VALLE D'AOSTA Valle d’Aosta fra Valli e Castelli - 4 giorni

VALLE D’AOSTA Valle d'Aosta among valleys and castles - 4 days

**Day 1: Fort of Bard and Issogne Castle Bard** is immediately recognizable by the fairy-tale fortress that dominates the village from above, situated near a gorge at the point where the Dora Baltea valley touches its narrowest point. Bard, the smallest village in the Aosta Valley, is home to just over 130 people and is one of the most beautiful villages in Italy. Climb to the Fort with panoramic lifts, retracing the famous Napoleonic siege. The **Fort** has housed not only Napoleon but also Camillo Benso, Conte di Cavour, within its mighty medieval walls. Today it is the home of a very interesting Museum of the Alps where, thanks to modern audiovisual technologies, the Alps are described in all their physical, geological, naturalistic, geographical and climatic aspects. A second part covers themes related to the mountain population, from prehistory to the present day, showing the cultural adaptations and strategies that man has adopted to live in a hostile environment.After lunch, a visit to the **Issogne Castle**, miraculously preserved, which is one of the masterpieces of the Valdostan Middle Ages. Entering the palace you will find yourself in the courtyard, surrounded by buildings on whose walls are portrayed the coats of arms of the Challant family, passing by the pomegranate fountain you continue towards the hallway decorated with precious fanlights. Visit the interior of the castle: the dining room, the kitchen and the baronial room, the walls frescoed with landscapes, hunting scenes and the Judgement of Paris; on the 1st floor, the chapel, with its vaulted ceilings, frescoes on the walls and the Gothic altar in carved and gilded wood; on the 2nd floor, the room known as the "King of France's room", with its coffered ceiling decorated with lilies.Stop in **Arnad**, a centuries-old mountain village where ancient secrets have been handed down from generation to generation, for a visit to the sausage factory and tasting of the Lardo di Arnad. **Curiosity**: On the last weekend of August the famous "Valle d'Aosta Lard d'Arnad D.O.P." festival is celebrated in Arnad, a tradition that has been repeated for almost 50 years and that attracts tens of thousands of tourists every year.

**Day 2: Aosta and Fénis** Visit to the historical pedestrian center of Rome in the Alps, **Aosta**, with the main roman and medieval remains: Augustus Arch, Collegiate Church and Cloister of Sant'Orso, Porta Praetoria, Roman Theatre, Cryptoportico Forense, Town Hall, Hotel des Etats.  **Curiosity**: the smallest region of Italy has a particular linguistic identity: most of the inhabitants are bilingual, that is, in addition to italian, they also speak patois, a dialect derived from Franco-Provençal. Patois is a language very close to french. It is even taught in schools and used, together with italian, in official documents.Moving to **Fenis** and walking up to the fourteenth-century castle: placed on a part of the territory without natural barriers, it combines the characteristics of the fortification with those of the noble residence. Externally it’s one of the greatest examples of medieval military architecture, with towers and crenellated walls. Inside there is a refined fifteenth-century residence.

Visit to the small mountain distillery "La Valdotaine", with its historical and monumental alembic. **Curiositiy**: the alpine herbs that grow at altitudes close to the perennial glaciers, preserve, in addition to their well-known therapeutic properties, the particular essences (artemisia glacialis and artemisia weber) of a typical Valle d'Aosta distillate: **génépy**, whose greenish yellow appearance and full, bitterish taste derive precisely from these essences, harvested sparingly and then selected and dried with meticulous care.

**Day 3: Cogne** Near the village of Pont d'Ael, located on the right of the road from Aymavilles to Cogne, stands the **Pondel Roman aqueduct bridge** over the Grand-Eyvia stream. It’s a magnificent work of masonry and cutting stone blocks, about 56 m. high and more than 50 m. long. The restoration and enhancement works now allow an exciting ring-route with a passage over the bridge going back to the original sense of water flow and return with an internal passage of 50 m. on glass plates that allow you to appreciate the impressive work. The site is accessible with difficulty to disabled people due to the presence of architectural barriers.Proceed to **Valnontey**, in the heart of the Gran Paradiso National Park with a visit to the Paradisia Alpine Botanical Garden. Easy hike in the valley bottom, at the foot of the **Gran Paradiso** glaciers, to discover the alpine environment in search of ibexes, chamois and marmots, trying to see some eagles flying. Proceed to **Lillaz** for a short walk to the famous Lillaz waterfalls which, with three water falls of the Urtier torrent for a total of 150 metres in height, is unique. Visit to the village of **Cogne**, a beautiful alpine village, with shops and the the interesting atelier of hand-making lace, a traditional production of Cogne. Visit to the parish church, tour of the village and inevitable photo of the iron fountain of 1800, classic postcard of Cogne. **Curiosity**: **Crema di Cogne** is a typical Valdostan dessert, a delight for the palate, which melts in the mouth leaving a wonderful taste of the mountains, including chocolate, cream and almonds. What is the perfect wine to accompany this delicacy? The experts from Valle d'Aosta recommend the **Chambave Muscat**, to be drunk very fresh.

**Day 4: Val d'Ayas** From Verres, up the **Val d'Ayas**, a beautiful valley situated below Monte Rosa, full of Walser villages with traditional wooden houses. **Curiosity: The Walser** ( a native of the canton Valais) are a population of Germanic origin who live in the Alpine regions around the Monte Rosa massif. They call their language "Titsch", a term related to the Italian word " tedesco" (German). The Walser villages in Val d'Aosta are very small groups of a few isolated houses on steep slopes. They are impressive for their beauty: old stone and wooden houses, covered in the upper part by trellises designed to dry the hay and often decorated with colourful flowers; fountains with large basins; outdoor ovens, dry stone walls and narrow paths that pass between the houses.

Along the climb, there are the Castles of **Verres** and **Graines**, clinging to steep heights. Visit to the village of **Antagnod**, among wooden huts with sharp roofs, picturesque cottages and roads surrounded by low fences, the Church of Saint Martin de Tours stands out with its rich baroque altar and... superb views of the glaciers of **Monte Rosa.** Return from the panoramic alpine pass **Col de Joux** and descent with a stop at the old Romanesque church of **Moron**. Short visit to the small town of **Saint-Vincent**. **Curiosity**: Saint-Vincent has been frequented as a spa resort since the 19th century when it also welcomed illustrious personalities such as Giosué Carducci and Silvio Pellico. Its waters, discovered by Jean-Baptiste Perret in 1770, have beneficial effects on the skin and healing properties for the liver, stomach and intestinal disorders. Transfer to **Ussel** Castle, on the opposite side of the valley, on an impressive and steep promontory. Ussel Castle represents a turning point in the military architecture of Valle d'Aosta, in fact we are in the presence of the first example in Valle d'Aosta of a Monobloc castle, the last evolutionary phase of the medieval castle, which marks the passage between the contemporary castle of Fénis and the rigid forms of Verrès. The castle was used as a prison, until it was completely abandoned. **Curiosity**: in 1983 Baron Marcel Bich, after having bought the castle from the Passerin d'Entrèves family, donated it to the Autonomous Region of Valle d'Aosta, which renovated it. Marcel Bich, whose family was originally from Valtournenche, was a famous French industrialist with inborn business instinct: after having bought the patent of the ballpoint pen from his inventor Birò, he improved it and spread it all over the world under the name of BIC. Its link with the land of origin has allowed us today to appreciate one of the jewels of the millenary history of Valle d'Aosta, restored in all its glory.