

# A journey in *Valle d'Aosta*

## In the heart of the Alps

With a surface area of just 3,266 km<sup>2</sup>, Aosta Valley is the smallest region in Italy.

Shaped by ancient glaciers and encircled by some of Europe's highest mountains, Aosta Valley is a typically alpine region, with over a third of it lying at an altitude of over 2,600 m.



Sheer rock faces, lofty peaks and rugged terrain make the region ideal for those seeking to push themselves to the limit and enjoy a range of exciting sports: top-class mountaineering, climbing, trekking, skiing, rafting, canoeing and downhill skiing can all be practiced here.



## Close to nature

There's more than sporting challenges and cycling routes for outdoor types who prefer to take it easy, and Aosta Valley is sure to win over the more contemplative visitor too, with its magnificent landscapes and its enviable natural heritage: it is here, in fact, that the first national park in Italy was created, and almost a third of the region is protected in order to safeguard the significant level of biodiversity.

## Art, history and culture in the valley of the 100 castles

Aosta Valley offers plenty of pleasant surprises for lovers of history and art, with an extraordinary concentration of traces from the region's rich past: prehistoric megalithic monuments, a wealth of Roman remains, over 100 mediaeval castles, towers and fortresses, which over the centuries

became Renaissance dwellings, or Romanesque and Baroque churches. This cultural heritage is kept alive through popular traditions, local crafts, food and wine, and the fact that most of the region's inhabitants speak both Italian and French.



## Things to do in *Valle d'Aosta*

### *Life in nature and sports*

Hiking, cycling, mountain biking and horseback excursions are the main activities from spring to autumn in Valle d'Aosta. The region is unique in terms of nature and environment, and here are some of the major parks and nature reserves in Italy.

For sportsmen and lovers of adrenaline and powerful emotions it is recommended the rafting and canoeing, while those seeking relaxation and contact with nature can benefit of 5 different golf courses throughout the Valle d'Aosta.



### *Mont Blanc cableway*

*A magic excursion between Italy and France*



Crossing Mont Blanc is an enchanting journey, designed around the movements of the earth rising to the sky. It is an occasion for everyone - as long as being at a high altitude is not unadvisable from a health standpoint - since it does not require significant hiking sections. 5 cableways and 1 cable car transport passengers between Italy and France, to discover the two slopes of Mont Blanc in a thrilling sequence of stretches hanging over glaciers and breathtaking views.

Inaugurated in the summer of 1947 and finished in the 1960's, The "Funivia dei Ghiacciai" is still one of the most spectacular cableways ever built, and it boasts some unique or rare technical-architectural solutions.

See all details at <http://www.montebianco.com/>

## ***Explore Aosta and its Roman ruins***

The numerous architectural monuments of Aosta are the evidence of its rich history. Visitors can appreciate the visible remains of Aosta, the Roman city, which are still in a good condition. A visit to the city is a journey in time that begins in 25 B.C, when the Romans called this city Augusta Pretoria. However, the history of Aosta began even earlier than this, when the Dora plain was inhabited. There is evidence of a necropolis in the megalithic area of **Saint Martin de Corleans**, where ancient, anthropomorphic objects were found that are now displayed in the **Museo Archeologico**. Roman structures you can visit include the **Roman theatre** - a well-preserved theater that is considered a masterpiece of late Roman provincial architecture-, most of the original city wall plus the four towers that stood at its corners, a double-arched courtyard called the **Porta Pretoria**, the remains of a cemetery, baths, apartments and more. The centerpiece of the ruins is likely the **Augustus Arch** dedicated to the Emperor Augustus. It is a sign of the presence and power of Rome, which, in 25 B.C., defeated the Salassi to establish a new colony. The Arch was probably constructed in the same year as the foundation of the city.

Aosta also boasts notable monuments from other eras like the tall, historic church of Aosta, the **Collegiata di Sant'Orso**. In a small square, the bell-tower, the church, the cloisters and a lime-tree recreate an atmosphere that takes visitors back into the medieval world of the monks.

The Valle d'Aosta official tourism website ([www.lovevda.it](http://www.lovevda.it)) provides the following 5 audio guide collections, each with specific information sheets that can be downloaded onto a Mp3:

[CHURCHES AND CASTLES](#)

[THE ALPS' SECRETS \(NATURE\)](#)

[ARCHITECTURE](#)

[MODERN ART](#)

[THE RESISTANCE](#)

## ***Fénis***

*The most spectacular castle in Valle d'Aosta*



In Fénis, you can visit the most famous castle in Valle d'Aosta. Positioned in a beautiful clearing, it presents itself well with all the aspects of a medieval castle, including embattlement wall and sighting towers.

