



FAST FACTS

TOTAL AREA:	
GRAPE VARIETIES:	Barbera, Dolcetto, Freisa, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Nebbiolo, Arneis, Chardonnay, Cortese, Moscato, Sauvignon, Timorasso
TOTAL WINE PRODUCTION:	2,043 hl
APPELLATIONS:	Alta Langa DOCG, Asti DOCG, Barbaresco DOCG, Barbera d'Alba DOC, Barbera d'Asti DOCG, Barolo DOCG, Dolcetto d'Alba DOC, Gavi DOCG, Langhe DOC, Nebbiolo d'Alba DOC, Roero DOCG

PRODUCERS

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OVERVIEW

Piedmont is the home of Barolo and Barbaresco. . . . If you're a lover of Italian wine, you're probably on the edge of your seat already. Barolo and its less flashy sibling Barbaresco are two of Italy's greatest wines, reasons enough to get to know Piedmont. But there are many other terrific wines made in the hills surrounding those two marquee wine towns, too, and Piedmont is unquestionably in the top two or three most important wine regions in the country.

In general, American vacationers visiting Italy don't usually spend a lot of time in Piedmont, which has few of the major touristic attractions that draw people to some of the other regions. Piedmont doesn't have any coastline, for example. It has comparatively few ancient ruins or Renaissance masterpieces, and warm sunny days are in short supply relative to most other regions. What it has in abundance are views of the Alps (on a clear day, anyway) and delicious wines.

History: The most notable aspect of Piedmont's history is the area's long, close association with neighboring France, specifically the area of Savoy. Much of Piedmont came under the control of the Count of Savoy early in the 11th century, at a time when most of Europe was fragmented into small principalities. Piedmont eventually became the dominant part of this pairing, and the capital of Savoy was moved to Turin, which is still Piedmont's capital today. It is through this connection that Piedmont adopted some French cultural influences ranging from architecture to cooking to viticultural and winemaking practices.

By and by, the stature of the territory grew: the Count of Savoy became the Duke of Savoy, who became King of

Sardinia (and Piedmont). Ultimately, during the unification of Italy in the 19th century, almost all of present-day Italy came together under the King of Sardinia (and Piedmont), who was proclaimed King of Italy. Thus, in a sense, all of Italy became part of Piedmont (don't mention that to anyone outside Piedmont).

Geography: Piedmont is the largest region of northwest Italy, bordering France on the west and Switzerland on the north. The Alps define the region's topography, forming a formidable physical barrier three quarters of the way around it. Jagged, ice-covered peaks line the skyline on the north, west, and south. It's not hard to understand how this area came to be called Piedmont, from *piede* and *monte*, foot of the mountain or in Italian, Piemonte. Rivers that flow down from the heights have filled the central area with an alluvial plain that is punctuated by hilly areas that are in fact the exposed tops of buried mountains. For the most part, it is these hills particularly in the south-central part of the basin that provide the ideal terrain for winegrowing.

Climate: The central area of Piedmont, boxed in by the Alps on three sides with the east side open to the Po River Valley, is protected to a large extent from cold air and storm systems approaching from the north and west, but can often experience intensified weather moving in from the east. Summers can be hot and humid, especially in the lower flatlands, and thunderstorms and hail are common. Winters are cold but not frigid. Spring and fall are mild and see most of the rainfall. Dense fog is a frequent occurrence in the autumn.

Primary grape varieties: Piedmont is best known for its red grape varieties. The most prestigious of these is Nebbiolo, a variety that makes outstanding wines in Piedmont but has had very limited success anywhere else. The very best vineyard sites are typically planted with Nebbiolo. Despite Nebbiolo's repute, however, there is much more Barbera planted an easier-to-grow grape variety which makes wines that are generally ready to drink sooner and less expensive. Dolcetto is another red variety in Piedmont's portfolio; it makes lighter, more easygoing wines that are very versatile.

The most important white grape variety in Piedmont is Moscato Bianco, an aromatic variety that is well known for sweet and sparkling wines. For dry, nonsparkling white wines, Piedmont's go-to grape is Cortese, although Arneis and Erbaluce are preferred in some areas.

Key wine regions: The principal winegrowing area in Piedmont is an extensive area of hills that spread north from the Ligurian Alps in the south. These hills range across three of Piedmont's provinces. Toward the west, the hills in the province of Cuneo are known as the Langhe; those in Asti and Alessandria provinces in the center and east, respectively, are called Monferrato.

Barolo and Barbaresco DOCGs are both located in the Langhe zone, where Nebbiolo excels. They are the most celebrated wine regions of Piedmont, both making long-lived complex wines from 100% Nebbiolo. Barolo is the brawnier of the two, and its wines can age for decades. Barbaresco can also last for many years, but is approachable at a younger age. Other Nebbiolo-based wines in the district include Roero DOCG and Langhe DOC, as well as Nebbiolo d'Alba DOC, named after Alba, the largest town in the winegrowing part of Cuneo province.

Nebbiolo, Barbera, and Dolcetto are grown throughout the entire range of hills in this part of Piedmont, as are the white grapes Moscato and Cortese. Barbera is at its best in the Asti area, notably in the Barbera d'Asti and Nizza DOCGs. Moscato is most famously used to produce Asti DOCG sparkling wines and Moscato d'Asti, a slightly effervescent sweet wine. Cortese's claim to fame is the wine of Gavi DOCG in Monferrato, the best-known dry white wine of Piedmont though over in the Langhe, Arneis from Roero DOCG is the local preference.

Cuisine: Piedmontese cooking is hearty and filling, particularly appropriate for the cold winters here. Appetizers may include carne cruda (raw marinated meat) or bagna càuda, a hot sauce of butter and olive oil infused with garlic and anchovies, typically used for dipping vegetables fondue-style. First courses of pasta or risotto are typical; the ravioli-like agnolotti stuffed pasta is a specialty, as is long tajarin noodles. Vitello tonnato, paper-thin slices of cooked veal covered with a rich creamy tuna sauce, is way better than it sounds. For the main course, beef and game dishes such as rabbit or pheasant are often served. And Piedmont is the home of the white Alba truffle, which will often be worked into dishes, especially in the fall, when fried eggs often show up shaved with the prized tubers. Typical Piedmontese desserts include zabaione and panna cotta puddings and any number of items flavored with fresh local hazelnuts. Gorgonzola, Robiola di Roccaverano, and Toma often round out a meal as the cheese offerings.