

# In the heart of Genoa

THE FLAVOURS OF TRADITION AND  
UNESCO HERITAGE COME TOGETHER



# The Flavours of Genoa



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## FROM THE LAND TO THE SEA: ALL THE FLAVOURS OF GENOA

Genoa and Liguria are famous for their authentic Mediterranean cuisine, rooted in a rich gastronomic tradition that emphasizes simple ingredients. Ligurian cuisine reflects the area's history and geography, featuring ingredients sourced from both the sea and the mountains. As a port city, Genoa has long served as a crossroads of cultures, arts and traditions. Many staples found in the Ligurian diet were introduced through the commercial and port activities of the Maritime Republic. This blending of flavours evolved until the Renaissance, which marked the peak of local gastronomy. Genoese cuisine is influenced by both the courts and the countryside, as well as the ships moored in one of the most important ports in the Mediterranean. As a result, it is simple, direct, and healthy—reflecting a history of making the most of essential. The cuisine relies on products sourced from the forest, the vegetable gardens, and the sea. One of the most iconic dishes is focaccia, often considered the 'queen' of the table. With just a few key ingredients, especially the region's prized extra virgin olive oil, this dish exemplifies the possibility of culinary miracles. The local menus feature fresh vegetables, blue fish, fresh pasta, and slow cooking techniques, offering a contemporary dining experience that stays true to its roots. Genoese cuisine is ancient yet perfectly suited for today's tastes: fresh, vegetable-rich, and light. Welcome to Liguria, and welcome to the table!





Luca Iacozzino ©



## THE CITY OF GREAT PRODUCTS

There is no other place in the world that yields such exceptional produce as this region. The hills overlooking the sea, combined with the unique climate and wind conditions, contribute to the distinctive flavour of the vegetables grown here. It is no surprise that Genoese cuisine is primarily focused on garden produce. The ingredients come not only from the terraced fields, painstakingly cultivated on this challenging terrain, but also from the surrounding woods.. Foraging for wild herbs, pine nuts, and berries has been a tradition here for centuries.. Additionally, the Mediterranean Sea offers bountiful treasures, notably blue fish, with anchovy being a standout ingredient. In Genoa, anchovies have countless uses and are a staple in many dishes. One of the most historic ‘salt routes’ originated in the port of Genoa, where salt, known as ‘white gold’, was once secretly transported beneath layers of anchovies. This technique gave rise to one of the world’s finest preserved foods. Genoese menus have always featured minimal red meat; if meat is included, it is usually white. This characteristic gives traditional cuisine a contemporary feel. Liguria is a rugged region that is not well-suited to extensive pastures, but this has led to the innovative use of local resources. When possible, cows and goats are raised, and from the milk of both, a local delicacy known as formaggetta is created. This fresh cheese is simple yet rich in flavor, much like Genoese cuisine itself.



## A BRIEF HISTORY OF GENOESE CUISINE

*La Cuciniera Genovese - La Vera Maniera di Cucinare alla Genovese* is the title of a manual authored by Gio Batta Ratto and published in 1863, which marks the first attempt to codify the cuisine of Genoa. At that time, Italy had just been unified, and Pellegrino Artusi's influential cookbook would not be published for another thirty years. The book clearly describes a cuisine that closely mirrors the lives of small farmers who depended on locally sourced ingredients while also embracing the bounty of the sea. Genoese cuisine was shaped by two key influences: the introduction of exotic spices and non-native ingredients brought in through trade with far-off lands and the impact of fine dining traditions. The latter influence is particularly evident in the kitchens of prominent Genoese families, such as the Dorias and Spinolas, who incorporated elements of European haute cuisine into their culinary traditions.



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# First Courses

*Fresh pasta requires only flour, water and salt – fundamental ingredients that encapsulate a cherished culinary tradition. Among the most distinctive varieties is **trofie**, small hand-rolled spirals that pair seamlessly with Genoa’s iconic sauce: **pesto**. Traditionally, trofie are served with pesto, potatoes, and green beans, creating a vibrant dish that highlights the fresh flavours of spring and the bounty of the land.*

*Another emblematic pasta dish is **mandilli**, a uniquely Genoese interpretation of lasagna. Mandilli are delicate square sheets of pasta, their name derived from the Ligurian dialect word “mandillo,” meaning handkerchief. They are traditionally served with either pesto or “al tocco”, a rich tomato sauce slow-cooked with a piece of meat to develop depth and complexity. Notably, the meat itself is removed before serving, having imparted its essence to the sauce. A more indulgent yet elegantly simple category of Genoese pasta is the stuffed variety. The most iconic of these is **pansotti** (or pansoti, as it is known in various Ligurian dialects), triangular pasta parcels filled with a delicate mixture of vegetables. The traditional filling typically includes “preboggion,” a medley of wild herbs, “prescinsêua” (a soft Genoese curd), and fresh marjoram. Pansotti are customarily served with walnut sauce, a regional specialty that reflects Liguria’s deep-rooted culinary heritage, utilizing ingredients foraged from the surrounding woodlands.*