The castle first appears in a document in 1242 as a property of the Viscounts of Aosta, the Challant family. At that time it probably was a simple keep surrounded by walls. From 1320 to 1420, under

the lordship of Aymon of Challant and of his son Boniface I of Challant, the castle was expanded to the actual appearance.

Beautiful frescos by Giacomo Jacquero, travelling master from Turin and court artist to Amadeus VIII of Savoy, can be found in the courtyard (St. George slaying the dragon to defend the princess) and in the chapel (Madonna della Misericordia).

The village is located at an altitude of 541 meters and was built in a slightly prominent area, protected at the back by a thick chestnut forest. Inhabited from Roman times to make the most of pyrite deposits in the area, Fénis was part of the Challant household in medieval times.

From March to September the castle can be visited every day from 9.00 am to 6.30 pm.

## ***The Fortress of Bard***

Already during Theodoric's reign (early 6th century A.D), sixty armed soldiers were garrisoned to defend the "Clausuræ Augustanæ" (a defence system set up to protect the borders of the Empire) in Bard. In 1034, Bard was described as "inexpugnabile oppidum", in one of the oldest references to a castle in Valle d'Aosta. The Savoys became the Lords of Bard in 1242, with Amadeus IV, driven by the insistence of the local inhabitants, who were tired of the abuse of power by Hugh of Bard, who exploited the position of his castle to levy heavy duties on travellers and merchants.

In 1661, the armies from other fortresses in Aosta Valley, including Verrès and Montjovet, converged in Bard. The castle took on renewed importance with the passage of the French army in 1704 and particularly in May 1800 on the arrival of Napoleon Bonaparte, who found a garrison of 400 Austrian men within the fortress. The defence structures of the fort were so efficient that Napoleon's army took about two weeks to overcome the Austrian defences, eventually succeeding thanks to cunning tactics. The fortress was then dismantled by Napoleon, to avoid further problems.

