

Devotional and Cultural Itineraries Tourism Exchange

The soul of Places, the Soul in places

FOURTH EDITION - 23/26 June 2011
Sanctuary and Sacro Monte of Oropa (Biella, Italy)

Presentation and New features

The inscription of the "Sacri Monti of Piedmont and Lombardy" in the UNESCO list of World Heritage sites (July 2003) highlighted their "outstanding universal value" from a historical, artistic and scientific point of view. The addition 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, 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 by anyone wishing to discover (or re-discover) these places of faith and spirituality through the oldest and most effective way: travel. 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 event **Devotional and Cultural Itineraries Tourism Exchange - The Soul of Places, the Soul in Places**, which started in 2005 with its first edition, has decisively confirmed also in the following editions (2007 and 2009) to be able to bring together all the players (International Buyers, Italian and Piedmont operators, regional and national representatives for these areas and themes, and so on) involved or interested in this particular niche of tourism, 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.

In its **first edition** the Devotional and Cultural Itineraries Tourism Exchange, inaugurated at the Sanctuary and Sacro Monte of Oropa in June 2005 and lasting for four days (from Thursday 23 to Sunday 26), emphasized the link between devotional sites and their landscape through visits to the Sacri Monti of Piedmont Varallo and Orta (Educational tour reserved for International Buyers). Moreover, it coincided with the staging of the *Passione di Sordevolo*, a Sacred Representation performed every five years by the "Associazione Teatro Popolare di Sordevolo".

For the **second edition**, held from 21 to 24 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 raising awareness on devotional sites by linking them with other regional sites of historic, cultural and artistic excellence, as suggested by the Educational tour for International Buyers definitely entitled "*Places of Worship, History and Art*".

At the **third edition**, the event asserted its reputation for quality and credibility in the regional and national panorama of events in this sector. From 18 to 21 June, tour operators from countries worldwide attended its Workshops and met organisations and operators from all over Piedmont and other provinces and regions of Italy: among this year's novelties was the presence at Oropa of buyers from Turkey, Russia, Australia and Taiwan, while attendance from the United States, China and Eastern Europe continued to be relevant.

With the **fourth edition**, that will be held **from 23 to 26 June 2011**, the Devotional and Cultural Itineraries Tourism Exchange therefore confirms its role as a BIENNIAL opportunity (fifth edition: June 2013) to highlight and promote at an international level the tourist potential, the quality and the unique nature of the sites, together with 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 sites.

Workshop, Educational and Technical Events

The themes proposed for the in-depth visits of the **Educational tours reserved for International Buyers** constitute the "leitmotif" which, from one edition to the next, allows the Tourism Exchange to explore every aspect of an integrated approach to the valorisation of devotional and cultural attractions. The visits, which will gradually cover all the different areas of Piedmont, aim to highlight the efficacy of using an integrated model, clearly strategic in the case of Piedmont, that links devotional sites to other attractions of outstanding cultural, historic and artistic significance, along with their landscape, environment, fine foods and wine.

Alongside the Educational tours, the event offers two main highlights. The **Fair for Institutional Exhibitors**, held under the monumental portico of the Sanctuary of Oropa, actively promotes the creation of a regional "network" - also of national and international appeal, as in the case of the European Association of Vie Francigene - among minor devotional sites interested in valorisation. Secondly, the **WORKSHOP** which aims to bring together sellers and operators from Piedmont and Italy with international buyers from all over the world. A section of *Technical Meetings reserved to the Italian Tourist Offer* was launched and re-proposed with increasing success since the 2007 edition. These refer above all to those sites and attractions outside traditional tourism circuits which may need "support" facilities at the Workshop.

A co-marketing agreement was confirmed and consolidated at all the three editions of the Exchange - in a ever more cooperative way - with the already well-established **100 Italian Cities Tourism Exchange**. This collaboration strengthens 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 past editions (2005, 2007 and 2009) - with the **European Association of**

Vie Francigene. The 2009 edition saw the intervention of the *International Transromanica Association* (which Regione Piemonte takes part in) while synergies with other national and regional networks - as the "*Sentieri Frassati*" - *Italian Alpine Club*, *Europassion Italy* and from 2011 the *Italian Environment Fund* - are raising and more and more consolidating.

Since the first edition, the event has enjoyed the **High Patronage of the President of the Italian Republic** together with patronages of the *Ministry for Cultural Activities*, of *ENIT - Italian Government Tourist Board* and of *TCI - Touring Club of Italy*, and from the 2011 Edition also the prestigious patronage of the Italian Representative of the **European Commission**. Furthermore, the Exchange directly involves the surrounding area, not only in terms of professional services and local government, but also with its 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 by participating in the event.

Why choose the Sanctuary and Sacro Monte of Oropa?

The outstanding settings offered by the network of the "Sacri Monti" (Sacred Mounts) - including Oropa - underline, from one edition to the next, the quality of Piedmont's tourist offer in the field of devotional, cultural, historical and artistic sites. In such ideal context Italian Tourist Offices, Provincial and Regional Councils, national Tour Operators and International Buyers from countries as distant as Japan, Russia, Brazil, China and Taiwan, the United States and Canada, Australia and India join to set the foundations of a lasting and fruitful exchange, which is destined to develop further over the years.

