

DISCOVER ITALIA!



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DISCOVER...

Pavia

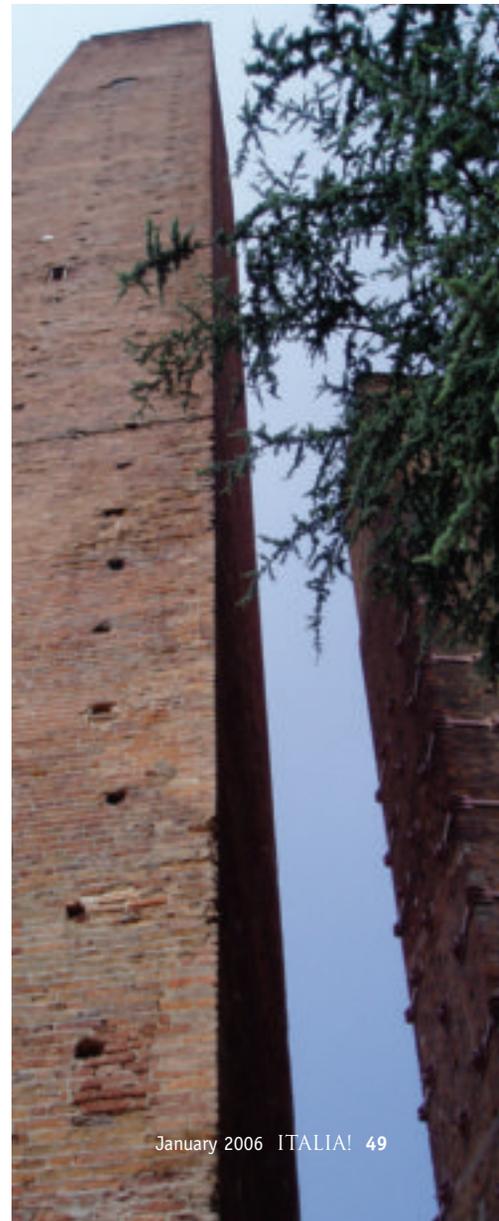
Tucked away in the Lombardy plains, the heart of medieval Italy beats on. **Marie Barbieri** rediscovers why for centuries the Pavese province attracted Italy's most noble families.

Sadly all too often overlooked by the international visitor, the province of Pavia is often referred to as 'Lombardy's best-kept secret'. This might have been what attracted the Milanese Visconti family when they conquered Pavia in 1359, leaving many Pavians fearing that the medieval capital of the Lombard kingdom would enter a state of decline. Yet the noble family was instantly drawn to Pavia's stately, refined charm and devoted their creative energies to the town.

Despite being overshadowed by its imposing northern neighbour, the arrival of the Viscontis marked a period of regeneration in Pavia, which soon became a town of high art, culture and intellect. Once settled, the family founded the town's university, the Castello Visconteo and the Certosa di Pavia in just one extraordinary century. The affection they endowed Pavia, and the reasons why it fascinated them so, are still tangible to the visitor today.

Walking around Pavia, you feel invisible; the un-territorial locals silently accept you as part of their town's fabric. Through a process of osmosis, you blend into their civilised and welcoming society. Pavia is at peace with itself.

Nowhere is Pavia's culture more felt than in its medieval centre. Hidden behind the Strada Nuova, the University of Pavia is one of the oldest in Italy. This 9th-century school of law was inaugurated as a university in 1361 by Charles IV and Galeazzo II Visconti. It later became established in the hands of Ludovico Sforza (known as Ludovico il Moro due to his dark looks). ➤



WHAT TO SEE

CASTELLO VISCONTEO 1

Via XI Febbraio, Pavia

☎ +39 038 233 853

Built by the notorious, yet influential Gian Galeazzo, this 14th-century castle was the Visconti's pleasure-cove. Today, its frescoed rooms house the civic museums, with a beautifully intricate cypress and oak model of Pavia's Duomo. *Open 9am–2pm Tue–Fri; 10am–7pm weekends. Closed Mondays.*

SAN TEODORO 2

The river end of Via Porta Calcinara, Pavia

Tucked away in cobbled streets, this redbrick church houses the statue of San Teodoro, who cradles the city of Pavia in his arms. The two frescoes, *Veduta di Pavia*, are bird's-eye depictions of Pavia in the 1500s. Recognised as Pavia's first maps, they still baffle analysts as it is unknown how the anonymous artist mapped the city with such accuracy.