*Another beloved stuffed pasta from Genoa is **ravioli**, often filled with borage, a wild herb frequently used in Ligurian cuisine. Like pansotti, ravioli are commonly served “al tocco,” demonstrating the enduring connection between Genoese pasta dishes and the region’s time-honored sauces.*

*These elegant yet unpretentious preparations exemplify the essence of Italian gastronomy, where simplicity, quality ingredients, and deep-rooted traditions converge to create dishes of remarkable refinement and character.*



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## ***Pesto***

Pesto is one of the most delicious and creative Italian sauces, born out of necessity and crafted from high-quality ingredients. The main ingredient is Genoese basil, which flourishes in the hills of Liguria, where the salty winds enhance its flavour. Other essential components include pine nuts, Parmesan cheese, pecorino cheese, garlic, and the most iconic local ingredient: extra virgin olive oil. Pesto, as we know it today, was popularised in the nineteenth century, although its origins can be traced back to ancient Rome. Traditionally, it is made by hand in a mortar, a method still preferred today because using a blender can heat the basil leaves and diminish their aroma. Pesto is not only a perfect condiment for first courses like trofie, trenette, and gnocchi, but it also serves as an excellent sauce for appetisers and second courses. Since 2007, the World Mortar Pesto Championship has been held biennially, awarding the title of best pesto to the competition's top contender.

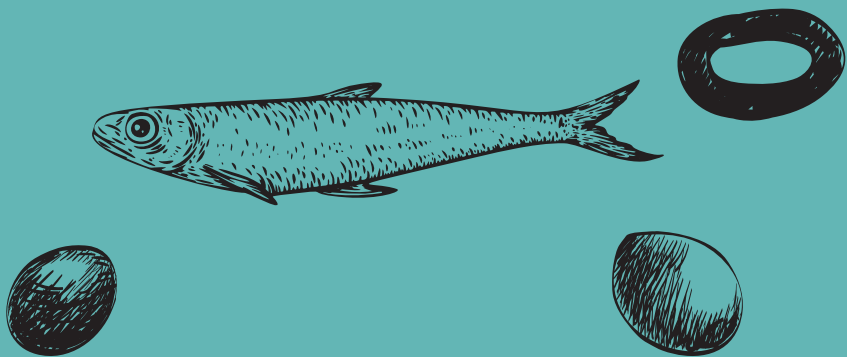


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## ***Olive Trees, Olives, and Olive Oil***

The olive tree stands as the symbolic plant of Liguria, an essential element in both local and regional cuisine. Thriving on the region's sun-drenched hillsides, olive trees are cultivated on terraced slopes supported by dry stone walls, their silvery-green canopies lining the «creuze»—ancient mule tracks immortalized in the works of poets such as Eugenio Montale and Fabrizio De André. The Ligurian Riviera is home to several notable olive cultivars, including the renowned Taggiasca, the Lavagnina, and Mortina, a variety typical of the Genoese area. These olives are characterized by their small size and delicate flavor profile, contributing to the production of Ligurian olive oil, one of the most highly prized and sought-after oils in the world.





## Second Courses, from Land to the Sea

Eugenio Montale once wrote, “What we are not.” In Liguria, the second courses stand apart from the rich, lavish dishes found in regions where livestock like cattle and pigs thrive. Instead, they are rooted in simple ingredients, skillfully elevated into extraordinary meals through generations of culinary expertise honed in local gardens and ports. A quintessential dish from this land is **Ligurian-style rabbit**, which becomes tender and aromatic through a slow cooking process that incorporates olives, pine nuts, white wine, and thyme. The focus here is on using less expensive cuts of meat. **Tripe** has attained iconic status, often served alongside ‘fagiolane’, a type of bean, as diners navigate the narrow alleyways of the historic centre.

Even with fish, the careful transformation of humble ingredients yields remarkable results. The ‘**buridda**’, a typical fish soup, is accompanied by ‘**zemin**’, a hearty legume soup made with beans or chickpeas, occasionally enriched with cuttlefish. Squid, meticulously prepared, are often served stuffed. Additionally, **stockfish** – though not a native Ligurian fish – tells the story of Genoa’s long-standing trade. It is prepared as ‘**brandacujun**’ (a delicious pie originating from Western Liguria), arranged in a salad, and has been a beloved ingredient in the city for centuries. Finally, we have the queen – **the anchovy** – and the king, the **cappon magro**, both of which deserve special mention.

## *Anchovies in Countless Delicious Ways*

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Whether marinated, floured and fried, breaded and fried, stuffed, baked in a pie, or used in a pasta sauce, anchovies reign supreme in Ligurian cuisine. These small blue fish are both humble and exquisite, appearing in the Tyrrhenian Sea during the early summer and late summer months, which allows fishermen to catch a sustainable, cost-effective, and delectable ingredient. Anchovies take centre stage in traditional fry shops and 'sciamadde,' where they are often combined with bread, cheese, vegetables, parsley, and garlic. You haven't truly experienced Genoa until you've sampled these iconic fish.

