11th century. It is one of the most exciting examples of Romanesque in Piedmont, built of simple materials such as river pebbles and terracotta bricks. For a long time, it was considered a temple of pagan origin because of the marble bas-relief on the portal, which is actually from Roman times: it was probably found during construction work (there was a Roman burial ground under the Baptistery) and inserted for aesthetic reasons. For a



At a glance

The Piazza



THE OLDEST PART OF PALAZZO GROMO LOSA, OVERLOOKING CORSO DEL PIAZZO, DATES BACK TO THE 1300S. TODAY THE PALACE IS USED FOR CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

BELLONE PARK

PALAZZO LA MARMORA HAS BELONGED TO THE SAME FAMILY FOR EIGHT CENTURIES. IN ADDITION TO A HOUSE MUSEUM, IT REGULARLY HOSTS EVENTS AND EXHIBITIONS. IT IS A HISTORIC HOME FROM THE 16TH CENTURY WITH A ROMANTIC ENGLISH GARDEN OVERLOOKING THE CITY

PIAZZA CISTERNA IS THE BEATING HEART OF THE PIAZZO. THE MEDIEVAL ARCADES AND SQUARE FEATURE THE LIVELY ATMOSPHERE OF BARS AND RESTAURANTS

THE FUNICULAR, WITH ITS TRACKS, CABINS AND DEPARTURE AND ARRIVAL STATIONS, IS ONE OF THE CITY'S MOST BELOVED SYMBOLS

BIELLA PIANO

PALAZZO GROMO LOSA IS EMBELLISHED WITH AN ITALIAN-STYLE GARDEN OF ABOUT ONE HECTARE, FAMOUS FOR ITS ROSES AND THE PRESENCE OF VARIOUS BOTANICAL SPECIES

PALAZZO FERRERO WAS BUILT BETWEEN THE 15TH AND 16TH CENTURIES. ITS OCTAGONAL TOWER IS ONE OF THE SYMBOLS OF THE CITY. TODAY IT IS OWNED BY THE MUNICIPALITY AND HOSTS YEAR-ROUND EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS

tour of the interior, you can ask the sacristan.

What is the church not to be missed?

It is the church of San Sebastiano, which introduced the Lombard Renaissance to Biella in the 1500s. It was built on the initiative of local nobleman Sebastiano Ferrero, who had been general of finance to Ludovico il Moro in Milan. Originally a convent (now the Museum of the Biella Territory) was attached to the church, which housed the Lateran canons. Inside observe Bernardino Lanino's Assumption, the inlaid wooden choir with 12th-century Limoges enamel medallions, the large Crucifixion set in a Biellese landscape, and the statue of General Alfonso La Marmora's English wife.

What is the heart of Biella today?

The city center revolves around Via Italia, the long pedestrian street that connects Zumaglini Gardens to the Riva district. At Piazza, people gather in Piazza Cisterna and in the restaurants and bars under the arcades.

Is there a corner of Biella to discover?

The old Vernato district can be reached directly from Piazza by a downhill walk along the Vernato coast. Along the way, observe the two old half-timbered houses, the Shroud fresco and the picturesque church of San Nicola da Tolentino.

Biella is famous for its industrial heritage. But where can you see the old textile factories?

They are concentrated along the Cervo stream, where they were built to harness the energy of the water that made the looms move. They are a striking reminder of the glorious industrial past of Biella, once called the Manchester of Italy.

What use do the former Biellese textile factories have today?

Many factories have been creatively converted. The most famous example is Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto, conceived by internationally renowned contemporary artist Michelangelo Pistoletto. It was carved out of a former woolen mill in 1998, a splendid example of industrial archeology. It is now a vibrant cultural hub, hosting a permanent exhibition, a workshop school, art residencies, an exhibition of sustainability projects and a cafeteria. Nearby, visit the permanent home of the Third Paradise. Lanificio Pria now houses an art gallery, ateliers, start-ups, and professional studios, while Lanificio Sella is home to Fondazione Sella and SellaLab, which promotes the development of new entrepreneurial activities.

What does Biella offer to nature lovers?