BEREGUARDO'S PONTE DI BARCHE 3

Originally straddling the River Po, this floating bridge is one of the few surviving examples of its kind. Only 30km from Pavia, summer sees locals flooding to the river banks to tan. Follow the Ticino north-west, via a picture-postcard drive through precisely aligned *pioppi* rows.

LEONARDO DA VINCI EXHIBITION 4

Piazza San Francesco, 8, Vigevano

☎ +39 033 5520 7542

Engineering enthusiasts can easily while away a day at Ludovico il Moro's water mill. The superbly reproduced models of Leonardo's machines have been crafted from his manuscripts by skilled engineers. *Open Weekends from 10.30am–6.30pm.*

PONTE COPERTO 5

River-end of Strada Nuova, Pavia

Cross at your own risk, as legend has it that the devil created this bridge on Christmas Eve in 999! Believing that the bridge was in exchange for the first soul to cross it, clever locals sent a dog over to trick Satan. Destroyed during World War II and rebuilt in 1951 with granite pillars repositioned to support its roof, it leads over to the rural suburb of Borgo Ticino.

BASILICA DI SAN MICHELE 6

Via San Michele, by Via Cavallotti, Pavia

This 12th-century sandstone church, rebuilt following an earthquake, is a fine example of Romanesque architecture. Central to Pavia's past as Italy's capital, it was frequently used for coronations. Its rich sculptural decoration reveals carvings of griffins and dragons battling humans. Look out for the controversial crucifix, which uniquely depicts Christ with open eyes and a calm face, no crown of thorns or wounds, and parallel feet.



Piazza Ducale is the emblem of Renaissance style.



The work of the devil? Rebuilt Ponte Coperto, with its old foundations in the foreground.



The perfectly combed hills of the Oltrepo Pavese.

DON'T MISS

THE TOWN OF VARZI

In ancient Varzi you will find the world-famous and now DOC (protected) salami. Medieval in origin and delicate and sweet in flavour, it is sold at the cattle market on Fridays; on the first Sunday in June you can catch the Salami Festival. While you are here, take some time to visit The Temple of Fraternity in nearby Cella. It is constructed from recycled parts of ships, town halls and churches destroyed during World War II.

➤ Many important literary and academic figures brought international recognition to the university, including the renowned poet and professor of Italian literature Ugo Foscolo. Leonardo da Vinci, Christopher Columbus and Alessandro Volta were all students in Pavia. Indeed, it was here that Volta changed the world forever in 1799 by inventing the battery. Today, it remains one of the leading universities for the study of engineering and commerce.

Walking around Pavia, you feel invisible; locals accept you as part of the town's fabric.

Walk through the university into Piazza Leonardo da Vinci and you will be humbled by Pavia's landmark medieval towers. There are only three left in 'The City of One Hundred Towers', as Pavia is so often referred to in ancient texts. These 11th-century structures were built more as symbols of family status than for protection; enemy families would demolish each others' towers during conflicts.

"There used to be four of those until 1989", offered a student as I craned my neck to photograph their scale. "After the last one fell," she continued, "the Pisa council decided

