

## Discovering the most beautiful villages in the Ossola Valley

**Pubblicato:** Sabato 7 Maggio 2022

The Ossola Valley is known for its rural and architectural traditions, which are still present, even after centuries, making the historical hamlets and small villages in the valley unique and characteristic.

No fewer than five municipalities have been awarded an “**Orange Flag of the Touring Club Italiano**”; this acknowledgement, which is highly coveted throughout the country, recognises the historical, cultural and environmental heritage of the territory.

The municipalities are: **Mergozzo, Vogogna, Macugnaga, Santa Maria Maggiore and Malesco**. The **Sacro Monte Calvario of Domodossola**, a place of cultural and meditative interest, and the **Val Grande National Park** (which lies within the Sesia Valgrande geopark) are both recognised as **UNESCO World Heritage Sites**.

When setting off to explore medieval alleys and squares, the first stop is the **Village of Culture of Domodossola**, an architectural and cultural gem. The historical elements that can be found within the pentagonal walls that characterised the village, have been renovated, and have become a popular destination for tourists.

**In the centre of the Antigorio Valley, Baceno**, which is home to the beautiful **Church of San Gaudenzio**, has become an attraction for many visitors. Also not to be missed is **Craveggia**, one of the oldest villages in the Vigezzo Valley: the countless chimneys on the **gneiss roofs** of the elegant buildings with their fine frescoes, beside the lower-class houses, immediately catch the eye. This is a place where paintings and frescoes make the streets surrounded by suggestive views unique. You will also have the chance to explore **the first village inhabited by the Walsers, a population of Germanic origin: Formazza**, a municipality that borders the Swiss cantons of Valais and Ticino.

This is home to natural wonders that can be appreciated in both summer and winter: trekking, Nordic walking, and alpine and cross-country skiing; there are many sports that can be practised, surrounded by mountain landscapes. Moving into the **Anzasca Valley**, at the foot of the east face of Monte Rosa, the highest in the Alps, is **Macugnaga**, a municipality with a long history of mountaineering, as a result of its geographical position.

One easily recognised symbol is the Old Church, a Romanesque building that dates back to 1300, that is flanked by a centuries-old linden. **Malesco** is a Vigezzo village that has a very long history, that is

surrounded by the largest natural reserve in Europe, the Val Grande National Park. In the middle of Malesco, there is the **Church dedicated to the Saints Peter and Paul**, a building of architectonical beauty that is a must. However, the main attraction in Malesco is undoubtedly the **Ecomuseum of Soapstone and Stonecutters**, which promotes the local culture, traditions and environment.

In the Ossola Valley, tourists are welcomed by Mergozzo and the lake with the same name, which is now separate from Lake Maggiore, but which originally formed the westernmost part; over the centuries, the numerous and frequent flooding of the River Toce formed the strip of land which divides the two lakes, still today. What is famous is the **ancient elm, which has become an acknowledged symbol of the village over the years**; according to historical documents, this tree has overlooked the square since 1600.

**Mergozzo** was the centre of ancient settlements, according to the Archaeological Museum, which has an exhibition that shows a lot of local archaeological material, and, the **Ecomuseum of Granite**, where you can also admire the Candoglia pink marble and the Montorfano white granite. The town of **Santa Maria Maggiore, the main town of the Viguzzo Valley** (also known as the Valley of Chimney Sweeps), brings together alpine culture, high quality gastronomy and a lot of outdoor activities for every season.

In Santa Maria Maggiore, there are another three museums that are not to be missed, that are among the best known in the Ossola Valley. The **Museum of Chimney Sweeps** contains an interesting multimedia exhibition, with work tools, clothing and images, to help visitors understand the often painful lives of chimney sweeps. The **“Rossetti Valentini” School of Fine Arts** is situated in the centre of the village. The Ossola Valley is also known as the valley of painters, because of its artistic tradition, which began with the foundation of this school, in 1878.

The third museum is the **Casa del Profumo Feminis-Farina** (*The Feminis-Farina House of Perfume*), which celebrates the creation of the eau-de-cologne by two emigrants from Santa Maria Maggiore. To conclude this trip along the stone alleys and breathtaking landscapes, there is Vogogna, a fortified village which introduces tourists to medieval settings. The main attractions that are not to be missed are: the Petrorio Palace, which today serves as the town hall, which houses the most important artistic symbol of the old village, the **“Mascherone Celtico”**, a mysterious face in soapstone that is evidence of Celtic art in Piedmont; and the Visconti Castle, which was originally a military base, for the defence the whole of the Lower Ossola.

**Vogogna** is home to the Val Grande National Park, an uncontaminated area, in which it is possible to go on many excursions, surrounded by picturesque scenery.

Translated by Rebecca Motta and Nicole Dall'Osto

Reviewed by prof. Rolf Cook