## *The Popular King: Cappon Magro*

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There is some debate about the origin of the name "capon magro". Some believe it is the 'lean' version of the capon served during Easter, while others suggest it was once made with 'capone', the Italian for dolphinfish (though this is unlikely). Some also associate "capone" with "chapon," the French word for crouton. However, there is no disagreement about the fact that cappon magro is an exquisite dish. Originally, cappon magro was a humble preparation made by fishermen on their boats using unsold fish. It consisted of a pie created by layering "galletta del marinaio" (a dry bread soaked in vinegar), beetroot, boiled vegetables, and various types of white fish, all served with a green sauce. This resulting dish was fresh, with a touch of acidity, and representative of both the sea and the countryside. Over the years, this modest recipe has evolved into one of the most elegant and visually stunning dishes in the city. The humble scraps of fish have been replaced by crustaceans, molluscs, and more refined fish. Additionally, the rustic presentation has been transformed into artistic decorations, making cappon magro one of the most sophisticated dishes in Genoese cuisine.



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## *A Symbol of Genoese Culinary Tradition: Cima*

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Italian singer-songwriter Fabrizio De André paid tribute to one of Genoa's most iconic dishes, 'la cima', in his celebrated song *Â çimma*. This dish consists of carefully crafted pocket of veal, specifically a square cut from the belly, which is folded and sewn to create a sort of pocket. It is stuffed with vegetables, eggs, cheese, peas, and marjoram; the original recipe even included a generous amount of offal. Once assembled, the stuffed veal is gently boiled and later served cold, sliced into portions—a process that enhances both its texture and depth of flavour. Though historically regarded as a 'poor man's dish', often prepared with available leftovers, cima has evolved into one of the most emblematic delicacies of Genoese cuisine.





# The Land of Vegetables (and Minestrone)

*Genoese cuisine is among the most vegetarian-friendly in Italy, showcasing a wide array of dishes, including polpettone (a traditional potato and green bean tart), various stuffed preparations, minestrone, torta Pasqualina, and other savory pies. The distinctive flavours of vegetables grown in the Mediterranean scrubland and hilly terrain surrounding the region contribute to this rich culinary tradition.*

*One of its most iconic dishes is **Genoese minestrone**, a staple dating back to the late nineteenth century. Its uniqueness lies not only in the variety of vegetables used but also in the final touches: a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil and a spoonful of pesto added just before serving. The aromatic quality of Ligurian wild herbs, particularly marjoram, enhances many of the region's classic preparations. In Genoa, **polpettone** is primarily made with potatoes, green beans, and cheese. The region is also renowned for its savory **pies**, traditionally baked in wood-fired ovens and often featuring ingredients such as chard, spinach, and borage. Notable examples include torta Pasqualina,*



*traditionally prepared for Easter, and another variation made with rice and prescinsêua, a local curd cheese. Additionally, wood-fired ovens are ideal for roasting stuffed vegetables, such as small round Genoese eggplants, filled with their own pulp, cheese, mortadella, breadcrumbs, and a blend of seasonings.*



## Street food or rather, alley food

*Genoa offers a wealth of culinary delights amid its narrow streets and inviting aromas. Begin by the sea, where the porticoes of Sottoripa are home to kiosks frying fresh anchovies, wine shops, and traditional eateries serving delicious sandwiches paired with glasses of local wine. As you wander through the labyrinthine alleys, you'll come across traditional «sciamadde» (literally «flames»), where dishes are cooked over wood fire, including farinata, stuffed vegetables, anchovies, and savory pies. Be sure to visit the bakeries, where focaccia is freshly baked throughout the day.*

*A true port city, Genoa has preserved its rich culinary traditions. Strolling from alley to alley, from cafés to fried food shops, remains one of the most authentic and enjoyable ways to experience the city.*







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## Farinata

Those who are unfamiliar with it will be amazed when they see enormous “testi” – huge copper pans – coming out of wood-fired ovens, with a large, golden surface that continues to sizzle. This dish is called farinata, and it has various versions across the regions, including Liguria, Tuscany, Piedmont, and the French Riviera. However, it reaches its fullest expression in Genoa. Despite being a simple food, farinata is quite challenging to prepare. It requires a mixture of chickpea flour, extra virgin olive oil, water, and salt. This mixture is poured into the “testi” and then cooked at very high temperatures. Achieving the perfect result demands a delicate balance in the proportions of the ingredients, the uniformity of the dough spread across the large pan, and the timing and temperature of the cooking. However, the outcome is exceptional. To experience this miracle made with so few ingredients, just visit a local eatery – known as ‘sciamadda’ – order a portion, and either enjoy it at the tables or take it away (it is served on a sheet of food paper).

## Focaccia

Genoese focaccia is the quintessential dish of Genoa, renowned for its simplicity, deliciousness, and popularity. Everyone loves it, and it can be enjoyed at any time of day—in Genoa, it’s even common to dip it in cappuccino for breakfast. Variations of focaccia have existed across cultures since ancient times. All you need are flour, oil, salt, yeast, water, and fire. The name ‘focaccia’ derives from the Latin term “focus” (hearth or fireplace); however, despite many attempts to replicate it, there is only one true ‘fùgassa’. The dough is spread out in large rectangular pans and gently kneaded to create its characteristic dimples. It is then sprinkled with water and oil, resulting in a very soft, golden bread with typical light areas where the fat enhances the flavour and texture. Every Genoese bakery produces exquisite focaccia, and for just a few euros, you can take home a piece of this culinary delight.