The Sanctuary and Sacro Monte of Oropa, the venue for this event, is an important landmark in terms of excellence, not only as a destination for visitors and pilgrims from home and abroad, a site forming part of the **UNESCO Sacri Monti system** and of the Piedmont's Regional Parks, but also in terms of the grandiose nature of its structures, which provides the perfect setting for a residential training course for tourism operators, representatives from devotional and cultural sites invited to attend the event, institutional authorities and organizations connected to this theme.

The Sanctuary and Sacred Mount of Oropa and the area of Biella, which already organized and hosted the first three editions of the "*Devotional and Cultural Itineraries Tourism Exchange*" in collaboration with the Piedmont Region, contributing to its already notable and consolidated success, have thus become a point of reference for the national and international tourist operators active in this field. This confirms Piedmont's role in safeguarding, valorization and promotion of the territorial and cultural systems represented by the Sacred Mounts and the other spiritual and devotional sites.

With the aim of rewarding and increasing the trust and satisfaction of the participants, from Piedmont and the rest of Italy as well as from abroad, the **biennial occurrence** of the event helps furthermore to highlight the necessary visibility to all the activities directed to the tourism and cultural valorisation of Piedmont and national devotional sites, enabling the international audience to appreciate the quality and uniqueness of this particular offer.

Press Releases - 2005 Edition

(...) Satisfaction for the success of the initiative was expressed by the Regional Councillor for Tourism, Giuliana Manica. "*With this first edition of the "Exchange", the Sanctuary and Sacro Monte of Oropa and the Biella district presented their candidacy as a fundamental reference point for domestic and international tour operators specialising in religious tourism, and not only. Indeed, I believe that it isn't too ambitious to think about presenting opportunities for all kinds of tourists, presenting packages that are able to link Sacred Mountains and devotional sites with the rest of the area*". It's no mere coincidence that the Exchange will be biennial. The edition scheduled for 2007 is intended to consolidate the role of the Piedmont-system in managing and promoting the huge potential highlighted in the context of this new market for tourism. (...)

Press Releases - 2007 Edition

The Oropa Tourism Exchange has confirmed its success as a key appointment for tourism in Piedmont. (...) Two years after it was first held to promote meetings between demand and supply in the sphere of cultural and devotional tourism, these figures serve to reinforce the original idea underlying the Exchange. Thanks to its unique blend of art, nature and culture, Piedmont is at the forefront in terms of the range of itineraries that combine wellbeing and spirituality. "*In particular, the 2007 Exchange,*" affirmed Regional Councillor for Tourism Giuliana Manica, "*as well as confirming Piedmont's status as a leading region for tourism and cultural itineraries, relaunches and enhances the region's success as an Olympic venue. The positive repercussions of the Oropa Tourism Exchange on the local economy and image have already been recorded over the past two years and, after the success of this year's event, they will certainly be evident in the future.*" (...)

Press Releases - 2009 Edition

After the success of 2005 and 2007, the "Devotional and Cultural Itineraries Tourism Exchange" will continue its two-yearly schedule and return to Oropa (Biella) next year. Once again, from 18 to 21 June 2009 the Sanctuary and Sacro Monte will host the four-day event funded by Regione Piemonte to promote meetings between the offering and the demand for cultural and devotional tourism.

(...) As the Regional Councillor for the Environment and Parks, Nicola de Ruggiero, remarked: "*The continuity of this prestigious event, which is held every two years, aims to underline the importance of this project as a cultural investment for the Region. Having got this far, the Exchange is a challenge that has been won, but it is important not to rest on our laurels. Among other things, the event represents an investment capable of enhancing the beauty of our "Sacri Monti", which are also protected areas. Moreover, this is an approach that is absolutely strategic in view of the Ostension of the Holy Shroud in 2010*" (...) "*Until recently the word 'tourism' did not seem compatible with the principles that govern the Protected Areas. The history of Piedmont's Parks, however, began thirty-one years ago: so we believe that we are now sufficiently grown-up to succeed in recognize and manage with the right balance protection - which is and remains our first responsibility - valorization and tourist acceptance. We must not forget that this is a more delicate kind of tourism, which has slower rhythms and promotes a more respectful and quiet enjoyment of the locations: a 'tourism of proximity' that can help to strengthen the link between a Sanctuary, a devotional site and its local communities*". (...)

"*The success of the third edition - commented the Regional Councillor for Tourism, Giuliana Manica - "confirms that the steps taken five years ago were indeed heading in the right direction. The blend of spirituality, nature, culture, landscape and art that is typical of Piemonte has proved capable, having been duly enhanced by this event, of attracting and seducing a growing number of foreign tourists. This is an extremely significant result, especially at a time of international crisis.*" (...)"

In keeping with its two-yearly schedule, the Exchange will return to Oropa in June 2011.

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