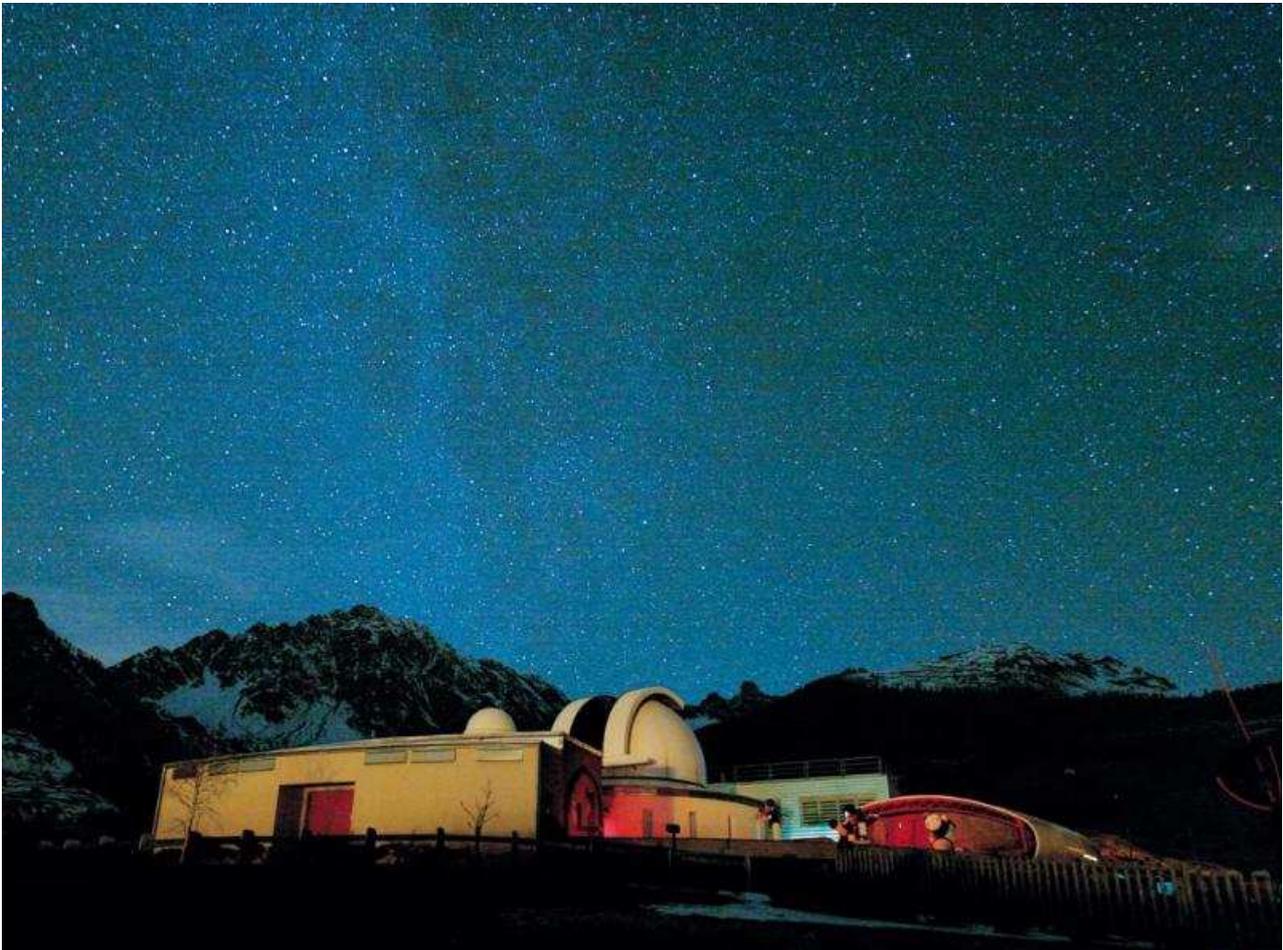


The current appearance of the fort is the result of reconstruction work commissioned by Carlo Felice, at the height of the Restoration, which, from 1830 onwards, turned it into one of the largest military structures in Valle d'Aosta. The fortress began to deteriorate at the end of the nineteenth century. It was used as a prison and then as a weapons depot. It was decommissioned in 1975 from military state property and was purchased by the Valle d'Aosta regional authority in

1990. Completely renewed in 2006, the fortress hosts the **Museum of the Alps**, the **Children's Alps**, as well as permanent and temporary exhibitions.

<http://www.fortedibard.it/en>

### ***Astronomical observatory and planetarium***



The astronomical observatory of the Aosta Valley was completed in 2003 and is quite unique in terms of its features and the variety of instruments available.

The Observatory includes a weather center and is equipped with a helium physics laboratory, a computer room, a teaching program made up of two internal exhibitions and a “Planet Pathway”: a series of illustration panels about the solar system.

In 2008 the structure was completed with a planetarium, a site equipped with a dome for entertainment purposes, educational conferences and informative encounters in the field of astronomy. “Planetarium” refers to both the building and the structure that allows for the projection, on the inside of the dome, of all types of heavenly bodies, including constellations, planets, nebulae and galaxies. What the visitor can see is a simulation of the sky.

The projection room has 67 comfortable seats. The sky projected onto the dome is a computer-generated reconstruction, made possible by 6 processors working parallel to one another.

#### **Visits at the Observatory**

Guided visits, on reservation, every day of the year except Sundays and Mondays, either at night or during the day (looking at the Sun).

From April 1st to September 30th: day 4.30 p.m. – night 9.30 p.m.

### **Planetarium visits**

From April 1st to September 30th: every Saturday at 3.00 p.m. and 6.00 p.m.

In the months of July, August and September, the Planetarium will be open also on Sunday, with visits at 4.30 p.m. and 6.00 p.m.

The observatory is about 60 km from the hotel, and you have to organize the logistics to get there. Better to take a look at <http://www.oavda.it/english/index.htm>

### ***Pré-Saint-Didier Thermal Spa***

*An unforgettable atmosphere at the foot of Mont Blanc*



The springs in the area were already known in Roman times, but the systematic use of the waters of Pré-Saint-Didier began in the middle of the 1600s, when the first foreigners came to the Alpine basin to “take the waters”.

The construction of the thermal establishment dates back to 1834, while the building which hosts the Casino was built in 1888. For over 150 years the thermal spas were one of the main attractions of Valle d’Aosta, hosting illustrious personalities and becoming the favorite holiday destination for the Italian royal family. After more than 30 years the thermal spas at Pré-Saint-Didier are re-opening; the intervention work has returned the thermal establishment to its past splendor, while preserving the architecture of the time.