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# Sweets



Pine nuts, sultanas, anise, and fennel are the key flavours in traditional Genoese sweets, reflecting the region's natural ingredients while compensating for lower butter content. One example is the **Genoese Pandolce**, which, although not as tall as many other traditional Italian Christmas cakes, boasts rich flavours from sultanas, candied fruit, and a hint of anise. Its delightful taste has even led it to cross oceans.

Another notable treat is the biscuit of the **Lagaccio**, which originated in the sixteenth century in the Lagaccio neighbourhood (literally 'bad lake' as it was the location of an artificial lake). Often referred to as the "healthy biscuit," it is low in fat and flavoured with fennel seeds.

In Genoa, the tradition of sweets is enriched by the influence of the court. The great Renaissance families contributed to the flourishing of delicate confectionery art in the city. As a result, simple sweets were joined by more sophisticated delicacies, including exquisite **candied products** and precious fondants, which remain a source of pride for the city's historic confectioneries.

# Beverages, Wines, and Spirits



Genoa's vineyards, nestled on scenic slopes within a marine climate, feature rows of native vines that produce unique and fascinating wines. For those with a curious palate, the offerings from this region provide rare selections and exciting flavours. Grapes such as Vermentino, Bianchetta Genovese, Cilieggiolo, Dolcetto, Scimiscià, Albarola, and Pigato contribute to the creation of DOC wines like Golfo del Tigullio and Val Polcevera, as well as IGT wines such as Colline del Genovesato. The wines here are predominantly white and



*fresh and have drawn the attention of modern winemakers, leading to innovative creations such as sparkling wines and Passito varieties. Yet, the beverage scene in Genoa extends beyond just wine. The craft beer movement has also flourished in the city, which has long been known for its bitters since ancient times. Historically, Genoa has served as a hub for spices and herbs, all of which have flowed through its bustling port. A traditional Genoese meal typically wraps up with a local bitter, offering a fitting conclusion to the dining experience.*



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## Where to Eat



*One of the best ways to truly explore Genoa is through its traditional cuisine. Start your culinary adventure on the streets, moving from a fried food shop to a “sciamadda,” then on to a bakery and a café. For a deeper experience, visit a trattoria in the historic centre, where you’ll find simple yet delicious regional dishes. Genoa is a vibrant city that cherishes its historical eateries, where you can savour local classics such as Minestrone,*

*pancetta with walnut sauce, cod, and perfectly fried anchovies. In recent years, many bistros have emerged, often run by chefs and innkeepers who have returned to Genoa after travelling the world. These friendly establishments focus on tradition while adding contemporary twists to their offerings, making them perfect for trying typical dishes with a modern flair. Additionally, there are options for contemporary cuisine; while Genoa may not be known for high-end dining, there are certainly places suitable for special occasions, whether they are located by the sea or near the stunning Renaissance palaces.*



Angel Villalba/Gettyimages ©

## Where to Shop



*The historic shops are one of the most captivating features of the historic centre in Genoa. Many small shops that have remained unchanged for centuries still thrive here. You can find tripperie (tripe shops) with marble walls and large copper pots, confectionery stores with wooden panelling, glass display cases and drawers filled with candied violets. The enticing aroma of focaccia wafts through the bakeries, while the wine shops offer an impressive selection from small producers alongside a range of historic bitters. Food often makes for one of the most cherished souvenirs and serves as a rich narrative of the city's history.*





The System  
of the *Rolli*



*Porto*  
antico

# Genoa, *where hospitality* *is art*



Villa del  
*Principe*



Palazzi dei  
*Rolli*



Experiencing  
the *Rolli*  
Today



# The System of the Rolli

## STRADE NUOVE AND PALAZZI DEI ROLLI

*“Le Strade Nuove and the system of the Palazzi dei Rolli” are recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, serving as exemplary representations of late Renaissance and Baroque architecture. They also highlight the remarkable adaptation of architecture to the local landscape and the economic and social needs of the time. But what exactly are the Rolli? We’ll explore that in the next few pages.*



ABOVE: PIAZZA DELLA NUNZIATA,  
STARTING POINT OF VIA BALBI.  
NIKITAROYTMAN PHOTOGRAPHY/  
SHUTTERSTOCK

BELOW: PALAZZO REALE,  
TRABANTOS/SHUTTERSTOCK

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Let's step back in time to the 16th century. The Port of Genoa served as a crossroads for people and trade, where merchant families amassed significant wealth to reinvest. This was the moment when Genoa began to demonstrate their financial power to the world publicly.

### STRADE NUOVE

The first step was to construct lavish residences that reflected the economic power of the families who commissioned them. However, the narrow alleys of medieval Genoa made it impossible to build such grand homes. To overcome this, two streets, known as the **Strade Nuove**, were levelled to create today's



## **Via Balbi and Via Garibaldi.**

These streets wind between the green hill on one side and the old city on the other.

Today, both streets serve as an open-air museum, showcasing the finest examples of late Renaissance and Baroque architecture.

