

GAVI

This verdant Piedmontese wine region is rich in medieval history and has much to offer the hungry traveller, from truffles to amarettis. Gabrielle Sander sniffs out the highlights

Why go? Nestled into lower Piedmont, either a train ride or an hour's drive from Genoa in the south and Milan in the north, Gavi is best known for the floral wines it's been producing since the 17th century. Venture forth and you'll find much more to savour in this medieval town, which is surrounded by a bountiful landscape of vineyards, dense woodlands and the curvaceous 'sweet hills of Gavi', which sweep across to the craggy Apennines and down to the Lemme Valley. As the Cortese grape harvest approaches its end, a delicious new season for food begins to unfurl, peppered with foraged black truffles and myriad wild mushrooms.

What to do Stroll Gavi's historic centre, taking in the ruby and ochre trompe l'oeil facades that hark back to Genoese rule, then peek inside the Romanesque San Giacomo church to soak up the peacock-blue vaulted ceiling and fading 700-year-old frescoes. The imposing structure you spy from every corner of town is the Forte di Gavi *associazionefortedigavi.it* which rewards visitors with far-reaching vistas. It's a 20-minute winding footpath from Piazza Dante to the top. The hourly tours (£4.50pp including English audio guide, 9.30am-5.30pm) are the only way to gain entry, and well worth it – you'll soak up a colourful history dating back to 972, from princesses to Hemingway-inspired Second World War POW camp escapees. Gavi soils conceal plenteous truffles. Unearth these pungent treasures on a trip with Truffle Hunter Italy *truffleexperience.wixsite.com/truffleexperience* and their canine sidekicks (£80pp). Pre-book a visit to biodynamic winery La Raia, where a jaunt through the art-dotted vineyards ends with a tasting of their award-winning bins and a spread championing local ingredients 00 39 0143 743685 (£18pp). Allocate a morning to visit the nearby Libarna *libarna.al.it* (free entry). This 1st-century Roman city is an evocative trip to a time when gladiators entertained crowds in the amphitheatre, with mosaics and remains to explore. Nature reserve Capanne di Marcarolo is a local favourite for hiking, mountain biking and wild swimming.

Travel information

Currency is the euro (EUR). Time is 1 hour ahead of the UK. Flight time from London to Milan Linate is 2 hours, or 2 hours 10 minutes to Genoa. Trains to Aruqata Scrivia, a five-minute bus or taxi ride from Gavi, take around an hour from either. *trenitalia.com*

Getting there

British Airways flies from London Heathrow to Milan. *ba.com*
Ryanair has flights from London Stansted to Genoa. *ryanair.com*

AVERAGE DAILY TEMPERATURES AND RAINFALL

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Min C	-1	0	1	5	8	11	13	13	11	7	3	0
Max C	4	6	9	13	17	21	24	23	20	15	9	6
mm	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	4	6	6	4

Clockwise from top left: La Raia winery; Italian purple garlic; local salami; treasured black truffle; sun-ripened tomatoes and peppers; Forte di Gavi; the tasting area at La Raia; Piedmontese grapes; a vineyard tour; one of La Raia's whites and a jar of local honey; ravioli is said to have originated here; Gavi's historic cobbled streets

Where to stay In the heart of the Gavi hills, the jolly green Locanda La Raia 00 39 0143 642860, *locandalaraia.it* is as beautiful inside as out, with 12 sunny rooms looking out to herb gardens, a spa and an indoor-to-outdoor heated pool. In the centre of Gavi, Hotel Al Castello 00 39 0143 642794, *hotelalcastello.net* combines comfortable dwellings with stellar breakfasts and fortress views. Pretty 18th-century L'Ostelliere forms part of the Villa Sparina Resort 00 39 0143 607801, *ostelliere.it* – with a winery, restaurant and Turkish bath. At Colline del Gavi 00 39 0143 342264, *golfcollinedegalvi.com* 11 rooms are teamed with two golf courses.

Where to eat and drink It's firmly asserted that ravioli was invented in Gavi. Find it and other top seasonal serves – such as, olive oil-drizzled wild ovuli mushrooms, and slithers of *testa in cassetta* ('head in a box' – a mix of pork offal, herbs and spices) – at Cantine del Gavi 00 39 0143 642458, *ristorantecantinedelgavi.it* – one of the town's oldest restaurants. Despite its name, Beer & Co 00 39 0143 643990 boasts a vast list of regional wines. Sample them in 7th-century surroundings along with slabs of Montébore cheese, porcini polenta, and speciality chocolate bonnet dessert. Book an early dinner at Locanda La Raia 00 39 0143 642860 for a sunset-dappled panorama and Piedmontese cuisine overseen by Michelin-starred chef Tommaso Arrigoni. The gnocchi with ragù (using beef from the white Fassone cows grazing freely on the land) and black truffle is a must. At family-run Caffè Del Moro 00 39 0143 642648 the *amaretti di Gavi* are a fine accompaniment to an espresso, and the 'rose and thorns' gelato made with rose petal syrup and chocolate-spiked vanilla is a popular choice.

Time running out? Nip to nearby bean-to-bar Bodrato chocolate factory to scoop up their famous 'Boero' – a grappa-soaked Garbagna cherry coated in chocolate. *bodratocioccolato.it*

Trip tip Hire an e-bike from the rental shop on Via Roma and follow one of their recommended self-guided routes through Gavi's rolling hills and lush vineyards. *hobbybici.wordpress.com*

Resources

Visit Piemonte is the official tourist board and its website offers loads of sightseeing and culinary inspiration. *visitpiemonte.com*

Further reading

Autumn in Piemonte: Food and Travels in Italy's

Northwest by Manuela Darling-Gansser (Hardie Grant, £12.99) will give you the know-how to cook up a taste of Gavi back home.

