

18/21 June 2009 THIRD EDITION - Sanctuary and Sacro Monte of Oropa
Devotional and Cultural Itineraries Tourism Exchange
The soul of Places, the Soul in places

*Biennial event dedicated to the enhancement of religious and cultural tourist attractions
in Piedmont and Italy, focusing in particular on the lesser-known sites*

Presentation and New features

The inscription of the "Sacri Monti of Piedmont and Lombardy" site on the UNESCO list of World Heritage sites (July 2003) highlighted their "outstanding universal value" from a historical, artistic and scientific point of view: by increasing and qualifying international attention, this recognition commits the administrations in question to provide careful and conscientious management of the assets comprised in the site, in terms of their protection and conservation, as well as their valorisation.

The inscription of the "Sacri Monti of Piedmont and Lombardy" in the *World Heritage List* marked the start of a process of reflection on how, in operative and ongoing terms, the Piedmontese and national devotional realities can be transformed into places of reference to be visited not only by the faithful, but also and in particular to all those who wish to discover (or re-discover) these places of faith and spirituality through travel, which is the oldest and most efficient means. This itinerary of "(re)discovery" must, by definition, be combined with the acquisition of more detailed knowledge about the areas surrounding the sites, which are often closely linked and provide the historical motives for the development of these places of worship.

The **Devotional and Cultural Itineraries Tourism Exchange – The Soul of Places, the Soul in Places**, which THIRD EDITION will be held **from 18 to 21 June 2009**, aims to bring together all the players (international buyers, Italian operators, institutional representatives for these particular areas, etc.) involved or interested in this particular niche of tourist activity, which brings millions of people every year to famous and less famous sites all over the world, for reasons ranging from profound faith to the desire to combine moments of inner serenity with opportunities for cultural discovery. The Devotional and Cultural Itineraries Tourism Exchange therefore confirms its role as a BIENNIAL opportunity (fourth edition: June 2001) to highlight and promote at an international level the potential openings for tourism, the quality and unique nature of the sites, and the cultural and leisure attractions available when visiting and staying at places of worship in Piedmont and Italy, focusing in particular on the lesser-known attractions.

Introduction to the Third Edition

In its first year the Devotional and Cultural Itineraries Tourism Exchange, inaugurated at the Sanctuary and Sacro Monte of Oropa in June 2005, emphasised the link between devotional sites and the landscape through visits to the Sacri Monti of Piedmont (Educational tour reserved for international buyers). Moreover, it coincided with the staging of the **Passione di Sordevolo**, a mystery play performed every five years, that will be held again in **2010**.

For the second edition (June 2007), in the wake of the success of "Olympic Turin", which confirmed the inclusion of Turin and Piedmont in the international cultural tourism circuit, the emphasis was laid on the theme of valorising devotional sites by linking them with other regional sites of historic, cultural and artistic excellence, as indicated by the Educational tour for international buyers entitled "*Places of Worship, History and Art*", which is confirmed for the 2009 Edition.

According to this policy, the themes proposed for these in-depth visits reserved to buyers - which will gradually cover all the different areas of Piedmont - aim to highlight the efficacy of using a *model of integration* that links devotional sites with other attractions of outstanding cultural, historic-artistic, landscape-naturalistic significance, and also with fine foods and wine. Clearly, such a model is strategically important if applied to Piedmont as a whole, but could also be "exported" to other Italian regions.

A co-marketing agreement was launched and consolidated between the Devotional and Cultural Itineraries Tourism Exchange – which aims to become a biennial appointment for institutions and operators in the religious and cultural tourism sector – and the already well-established **100 Italian Cities Tourism Exchange**. This collaboration will strengthen both initiatives and it also meets the need to rationalise resources and energies, giving a more clearly defined position to the two events in the densely packed calendar of tourism exchanges and workshops in Italy.

It is also regarded as important to continue the fruitful collaboration - launched and consolidated during the first two editions of the *Tourism Exchange* (2005 and 2007) - with the **European Association of Vie Francigene**, together with the synergies with **Associazione Teatro Popolare di Sordevolo**, in view of the forthcoming event *Passione di Sordevolo 2010*, and with the **International Transromanica Association**, which Regione Piemonte takes part in.

Furthermore, the Exchange directly involves the surrounding area, not only in terms of professional services and the local government, but also with regard to the well-established connections with pupils from the **Tourism Institutes in Biella**, who benefit from a unique opportunity to obtain highly stimulating and relevant work experience.

Workshops and Technical events

It has already been mentioned how the themes used for the **Educational tours reserved for International Buyers** constitute the "leitmotif" that, from one edition to the next, allows the Tourism Exchange to explore every aspect of the integrated valorisation of devotional and cultural attractions. Alongside the Educational tours, the event offers two main highlights. The **Fair for Institutional Exhibitors**, which is held in the monumental portico of the Sanctuary and this year will be given greater national scope, above all in the form of "networking" between minor sites interested in the valorisation theme. Secondly, the **WORKSHOP** that aims to bring together tourist operators from Piedmont and Italy with international buyers from all over the world, and that will be held, for the 2009 Edition, in view of a forthcoming event of international significance, the **Ostension of the Holy Shroud in 2010**.

In addition, in order to attract interest on all fronts in *a new method of organising the Tourism Exchange*, a section of **Technical Meetings reserved to the Italian Tourist Offer** was launched since the 2007 edition. These are addressed above all to those sites and attractions outside traditional tourism circuits which may need "support" facilities at the Workshop. In view of the successful reception of the proposals launched experimentally in 2007, the Third Edition will implement and enrich the space set aside to Technical meetings and **Presentations**, managed in collaboration with Organizations and Networks variously involved for the devotional and cultural tourism sector: the national network of *Sentieri Frassati - Club Alpino Italiano* is an example.

Why choose the Sanctuary and Sacro Monte of Oropa?

The Sanctuary and Sacro Monte of Oropa, which has been chosen and confirmed as the suitable venue for this event, represents a significant site of excellence, not only as a destination for visitors and pilgrims from home and abroad, a site forming part of the system of UNESCO Sacri Monti and Piedmontese Regional Parks, but also in terms of the grandiose nature of its structures (a strategic aspect with regard to hospitality), which will provide the optimal setting for a residential training course for operators representing other devotional sites invited to attend the event and institutional authorities connected to this area.

The Sanctuary and Sacro Monte of Oropa and the Biellese area, by hosting and contributing to the success of this THIRD EDITION of the Tourism Exchange, are now a reference point for national and international operators interested in this form of tourism. The organisers undertake to guarantee the spread of information, news and analysis concerning the Devotional and Cultural Sites and Itineraries presented and sold "live" during the event.

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