The wellbeing route includes numerous practices which range from whirlpool baths to relaxing baths with still water and sub aqueous music, toning cascades, themed saunas in wooden chalets, aromatic steam baths, a mud-treatment area, color therapy rooms, aromatherapy rooms, relaxing rooms for admiring the views. An evocative walk in the water takes you to the gardens where three pools have been built, which are the boast of the entire complex. The characteristic wooden chalet saunas complete the thermal garden with windows, which give views over the Mont Blanc chain.

<http://termedipre.it/en/>

## ***Saint-Vincent Thermal Spa Complex***

The thermal spring, discovered in 1770, was originally called *Fons Salutis* (the spring of health) for its distinctive curative properties. During the recent redevelopment work on the thermal SPA facilities, a modern wellness center was added to the original spa treatment center.

The thermal treatments offered by the complex include Hydrotherapy and Inhalation Therapy, Social SPA with indoor and outdoor pools, saunas, *hammam*, emotional showers and an ice cascade, and Masso-therapy. Since relaxation is essential for rebalancing the metabolism, the SPA also has two relaxing oases, allowing guests to enjoy spending their leisure time in front of the fireplace, or admiring the mountain landscape enveloped. A gourmet buffet is at the disposal of guests, offering snacks, tisanes and drinks.

As an alternative to the Social SPA, guests may opt for customized programs, with three different private suites guaranteeing elegance, comfort and first-class treatments, as well as total privacy.



The panoramic location of the New Thermal Spa Complex can be admired from the Solarium, a terrace furnished with hydro-massage tubs, loungers, showers and changing rooms. The Solarium is the ideal place to spend some leisure time enjoying the fresh air, picking up a tan, having a quick lunchtime rest or just enjoying the splendid view as you sip an aperitif at sunset.

On the ground floor of the New Thermal Spa Complex are the bar and restaurant.

<http://www.termedisaintvincent.com/>

## ***Casino de la Vallée***

*Since 1947, your entertainment has been our only wish*



Surrounded by four of the highest mountains in Europe (Mont Blanc, Monte Rosa, Matterhorn and Gran Paradiso), the *Casino de la Vallée di Saint-Vincent* is one of the largest and most prestigious gambling-houses in Europe, opened in 1947. There are over 90 gambling tables and more than 400 slot machines for the clientele to use 364 days a year.

In addition to running the richest variety of gambling activities anywhere in Italy, the company has always been a promoter of cultural activities, which form part of a rich calendar of prestigious events and prizes, which include, for example, the famous Saint-Vincent Awards for Journalism, Cinema, TV Series and Radio.

<http://www.casinodelavallee.it/en>

## Cuisine and typical foods of *Valle d'Aosta*



Valle d'Aosta is tucked up on the French and Swiss border and the local foods and rich dishes have been greatly influenced by the culinary traditions of neighbors.

Traditionally, the people in Valle d'Aosta were known as skilled hunters and farmers, which explains the quality and variety of their food products. Local breads and pastas are often made with rye or chestnut flour, and are used in the preparation of various cold-weather soups. Like in other regions of Northern Italy, *polenta*, a type of Italian corn meal, is popular here and is often served with melted cheese. **Fontina DOP** is the most famous regional cheese and is the basis of *fonduta*, the Italian take on fondue. You will also find a considerable amount of meat served in Valle d'Aosta, thanks to the local hunting tradition. Many of the dishes are based on French preparations, like cooking game in civet, or marinating it with wine, herbs and onions. Another classic dish of the region is *carbonade*, a stew of salt-cured beef, red wine and spices.



There is also a long tradition of curing game. The typical, regional cured-meat, is **Mocetta**. Today, it is made with beef, or chamois, it used to be made out of the thigh meat of Alpine ibex. The region is also known for its flavorful and aromatic pork products, like the **Jambon de Bosses DOP** and the sweet **Lardo d'Arnad DOP**, flavored with herbs.

Other specialties of the valley are the particularly aromatic **honey**, the **Tegole Valdostane** (almond biscuits), the high altitude **wines** and the **Genepy**, a typical liquor made with mountain herbs.

## What to buy in *Valle d'Aosta*

In addition to the traditional gastronomic products, Aosta and the surrounding countryside are famous for wooden carvings and wrought iron. Traditional wood objects are toys, like the nice **Tatà**, the typical **Sabots** (wooden footwear), the colored wooden flowers and the **Grolla dell'amicizia**, a sort of friendship cup used for drinking specially prepared coffees.