It would be best if you took



At a glance

The Cervo Stream

THE PRIA WOOLEN MILL IS ONE OF THE OLDEST IN THE CITY. IT WAS FOUNDED IN 1824 TO CARD AND SPIN WOOL. IT USED WATER FROM THE STREAM AS THE DRIVING FORCE TO ACTIVATE THE LOOMS

OLD INDUSTRIAL PLANTS CHARACTERIZE THE BANKS OF THE CERVO STREAM. SOME HAVE BEEN REPURPOSED AND NOW HOUSE COMPANIES FROM DIFFERENT SECTORS, PROFESSIONAL STUDIOS, ART GALLERIES, START-UPS

A LONG ROW OF BLUE PENGUINS SIGNED BY THE CRACKING ART COLLECTIVE RECALLS THE STONE BRIDGE THAT CONNECTED THE TWO BANKS OF THE STREAM, WASHED AWAY BY A FLOOD IN 2002

GOING DOWN A FEW HUNDRED METERS ALONG THE CERVO, WE COME ACROSS THE FORMER TROMBETTA WOOLEN MILL, NOW HOME TO CITTADELLARTE - FONDAZIONE PISTOLETTO, AND THE FORMER SELLA WOOLEN MILL, WHICH HOUSES THE FONDAZIONE SELLA AND SELLA LAB

advantage of a walk-in at Zum-aglini Gardens, the public park built in 1876, home to three beautiful monumental trees: a horse chestnut, an Atlas cedar and a giant Himalayan cedar. If you are at Piazza, you can walk down to Biella Piano by crossing Bellone Park, a natural forest in the city. Starting on foot from the center, on the other hand, it takes just a few minutes to reach the Gorgomoro promenade, a beautiful path surrounded by greenery that winds along the Oropa stream. The beginning is flat and suitable for everyone, while the more athletic can continue and walk to the Sanctuary of Oropa. But in the Biellese region, nature is everywhere: around the city lies an area rich in greenery, with mountains, valleys, hills and nature reserves all to be discovered. Record lovers must attend the centuries-old sequoia of Chiavazza (4 kilometers from the center): planted in 1850, it is more than 50 meters high and has a circumference of 8 meters.

Are there museums in Biella?

Of course. The fascinating Museum of the Biella Territory collects evidence of local and international history and art. The MeBo allows you to discover the history of the famous Menabrea brewery, founded in 1846, and the Biella dairy Botalla. If you

like fashion, make sure to check out the Fila Museum Foundation: it is dedicated to the historic Biella brand of Fila and displays vintage clothing, as well as telling the creative/advertising history of the company. For wartime history enthusiasts, there is the Alpine Troops Museum with photographs, weapons, and wartime memorabilia. Finally, the M.A.C.I.S.T. "Trendless International Contemporary Art Museum" project, founded by artist Omar Ronda, houses various works by internationally renowned contemporary artists.

And a hidden gem?

One of the few remaining Christ of the Sunday wall paintings in Italy is in a side room of the cathedral. It is a 15th-century fresco depicting Jesus wounded by various work tools, such as hoes, pitchforks and shears. It is an invitation to sanctify the feasts by abstaining from work to devote oneself to prayer. In the period of the Counter-Reformation, this type of imagery was banned, and almost all the Sunday Christs were destroyed. Fewer than ten remain in Italy, including the one in Biella. If the hall is closed, you can ask the sacristan to open it for you. For info: find the sacristy as you enter the cathedral, through the main door, in the last chapel on the right.

At a glance

Biella Piano



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For more information:

Tourism Office of the City of Biella

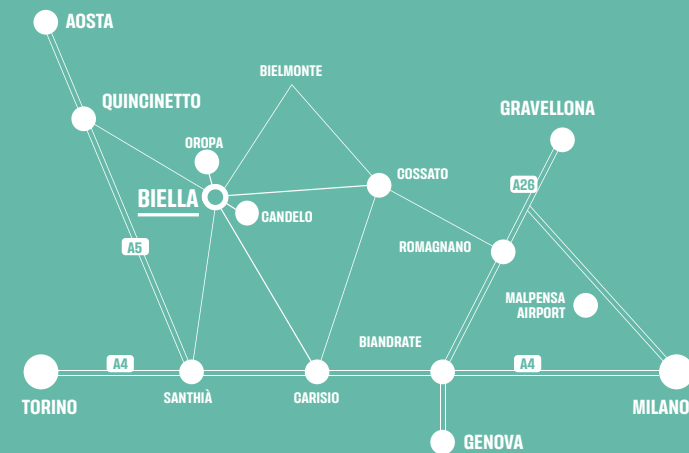
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BIELLESE: TRAVEL NOTES

The city of Biella

