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IN THE VALLEYS SEASON BY SEASON

SPRING: everything turns colored, the herons nest, the peregrine falcon dances his love parade

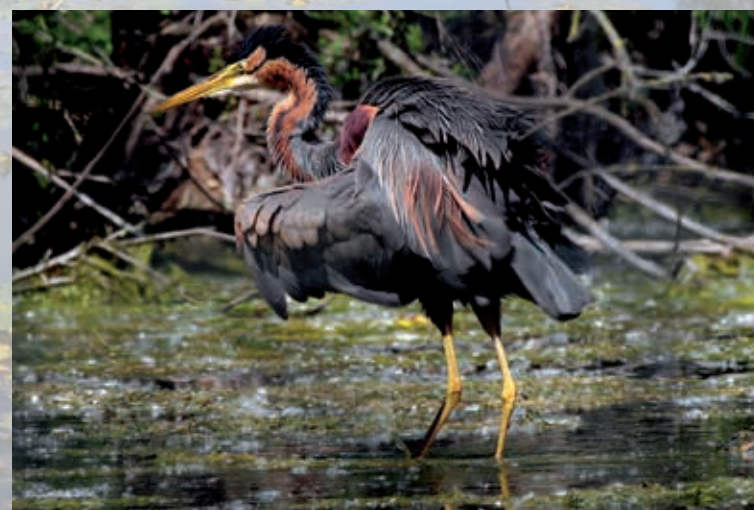
SUMMER: the lotus flower blooms, sidewalk artists and cotechino at the Feast of the Assumption in Grazie

AUTUMN: trekking, canoe, bike, but then.. let's go grapes harvesting

WINTER: a floating nativity scene on the river

ALL YEAR ROUND: guided tours and then.. let's sit down at the table to taste the best from the Valleys!

HOSTEL, B&B, FARM HOLIDAYS, MUSEUMS, CANOE RENTALS, BOAT EXCURSIONS, EXHIBITIONS, TYPICAL PRODUCTS AND SPECIALTIES, LOCAL HANDICRAFT, BIRDPWATCHING, TRADITIONS.



CRAFTS

The cobblestones of many streets and squares in Mantua are made of stones coming from the Mincio river and almost every old house in the inner city has woven cane ceilings. Together with hunting and fishing, now banned, water-related jobs were part of the economic system of the Mincio valleys. This is the reason why building those tapered, flat-bottomed boats for reed picking was once a flourishing activity. Proof is an old caulker's workshop, which can be visited in Rivalta sul Mincio. Twining to make baskets and flasks is another tradition which has been kept alive thanks to educational labs in Rivalta, in the visitor center of the park.

FLAVORS

The cuisine of the prince and the poor, in the EDEN of the Mincio valleys, taste has its own special place. Risotto with saltarèi (tiny freshwater shrimps), river prawns, or psina, tiny rice field fish, but also pumpkin ravioli and meat agnoli, riso alla pilota (sausage risotto) and bigoi con le sardele (pasta with sardines): it's the pasta dishes that reveal the ambivalent nature of this way of cooking, flavors that show the fruitful encounter of land and river, a double soul fully disclosing in traditional menus. The fish specialties of the Mincio valleys par excellence are fried catfish and luccio in salsa, that is pike in either white or Rivaltese sauce (with tomatoes, lemon and capers). If we turn to meat dishes, on the other hand, tradition is about salami, cicciole (compressed leftover pieces of pork), graspietà (minced pork lard) to be enjoyed with polenta and cotechino, which is traditionally cooked even in the middle of August during the Ancient Fair in Grazie di Curtatone. As for the desserts, the renowned sbrisolona is the symbol of this land, together with the Helvezia and the Greek cake.



FIELD TRIPS INTO THE NATURE

- Guided excursions for groups of 10 people on foot, by bike, by boat

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 itineraries, events, maps, boat trips information

THE WONDERS OF EDEN

Holiday offers in the Mincio valleys

- Two nights, three days
- Art, nature and traditions Tastings Family specials
- Dates to be agreed** (3 days / 2 nights) **from Euro 90.00 per person**
- Points of interest: Rivalta, Grazie and Soave
- Available in Italian – English - German

• Info at:
I Viaggi di Heron Tour
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THE MINCIO VALLEYS

ITALY, LOMBARDY, MANTUA
EDEN EUROPEAN DESTINATION OF EXCELLENCE – RUNNER UP 2009



MINCIO PARK

Managing authority of the Natural Reserve "Mincio Valleys"
 Natural Reserve and EDEN Destination runner up 2009

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THE MINCIO VALLEYS

A natural treasure chest that wraps up the Mincio river in its middle section, intertwined stretches of water which grow into lakes and then back into the river: it's the Regional Natural Reserve "Mincio Valleys", which has been awarded as European Destination of Excellence (EDEN). A little gem of excellences, old villages and records that equals the more famous regions of Camargue or the Po Delta. "The Mincio Valleys" in the heart of the northern Italian plain between the Garda lake and the Po river, and at the core of the Mincio Park, are one of the widest and among the most important freshwater wetlands. On the background, Mantua, the realm-city of the Gonzaga, framed by hygrophilous grasslands, groves of reeds and fens. A swamp environment inhabited by herons and their colonial nests, diurnal birds of prey, grebes and ducks. Colorful mosaics adorn this paradise on Earth: white water lilies lamineti, hibiscus blossoms and the floating isles of lotus flowers blooming in all their exotic charm during summer months. The restless coming and going of flying silhouettes, the symphony of birds singing and their multicolored feathers portray the magic vivacity of this environment, which is perfect to be explored either on a motorboat or in a canoe, or quietly by bike, among groves of reeds and water lilies, in a silence broken only by the sudden leaps of little bitterns, black-crowned night herons, purple herons and kingfishers.



