

SALUZZO

Today the ancient capital of the Marquisate of Saluzzo is one of the loveliest towns in Piedmont, having preserved the layout and many of the splendid mediaeval palazzi and monuments in the old town, with harmonious later additions.

Immersed in some of the most fertile agricultural land in Northern Italy, which is full of apple and peach orchards and the home of the prized DOP cheese *Castelmagno*, Saluzzo is the home of the famous *Scuola di Alto Perfezionamento Musicale* (a specialist music school), and offers other attractions in the surrounding area: *Staffarda Abbey* and *La Manta* castle.

Its history

Caught between Piedmont, France and Liguria, for centuries the Marquisate of Saluzzo was a feudal state which, although small, was powerful and important. Its rulers encouraged art and culture, as we can see from the splendid monuments and artistic works in this unusual corner of the country, halfway between Romanesque and Gothic culture and Provençal traditions going back to the Languedoc of the *Troubadours*.

The first reliable references to the existence of Saluzzo date to shortly after 1000 AD, although archaeological finds and tradition point to earlier settlements.

The history of Saluzzo, from the mid 11th century to 1478 is linked to that of the Marquisate: until 1142 this small realm based its independence on a careful policy of alliances and marriages with France and Savoy, and this coincided with its period of greatest economic and artistic splendour.

Its fortunes began to decline when Saluzzo became closely allied with the Valois kings, after the unfortunate Savoy war of 1478.

Foreign domination ended in fact in 1589, ratified by the Treaty of Lyons of 1601, when Saluzzo was to all intents and purposes incorporated into the Duchy of Savoy.

In spite of two centuries of war and religious persecution, in the mid 18th century, Saluzzo was one of only a few areas in Piedmont not to be without food but with a flourishing economy, based on trade and silk.

After the brief period of French domination in the 18th and early 19th centuries, Saluzzo became a province in its own right until 1857, when it was incorporated into the province of Cuneo, playing an important role in Piedmontese history.

The town

Standing between the plain and the first foothills that act as a buttress to Monviso, Saluzzo is one of the most beautiful, picturesque old towns in Piedmont.

Overlooked by the imposing castle known as the *Castiglia*, Saluzzo is full of historical artefacts, maintaining the character of the mediaeval village that was at the heart of a small modern state, the Marquisate of Saluzzo.

The tour of the town starts from the majestic 15th century *Cathedral*, a sober, late Gothic building, which contains precious works of art.

You enter the old town through nearby *Porta di Santa Maria*, passing in front of the birthplace of Silvio Pellico.

Salita al Castello is the main square of the old town, bordered by patrician palazzi and dominated by the *Civic Tower* and the *Castiglia*. The tower was built in 1464 and is open to the public. From the top there is a superb view over the plain, the Alps and as far as the peak of Monviso.

The *Castiglia*, the Marchesi's castle, was begun in the 13th century. Part of the Eastern wall of the original building, used as a jail until fairly recently, the two storey keep built in 1491 and a system of passageways and steps still survive.

The *Church of San Giovanni* is the most beautiful in the town. Inside, the frescoed chapels, the Cloister and the Chapter House are all worth visiting.

But the best example of Renaissance architecture in Saluzzo is the Civic Museum in *Casa Cavassa* (15th century and once the aristocratic home of the local nobles); inside there is a display of furnishings dating from the 15th to the 19th centuries and several works of art, including the splendid painting of the "Madonna della Misericordia" (by Hans Clemer, 1497). Other churches worthy of interest are the church of *San Bernardino* (16th-19th century) on a nearby hill, the *Santuario della Consolata* (12th-20th century) and the church of *Sant'Agostino* (16th-19th century).

Staffarda Abbey

The *Abbey of Santa Maria di Staffarda* stands about nine miles from Saluzzo on the road to Cavour, a monastery built by the Cistercians in 1135. The church, convent buildings, cloister and chapter house, the visitors' quarters where pilgrims stayed, and the market wing, all survive in Romanesque-Gothic style.

La Manta castle.

A late Gothic treasure built in the early 15th century. The castle is famous for the perfectly maintained frescoes in the Baronial Hall, on the theme of Heroes and Heroines taken from the epic poem "Le Chevalier Errant". The cycle of frescoes, which have been restored to their original splendour, is one of the loveliest of European courtly Gothic art.