## **THE SYSTEM OF THE ROLLI**

In 1576, the Senate took a significant step by establishing the System of the Rolli. Since there was no suitable palace for hosting illustrious visitors in the Republic, the responsibility and honour of welcoming these guests fell to the families who owned noble palaces. To facilitate this, a List of the Public Lodgings of Genoa, known as the Rollo, was created to catalogue over a hundred palaces. The palaces were classified into **three categories**, referred to as **bussoli**, based on the opulence of the buildings and the prestige of their owners.

The palaces in 'bussolo one' were designated for the most distinguished figures, such as popes and kings, while those in 'bussolo three' were assigned to ambassadors

and other diplomats. If multiple palaces shared the same bussolo ranking, the selection process was determined by lot, with a drawing among the available options.

The system also accounted for changes in the status of the palaces over time. If a palace fell into disrepair or, conversely, became more magnificent, the "Rolli", or List of Public Lodgings, would be updated periodically to reflect these changes.

## **THE UNESCO SITE**

The Rolli System is the first instance in European history where a public authority created a coherent urban plan based on a system of 'public hospitality.' Additionally, the Palazzi dei Rolli showcase the creativity of their architects, who used vertical building designs to make the most of limited land plots that are situated between medieval alleys and hillsides. Since 2006, UNESCO has designated 42 out of over 160 Palazzi dei Rolli as protected sites. For a detailed list, please consult the website

**Genova: le Strade Nuove e il sistema dei Palazzi dei Rolli.**

## **Rubens in Genoa**

Who knows what the Palazzi dei Rolli were like in the 17th century, before later interventions? Discover their beauty through the eyes of Peter Paul Rubens. Overwhelmed by the stunning refinement of the noble residences where he was hosted several times between 1604 and 1606, Rubens sought to showcase the typical Renaissance housing model he had encountered in Genoa. His work, "I Palazzi di Genova," documents the original structures of 31 palaces and four churches from 17th-century Genoa, featuring detailed plans and architectural sections recreated by the artist.



PALAZZO DI NICOLOSO LOMELLINO, VIA GARIBOLDI 7  
1563-66

# Porto Antico

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

*The Republic of Genoa built its financial strength on thriving mercantile activities and the wealth generated through trade. A true exploration of the Rolli in Genoa begins at the Port—not just for its stunning architecture, but because, much like in the past, the city's pulse can still be felt among the piers stretching towards the sea. As you stroll through the futuristic architecture designed by Renzo Piano, try to imagine the bustling commerce of the sixteenth century, filled with the constant flow of people and goods at the port.*

## A DEEP CONNECTION WITH THE SEA

In the old port, known as Porto Antico, Genoa deepens its connection with the sea. This is exemplified in the **Galata Museo del Mare**, which explores the development of Genoese maritime power. Through interactive installations and reproductions of ancient vessels, the museum provides a vivid insight into life on board. One of the most engaging sections focuses on the epic story of Italian migration to the New World. This theme is also the main focus of the newly established **MEI**,



Genoa and its port  
Karina Veza/500px ©

**Museo dell'Emigrazione Italiana.**

## ANCIENT ATMOSPHERES

Beyond the Overpass, in Piazza Caricamento, the imposing structure of **Palazzo San Giorgio** evokes the atmosphere of the medieval port and the grandeur of 'Genoa





the Superb' during its peak financial power. This building, which dates back to the thirteenth century, became the command centre of the highly influential Banco di San Giorgio, one of the oldest banks in the world, in the fifteenth century. The beautiful sea view is enhanced by frescoes from the early seventeenth century. Interestingly, it is said that Marco Polo recounted his travels in 'Il Milione' while imprisoned here.

## FUTURISTIC ARCHITECTURE

However, it is primarily the contemporary architectural additions that dominate the scene at Porto Antico. A stroll along the docks, in the spacious pedestrian area bustling

with a mix of tourists and local Genoese families, will bring you to the base of the impressive **Bigo**, which has become a landmark of the area. This eight-armed architectural structure, designed by Renzo Piano, supports a panoramic elevator that ascends to 40 metres above sea level, offering one of the best views of the old town and the docks. Other notable projects by Piano that enhance the Porto Antico landscape include the **Biosfera**, an iconic glass sphere next to the **Aquarium**, and the **Isola delle Chiatte**, a floating platform made entirely of wood. This platform provides a unique vantage point, allowing visitors to observe life in the port from a position right in the middle of the sea.

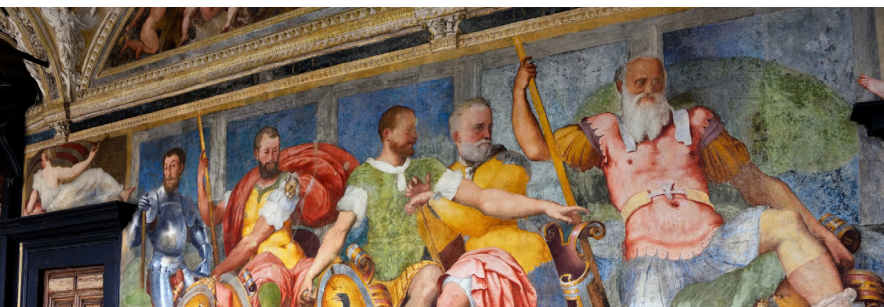


From above:  
Biosfera  
MAUDANROS/dreamstime@  
Bigo, kavalenkava/  
shutterstock@  
Palazzo San Giorgio,  
detail  
Boggy/Dreamstime@