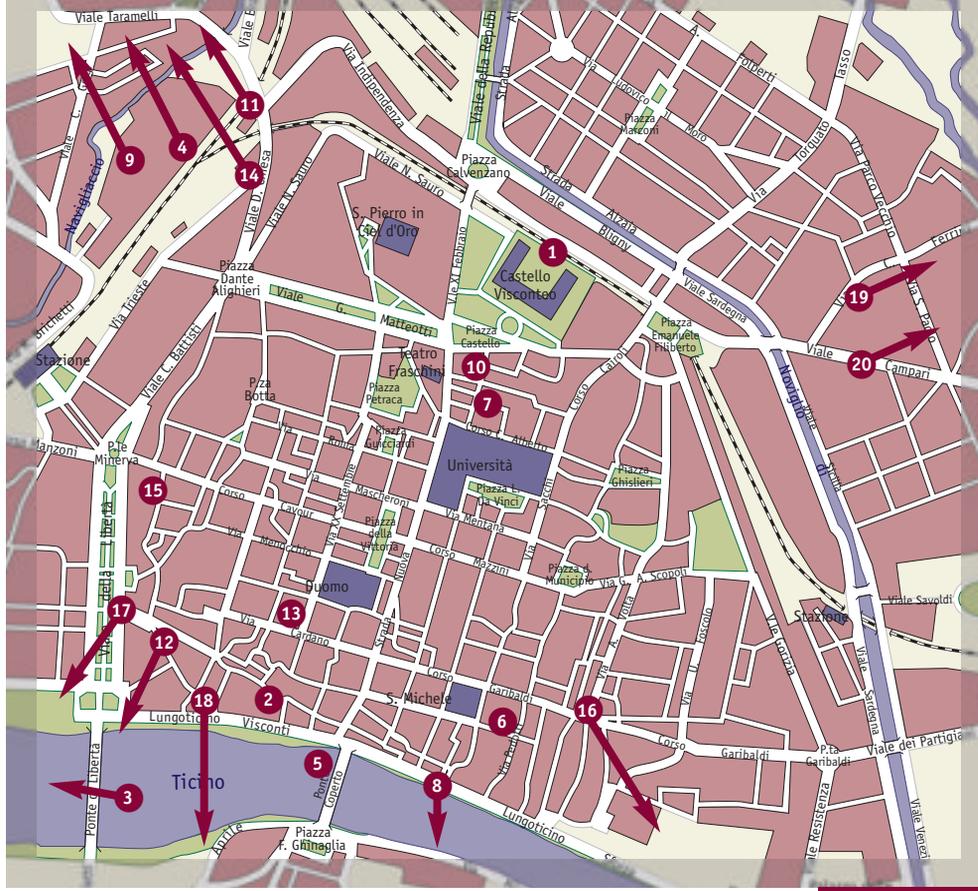
to stabilise its leaning tower." Shockingly, when the Romanesque tower by Piazza del Duomo suddenly collapsed in March of that year, it killed four people.

TO BE SEEN AND NOT HEARD

I travelled eight kilometres north to find the colossal Certosa di Pavia. The first stone of this 14th-century masterpiece, encapsulating Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque styles, was laid by Gian Galeazzo Visconti, the despotic ruler of Milan.

Prompted by the wish of his second wife (and cousin) Caterina, the Duke began donating funds for its construction in 1393, employing over 300 people. It was dedicated to the Madonna delle Grazie and named after the inhabiting Carthusian monks, who led a life of silent penitence.

Alas, when Gian Galeazzo died in the plague of 1402, the monastery was not completed. Still, he departed only after adding to his will an obligation for his son to donate 10,000 florins per year to the Certosa's continuing construction, which extended over two centuries.



Intended as the family's mausoleum, the Visconti's mark on this monastery is indelible. Gian Galeazzo's funeral is narrated by the marble bas-relief on the left-hand-side of the entrance, displaying with formidable perspective the procession of mourners carrying the Certosa, with its then-incomplete facade. His corpse, alongside that of his first wife, (Isabella of Valois), lies within the elaborate tomb on the right side of the transept. The funeral atmosphere planned by Gian Galeazzo is still palpable today as you wade through the Certosa's heavy silence.

Both the Viscontis and the Sforzas are represented by Bergognoni's transept frescoes, with Gian Galeazzo presenting the Certosa itself to the Virgin Mary. Opposite the founder's mausoleum lie the marble statues of Ludovico il Moro and his wife Beatrice d'Este, who funded the decoration of the monastery. Sculpted by Cristoforo Solari in 1497, the statues had been commissioned by Ludovico il Moro himself on Beatrice's passing.

Followed only by the echo of your footsteps, you can wander through Guiniforte Solari's large cloister (the monks' living quarters), which consists of 24 cells framed by 122 terracotta arches, each with individually carved and unique cornices. Entering a monk's cell is a

sobering experience; the opening by the door is where he would receive his only daily meal, to be eaten in silence and without being seen. Carthusian monks would spend their lives in their solitary cells, concentrating on prayer and theological study.

Since the late 1960s, the Certosa has been home to Cistercian monks, who have since opened their doors to visitors. They run services, cultivate the adjoining fields and distil herbal liqueurs for the onsite shop.