OLD VILLAGES IN THE VALLEYS

The lush vegetation of the Mincio valleys surrounds the waterside towns of Rivalta and Grazie, the villages of the Eden that men built in alliance with the river, such as Mantua, the city of the Renaissance. They show a century-long harmonious cohabitation of man and river which still goes on today on its fundamental pillars: environmental conservation, cultural traditions and sustainable tourism.



RIVALTA SUL MINCIO

The museum, the hostel, the canoes

Major town in the municipality of Rodigo, the history and everyday life of Rivalta sul Mincio are inextricably intertwined with the Mincio river. The oldest houses, small lanes and the church were built only a few steps away from the Mens, the seaway source of sustenance for the village: here, until a few years ago, the most common activities were fishing and reed picking. Nowadays fishermen have become boatmen and the prevailing activity is now river tourism, both on motorboats or solar boats, and canoeing. In the heart of the natural reserve of the Mincio valleys, tourists will find the visitor center (at the loghino Ariello) and the Ethnographic Museum of the River Crafts, whose education itineraries document and describe the life on the river and the activities that once made the economy of the region thriving. In Corte Mincio there is also a youth hostel, a canoeing center and landing stages to set off for guided excursions on the Mincio valleys.



GRAZIE

Sidewalk artists, boat trips

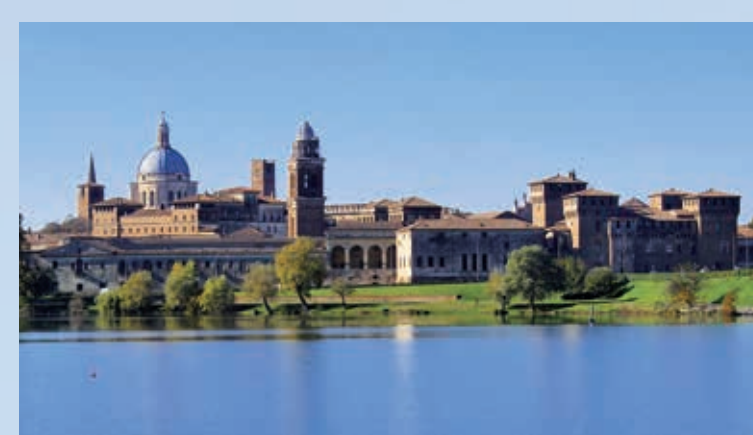
On the right bank of the river lies the village of Grazie di Curtatone, a place of local worship par excellence: it's right here that in 1399 Francesco I Gonzaga had the Shrine of Our Lady of Grace built as a vow to the Virgin Mary, while the plague raged in the city. Vibrant sign of popular worship, its inner walls are adorned with a long line of statues made of different materials, an endless series of ex-voto and a stuffed crocodile hanging from the ceiling. Here, tourist and pilgrims will find the funeral chapel that Giulio Romano built for the scholar Baldassarre Castiglione and the 15th century wooden effigy of Our Lady of Grace, painted in the Byzantine style. In addition to being a frequent pilgrimage destination, tourists come in their thousands on 15th August and gather on the church yard to see the national exhibition of the Madonnari, the sidewalk artists from all over the world, who paint the large church yard with their pieces of chalk in a day and night and to whom a local museum of unique masterpieces has been dedicated. In Grazie di Curtatone there is also a tourist information center, a landing stage for charming trips on the canals and a fully equipped area for camping vans.



SOAVE

Among the fens lies the little capital of the two wheels

Sulla sponda opposta della zona umida c'è il piccolo borgo rurale di Soave di Porto Mantovano, il lato più remoto e selvaggio delle Valli del Mincio. Tra i luoghi più emblematici, la Piuda si presenta come un mosaico incontaminato di specchi d'acqua, canneti e vegetazione palustre, abitato da una fauna ricca e variegata. In questi luoghi è straordinaria la presenzadell'Erba coltella dei fossi, simile ad una piccola Agave o Aloe, specie a rischio di estinzione in Italia. Adagiato lungo l'autostrada verde più lunga d'Italia, la ciclabile Mantova-Peschiera, Soave ospita ogni anno nel mese di maggio "Roundabike", rassegna dedicata al cicloturismo che promuove un fitto calendario di itinerari per gli appassionati della bicicletta.



MANTOVA

Where the valleys become lakes in the cradle of Renaissance

Mantua is the landing place of the valleys, which, to the south of the city, form the Lago Superiore, one of the three lakes surrounding this apparently floating city, yet firmly anchored to the dry land by means of the mill bridges and the St. George's bridge. With its Renaissance skyline, its majestic realm of the House of Gonzaga, its towers and domes, Mantua is an art treasure whose fascinating environment has been listed as UNESCO World Heritage site. If you set to discover its many gems, start from the Prince's Path, a wonderful route that twists and turns among masterpieces such as the Palazzo Ducale, the Basilica of Sant'Andrea, the Bibiena theatre and Palazzo Te. Alongside the artistic heart of the city, there is also an archaeological treasure worth seeing: the Lovers of Valdarò, two human skeletons from the Neolithic age caught in the act of embracing, are not to be missed. All around the inner city, there are parks and gardens running along the lakes that are home to cycle tourists and outdoor activities lovers; and trek and cycle paths connected to the main cycling routes of the region. This is an ideal observation point to enjoy the view of water lilies and lotus flowers charmingly coloring the lake in warmer months or to set off for a motorboat trip up to the Po river or, why not, up to Venice.