# Villa del Principe

THE RESIDENCE OF ADMIRAL DORIA

*Andrea Doria, a key figure in 16th-century Liguria, is remembered not only as a captain of fortune but also for his exceptional strategic skills. He played a pivotal role in negotiating the de facto autonomy of the Republic of Genoa. In 1528, Genoa stood on the threshold of its golden age, a period celebrated as “El Siglo de los Genoveses”.*



## A SYMBOL OF POWER

Just outside the sixteenth-century city walls, Andrea Doria's villa embodies the Prince's desire to distance himself from the Palazzo Ducale, the centre of political power. This villa also elevates his status above the city itself, symbolising his authority over both the land and the sea. The Villa del Principe, which predates the palaces

of Strada Nuova and was never included in the System of the Rolli, represents the transition of Genoese architecture from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. Visitors are greeted by the **grand Italian gardens**, which feature pergolas, vibrant plants, colonnades, a grotto adorned with mosaics, and fountains showcasing mythological themes.

Loggia degli Eroi  
Maudanzos  
| Tempo dei sogni.com/  
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## THE VILLA

A stunning feature of the villa is the **Loggia degli Eroi**, adorned with rich frescoes that celebrate the members of the Doria family as warriors of antiquity. This loggia serves as a magnificent connection between the gardens and the interior of the villa. Upon entering, visitors proceed through a series of rooms arranged in a specific hierarchy. The first rooms are accessible to all guests, the next are reserved for members of the court, and the final rooms comprise Andrea Doria's private living spaces.

Be sure to visit the **Salone dei Giganti**, which features a vaulted ceiling frescoed by Perin del Vaga, a student of Raphael. The artwork depicts Jupiter striking down the Giants, serving as an allegory for the triumph of Charles V over his enemies. On the walls, two large fifteenth-century tapestries woven with gold, silver, wool, and silk threads, illustrate the feats of Alexander the Great, who symbolises virtue. This hall served as the main reception room



Brenda Kearp/Dreamstime®

until the late sixteenth century, when the **Golden Gallery**, showcasing family portraits, was completed.

## THE THREE PORTRAITS OF ANDREA DORIA

The 'Prince' is immortalised in **three portraits**, each revealing a different facet of this remarkable figure. In the painting by Sebastiano del Piombo, he is captured as the supreme commander of the papal fleet, an austere figure in a dark suit and an admiral's cap. Bronzino presents Doria as a mythological figure, resembling Michelangelo's David, portrayed as Neptune, with his upper body exposed, exuding a commanding presence. Finally, in the portrait by William Key, we see the elderly Doria, his gaunt, wrinkled face set before his cat Dragut, named after his pirate adversary.

## The Villas of Genoa

Outside the city centre, Genoa is dotted with luxurious villas, many of which were built between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and are closely connected to the Palazzi dei Rolli. These villas served as summer residences for the influential families who lived along the Strade Nuove. Designed for leisure and relaxation, these Renaissance villas were opulent retreats set amidst lush landscapes. Their gardens played a significant role, featuring fountains, grottos, and wide walking paths. Much like the Palazzi dei Rolli, these villas welcomed notable personalities but in a more informal setting. The atmosphere was less rigid, allowing for the development of more personal relationships.

# Palazzi dei Rolli

STEPPING INTO A REALM OF SPLENDOUR

*Conceived to dazzle popes, kings, and high dignitaries, the Palazzi dei Rolli are certain to leave you equally awe-struck. As you explore their opulent interiors, you'll find yourself gazing upward, captivated by the stunning frescoes that adorn the ceilings. Ascending the grand staircases, you may become entranced by the mesmerising interplay of mirrors, reflecting the abundant gilded decorations. Your attention will inevitably be drawn to Caravaggio, Rubens, and Van Dyck. Just when you think you've seen it all, an unexpected marvel awaits, such as a hidden garden or a secret chamber nestled within a palace.*

## THE ESSENCE OF THE ROLLI IN TWO STREETS

The 42 Palazzi dei Rolli, which are protected by UNESCO, are located throughout the historic centre of Genoa. However, many of them are concentrated along the two Strade Nuove—now known as **Via Balbi** and **Via Garibaldi**. For travellers with limited time, a simple walk along these streets offers an opportunity to explore the rich history of the city's Golden Age. Each palace serves as a chapter in a captivating story that can be enjoyed in one short stroll.