The corridor approaching the shop is full of intriguing panels detailing the monks' herbal infusions. All their experience in blending herbs comes together in displays on how their teas can help medical conditions such as high cholesterol and hypertension. The range of products are sold by the monks themselves, along with a selection of chocolate, honey and liqueurs – all made on the premises.

NOBLE DELIGHT

If you head north-west over the river Ticino, you will be welcomed by the Castello di Vigevano and its Piazza Ducale. Arguably, Vigevano's castle and the adjoining gem of a square are the most prestigious architectural compositions in Lombardy.

Both of the dynasties by which medieval Lombardy is known – the Viscontis and the Sforzas

DON'T MISS

MUSEO DELLA CALZATURA
Vigevano is the birthplace of shoe production. This museum's first shoes were donated in the 1950s by its founder, Pietro Bertolini (later knighted). Now, 300 pairs chart the history of footwear, from the 15th-century to post-modern designs. During the site's recent excavation, one of Beatrice D'Este's platform shoes from 1490 was discovered. You will also see the shoes of Mussolini, Marilyn Monroe and the late Pope John Paul II. (Castello di Vigevano. Closed on Mondays. €2.50 entry.)

WHERE TO EAT

BAR BORDONI 7

Via Bordonni, 24, Pavia
☎ +39 038 221 652

This historic bar in the town centre has maintained the same menu for the last 30 years. Relax in its solid oak furnishings and choose from 52 varieties of *panini* and *focaccine*.

TRATTORIA AL CONFINE 8

Frazione Canova, Caminata
☎ +39 052 3993 029

Perched at 600 metres in combed vineyards, this one-time customs-house enjoys sweeping views across the Oltrepo Pavese. Their unique cuisine comprises mini-starters followed by mains, desserts, local wines and liqueurs – all inclusive in the set menu at €29.

PIZZERIA GAUDI 9

Via XX Settembre, 14, Vigevano
☎ +39 038 1690 474

Its post-modern interior with fragmented mirrors is somewhat unexpected just off historic Piazza Ducale, but Pizzeria Gaudi's cutting-edge menu complements its decor. The gorgeous *strozzapreti con porcini* never fails to impress.

OSTERIA IL SENATORE 10

Corso Mazzini, 8, Pavia
☎ +39 038 225 954

One of Pavia's oldest establishments, Il Senatore offers quality dishes such as grilled swordfish marinated in pink peppers. Live jazz bands make for a lively and sophisticated atmosphere.

CHALET DELLA CERTOSA 11

Piazzale Monumento, 1, Certosa di Pavia
☎ +39 038 2934 935

In a stunning setting, a favourite spot for wedding couples, this restaurant overlooks the Certosa. Since 1881 it has catered for its diners on its canopied veranda and pretty open balcony. All meals are freshly homemade with fixed price menus.

GOI 12

Via Togliatti, 2, San Martino Siccomario
☎ +39 038 2498 887

If a local speciality beckons, make your way to the heart of Pavia's rice fields. This upmarket *trattoria* serves traditional risottos softened by background jazz.

RESTAURANT PIZZERIA PALINURO 13

Via Teodolinda 38, Pavia
☎ +39 038 222 266

Air-conditioned and with terrace dining during the summer months, Pizzeria Palinuro is noted for its speciality fare, priding itself on producing unique and quality dishes. Its location in the historic centre of Pavia makes it convenient for a quick bite while sightseeing.

WHERE TO STAY

CASA SCARANO B&B 14

Via Valletta Fogliano, 141, Vigevano

☎ +39 038 1341 929

You will be warmly welcomed into this homely country house close to the Renaissance town of Vigevano. Rooms are light, airy and comfortable, plus mountain bikes are provided for guests.

Double room €50

HOTEL MODERNO 15

Viale Vittorio Emanuele, 41, Pavia

☎ +39 038 2303 401

www.hotelmoderno.it

These lavishly furnished en-suite rooms are air-conditioned and soundproofed. Access to the health centre is inclusive of the price. Pop into its stylish bar for a late-night tippie. Double room €140

LA CA' VECCHIA B&B 16

Via Casa Vecchia, 15, Rea, Pavia

☎ +39 038 5950 016

A country house located on the banks of the River Po near the Oltrepo Pavese hills. Sit in their kiwi garden and soak up the tranquillity of the area. Basic, clean and spacious rooms.