Palazzi della Città Vecchia  
boris stroujko/shutterstock ©

## ROYAL PALACE

The name "Royal Palace" was passed down as a legacy from the Savoy family, who resided there from 1824 to 1919. However, **Palazzo Balbi Stefano**



traces its seventeenth-century origins back to the Balbi family, who aimed to establish it as the centrepiece of an impressive real estate development on the street that bears their name. Over the centuries, the palace has been remodelled to reflect the changing fashions and specific needs of its various owners, much like many other Palazzi dei Rolli. One of its most stunning features is the **hanging garden**, which gracefully cascades towards the sea below the terrace. At the centre of a refined *rissêu*, water lilies float on a fountain, surrounded by interlocking black and white pebbles. In

certain sections, colourful stones are incorporated to form vibrant patterns. Inside, the palace exudes extraordinary opulence, reaching its peak in the renowned **Hall of Mirrors**, which draws inspiration from Versailles. Here, the interplay between the ceiling paintings and the sculptures depicting mythological figures, rich in allegorical meaning, is beautifully enhanced by the reflections in the mirrors. Particularly noteworthy are the **private apartments** on the first noble floor in the eastern wing. The furnishings, tapestries, and artworks, which have remained unchanged since the mid-nineteenth century, offer a glimpse into



Above: Hall of Mirrors  
Trabantos/Shutterstock®

Below: hanging garden  
aphy/Shutterstock®



life at the Savoy court. Additionally, Palazzo Reale serves as a museum, housing a rich **collection of paintings**, including works by Van Dyck, Guercino, Strozzi, Giordano, and Tintoretto.

## STRADA NUOVA MUSEUMS

In the vibrant urban setting of **Via Garibaldi**, landmark buildings — Palazzo Bianco, Palazzo Rosso, and Palazzo Doria-Tursi — house the **Strada Nuova Museums**.

The collections, spread across 75 rooms in these three locations, create a wide-ranging museum experience encompassing painting, sculpture, and applied arts.

To begin your visit, it's best to start at **Palazzo Bianco**, the oldest structure on Via Garibaldi and the first to be opened to the public. In 1884, Maria Brignole-Sale De Ferrari, the Duchess of Galliera, generously donated the palace and its artistic treasures to the municipality, ensuring that it would serve as a public gallery. This marked the beginning of the history of these museums. Today, Palazzo Bianco is a significant **art gallery**



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featuring a collection of works by sixteenth-century Ligurian artists, as well as painters from other parts of Italy, Flanders, and Spain. Notable artists include Rubens, Van Dyck, Zurbarán, and Veronese.

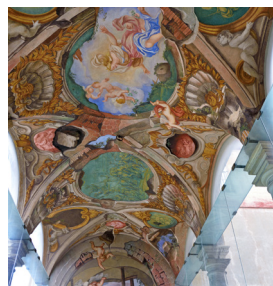
However, the most renowned masterpiece is **Caravaggio's *Ecce Homo***.

The striking contrast of light and shadow in this painting accentuates the humanity of the figures, particularly Christ, who gazes downwards rather than towards the sky and the Father, as seen in many similar works. The soldier accompanying Him appears moved by compassion as he covers Jesus.

Our next stop is the splendid 'house museum' of **Palazzo Rosso**. Its rooms were richly adorned by some of the most esteemed Ligurian artists of the seventeenth century. The

## Van Dyck's Portraits

Understanding the significance of visuals, the affluent patrons of the Palazzi dei Rolli invested heavily in having their portraits created by the era's greatest artists. At the peak of their influence, the Brignole family commissioned Van Dyck to create several family portraits. Notably, these works have remained together in the halls of Palazzo Rosso, preserving their symbolic value for the family rather than being scattered around the world as the heirs moved on. Van Dyck's portraits, particularly the remarkable double portrait of Anton Julius and his wife Pauline Adorno, serve as an extraordinary tribute to their patrons.



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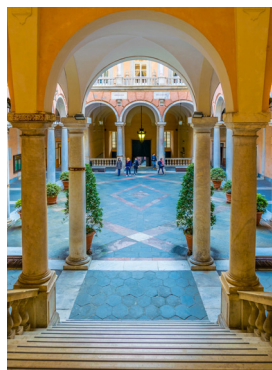


## The Top Floor of Palazzo Rosso

It's a hidden gem for design and furniture enthusiasts. In 1955, *Domus* magazine published an article showcasing the apartment of Caterina Mercenaro, the then director of the civic museums, who lived on the top floor of Palazzo Rosso. The magazine praised the harmonious blend of ancient and modern styles, which was emblematic of the tastes of the era. Thanks to the photographs preserved in the magazine, it has been possible to reconstruct the architecture and furnishings of these spaces. This serves as yet another testament to how Palazzo Rosso has consistently remained stylish and relevant throughout the centuries.

décor, inspired by the four seasons, features an impressive **picture gallery** showcasing masterpieces by artists such as Dürer, Van Dyck, Veronese, Grechetto, and Strozzi. A standout piece is the languid and alluring *San Sebastiano* by Guido Reni. The **portraits** of the Brignole family are also particularly significant. Beyond the art collection, Palazzo Rosso captivates visitors with the extraordinary layout of its **mezzanine floor**. Nestled between the two main levels, which feature grand halls, this mezzanine hosts smaller yet visually striking rooms, offering a **glimpse into private spaces** within a building primarily designed for public reception. Get ready to enter a 'grotto'