CASCINA BELCREDI 17

Via San Fedele, 11, Sommo

☎ +39 038 2402 189

A very friendly atmosphere awaits at one of Sommo's oldest buildings, where the town's bread was once baked in their courtyard. Double room €60

PRESIDENT HOTEL TERME 18

Via Perosi, 5, Salice Terme

☎ +39 038 391 941

www.president-hotel.it

All rooms have a smart modernist décor. Each comes with balcony overlooking the hotel's private garden and swimming pool. This spa hotel makes full use of the local sulphuric water sources, used medicinally since Roman times. Double room €104

PLAZA HOTEL 19

Via Togliatti, 39, Pavia

☎ +39 038 2559 413

Located inside the Ticino Park, the Plaza attracts an international clientele with American-style rooms and buffet breakfast. Double room €140

CASTELLO DI LUZZANO 20

Frazione Luzzano, Rovescala

☎ +39 052 3863 277

www.castelloluzzano.it

If the area's castles have given you a taste for medieval living, stay in the estate of this ancient castle, in a self-contained apartment. Nestled within its own DOC vineyards, it has a restaurant serving their own Luzzano wine. Digging is taking place to unveil a Roman villa dating back to the 1st century. One-bedroom apartment €105



Symbols of power – the medieval towers of Pavia's stately past.



The peaceful cloister within Pavia's Castello Visconteo.



Castello Visconteo's delicately manicured and tranquil gardens.

DON'T MISS

TEATRO FRASCHINI

This bell-shaped theatre on the Strada Nuova opened for the local nobility in 1773. Open to the general public from 1869, it was renamed after the Pavia-born tenor Gaetano Fraschini. This 750-seater hosts performances of drama, dance and concerts and, of course, opera, but its four rows of theatre boxes, an extraordinary sight, are perhaps its most notable attribute.

➤ instinctively took to Vigevano for entertaining nobility, using the castle a venue for receiving Europe's royalty.

The first phase of construction began in 1341 under the Viscontis, who developed the Maschio, ducal palace and the Strada Coperta, a covered road acknowledged as one of the finest examples of medieval military engineering. It was designed to enable the duke of Milan and his horsemen to leave and re-enter the castle secretly. I too enjoyed this anonymity as I stole through the sunray-dappled passage.

The Sforza family took over in 1450, adding the falconry, the stables and the ladies' quarters created for Beatrice d'Este (Ludovico's wife, who died at the age of 22), all of which benefited from artistic embellishments by Bramante and Leonardo da Vinci. The Florentine genius is believed to have been inspired by the Sforza stables when he designed his model of 'The Perfect Stable'.

Ludovico il Moro restored the ducal palace with its fresco-adorned halls and rooms during the 15th century, proud of the fact that it was one of the largest fortresses in Europe.

Re-opened to the general public in 1996 after 30 years, museum exhibitions and musical festivals take place within its cavernous dungeons. As I stalked further down into their

arterial network of underground passages, I found myself taking a haunting step back into the past.

THE LIVING ROOM

Known affectionately by locals as 'the city's living room', neighbouring Piazza Ducale was commissioned by Ludovico il Moro as a stately forecourt to the castle and a grand entrance to the ducal palace.

Bramante's welcoming intentions certainly worked on me. This early Renaissance masterpiece is universally defined as one of the most beautiful squares in Italy. Indeed it is: its three frescoed sides are trellised with arched porticos, themselves supported by 84 granite columns.

If you happen to be here in October, you can see the annual Palio delle Contrade (a celebratory and competitive festival) taking place. This is a sophisticated extravaganza re-enacting the 15th-century noble ceremonies of the Sforzas.

Sealed by the 1680 concave baroque façade of St Ambrogio cathedral, the square is 15th-century Lombard architecture at its best. Already working on the castle, Bramante designed its 64-metre-high Torre del Bramante, the highest point in town. The view from the top is nothing short of stunning. This is the spot from which to appreciate ➤



Torre del Bramante overlooking Piazza Ducale and Vigevano's castle.



The curved façade of St Ambrogio perfectly conceals the misaligned cathedral from the square.



The beautifully carved saints adorning the facade of the Certosa.



University students recharging their energies by Alessandro Volta.

GETTING THERE

► BY PLANE

From Heathrow you can fly with BA to Milan's Malpensa or Linate airports. Birmingham and Manchester passengers can fly to Malpensa with Alitalia. Ryanair flies from Stansted to Milan (Bergamo).

• With hire car:

From Malpensa airport, take the A8 towards Milan and Genova, heading for the A7. Exit at Bereguardo Pavia Nord.

• From Linate airport:

Take the Tangenziale Est motorway towards Bologna and Genova, followed by the Tangenziale Ovest towards Genova. This leads to the A7 and onto the Bereguardo Pavia Nord exit.

• Car hire companies:

Alamo, at both Linate and Malpensa, offers car rental from €46 per day.

www.alamo.com

Avis, in Pavia, offers car rental from €57 per day. They are located at Viale Cremona, 19. www.avis.com

► BY TRAIN

Take the Eurostar from Waterloo to Paris, then the TGV to Milan. Trains run from Milan Central to Pavia. www.trenitalia.it

► BY CAR

Take the Eurotunnel or ferry to Calais and head for Milan. 30km south of the Milan ring-road, join the A7 motorway for Bereguardo Pavia Nord.

► GETTING AROUND

Pavia's bus network is run by ASM-LINE. You can purchase a ten-journey multi-trip pass for €7.75, or a one-day pass offering unlimited travel for €3.

DON'T MISS

THE DUOMO

Before building began in 1488, the Romanic churches of San Stefano and Santa Maria del Popolo stood on the site of Pavia's Renaissance cathedral. The Duomo, partly planned by Bramante, is yet to have its marble facade completed. It is crowned by Italy's third-largest dome (after Rome and Florence) at 90 metres high, underneath which, close to the heart of the locals, are Carlo Sacchi's paintings of San Siro's life: Pavia's patron saint, painted by Pavia's most famous artist. Also inside is the saint's tomb (Piazza Duomo, off Via Omodeo).

► the disarming intricacy and harmony of Piazza Ducale and its surrounding areas.

THE DA VINCI CONNECTION

'Rice is born in water, but dies in wine'; nowhere is this Italian saying more relevant than in the province of Pavia, world-famous for its rice and wine. Of the many notable figures from Pavia's past, the one who left the biggest mark on the area's landscape is arguably Leonardo da Vinci, who contributed to the task of draining the River Po's marshlands by designing the necessary drainage channels.

As a result of his work, rice has become a staple food of the Pavese, with fields flooded and drained in May and the grain harvested in October. Italy's premier rice brand, Riso Scotti, is based in Pavia and is the largest European producer.

It was the monks of the Certosa who created the risotto that this province is renowned for. *Risotto alla Certosina* (traditionally made with frogs, prawns, peas and mushrooms) made use of abundant local resources and was considered a delicacy by the nobility. Nowadays, you can find this dish in most specialised restaurants.

Second only to rice, wine – particularly that from the Oltrepo Pavese region – is the province's other main industry. The area is known

globally for its dessert wines such as Moscato, Malvasia and the sparkling Sangue di Giuda (Judah's blood).

In the heart of the Moscato valleys, between Volpara and Molinella, lie the vineyards of Angelo Rampuzzi. Since 1800 his family has been harvesting grapes, rigorously picked by hand, on their ten hectares of 250-metre-altitude vineyards.

Angelo produces the ubiquitous Bonarda and Pinot Nero, but specialises in the red and white Moscato varieties. He proudly explained that: "Both of these are dessert wines. The red I make with shrivelled overripe grapes for their higher sugar content and, uniquely, I grow the white alongside my yellow peach trees. This lends it a sweet peachy aroma." He leant towards me, eyebrows lifted, adding: "I am the only one to do this..."

Angelo runs the monthly barbecue and wine-tasting event held at the Tempio del Moscato (by the church in Volpara), where local produce is at its best. His Golferenzo vineyard is also open to visitors (for a free guided tour of the production process and a wine-tasting session, call him on 0385 993 40).

You cannot help yourself becoming immersed in the charm of Pavia, its subtle society and ancestral grandeur always ready to impress. **1**