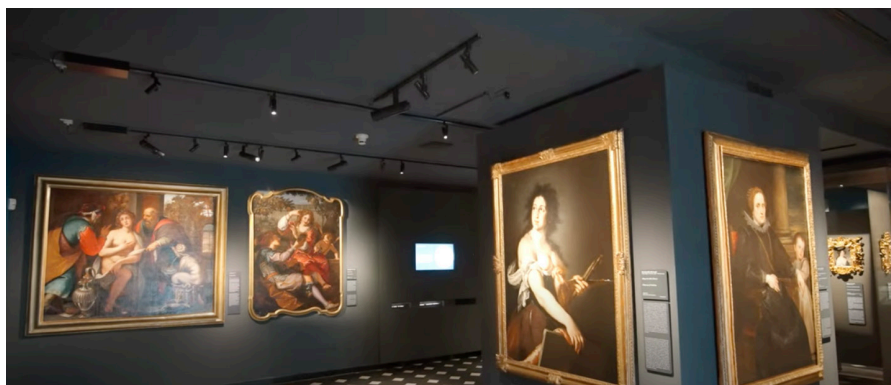
—a dining room designed to mimic the ambience of a cave, complete with frescoes depicting Diana, the goddess of hunting. In the adjacent alcove, admire the soft folds of the stucco drapery, that hangs elegantly over the bed. Your visit to the Strada Nuova Museums concludes at **Palazzo Doria-Tursi**, the most magnificent building on the entire street. Its façade, spanning three lots, features hanging gardens. A grand staircase leads you to the courtyard, where the open loggias are named after various places in Genoa. The highlight of the palace is the **Sala Paganiniana**, which pays tribute to the famous Genoese violinist. This room showcases an



From above:  
Palazzo Rosso, alcove

Palazzo Doria Tursi  
aphy/Shutterstock©





exhibition of memorabilia, including his treasured 'Cannone,' a Guarneri del Gesù violin that Paganini used throughout his career.

### **PALAZZO LOMELLINO**

As you peek through the door at number 7 on Via Garibaldi, you immediately notice a refined **nymphaeum** at the end of the courtyard. Though its layout dates to the eighteenth century, it is inspired by sixteenth-century aesthetic principles. Beyond the sculptures referencing the myth of Phaeton, transformed into water by Zeus, and the stalactite-adorned walls, lies the **secret garden** — a hidden gem invisible from the street, stretching across multiple levels, making the most of the area's vertical landscape.

Climb the side staircase to wander through the geometric flowerbeds of the Italian garden, where a second nymphaeum honouring Bacchus awaits. Stroll along the pergola leading to the cave, home to statues of Adonis and the wild boar. Seek out the second garden, then make your way to the top of the turret, reminiscent of a minaret, for a breathtaking view from above. As Palazzo Lomellino is privately owned, it is advisable to check visitor access in advance.

### **PALAZZO SPINOLA**

Overlooking Piazza Pellicceria, **Palazzo Spinola**, built in 1593, contrasts sharply with the surrounding medieval houses, its grandeur standing in stark relief. The Spinola family gifted the building and all its



From above:  
Palazzo Spinola  
Luca Schillirò©

Palazzo Lomellino, nymphaeum  
Paludoso | Tempo dei sogni.com,  
dreamstime©



treasures to the State, under the condition that it be preserved as a private residence, which adds a unique charm to the visit. As you ascend the monumental staircase through the noble floors, take a moment to appreciate the richness of the furnishings and decorative elements. Don't forget to explore the kitchens located on the mezzanine level and the iconic Gallery of Mirrors. Once you reach the third floor, immerse yourself in the **Galleria Nazionale della Liguria**, which showcases a stunning collection of masterpieces. Among the notable works on display are "Sacred and Profane Love" by Guido Reni and "Portrait of Giovanni Carlo Doria on Horseback" by Rubens. The standout piece of the collection is a small panel painted around 1470: the **Ecce Homo** by Antonello da Messina. In contrast to the Caravaggio painting of the same name displayed in the Strada Nuova Museums, this work conveys a more essential tone. There is no elaborate historical setting; instead, it emphasises the profound yet sorrowful



expression of Christ, crowned with thorns. From this depiction, viewers can sense that it captures the poignant moment when Pontius Pilate presents Jesus to the crowd with the words "Ecce Homo."



Gallery of Mirrors,  
Palazzo spinola,,Perseomedusa  
- Tempo dei sogni.com/  
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# Experiencing the *Rolli* Today

## SPECIAL EXPERIENCES

*Many of the Palazzi dei Rolli remain in the hands of the families who inherited them, while others have been acquired by banks, credit institutions, or private entities. While the palaces that serve as museums (as mentioned in the previous pages) are regularly open to the public, many other aspects of the Rolli heritage await discovery through tailored programmes.*



Palazzo Balbi Senarega, Luca Schillirò©

### A MOMENT FOR STUDYING

The rooms that once hosted nobles in their grand attire are now the domain of students armed with tablets and textbooks. **Palazzo Balbi Senarega**, located at number 4 on Via Balbi, houses the humanities faculties of the **University of Genoa**. You can join the students as they stream past the colonnades to reach their study areas. Take a moment to sit and admire the stunning



Left: Palazzo Tobia  
Pallavicino, FabrizioRobba/  
Dreamstime.com®

Below: Palazzo Gio Vincenzo  
Imperiale, Annalisa Bruni®

Palazzo Bianco  
Dudlajzov/Dreamstime.com®

baroque frescoes that adorn the high ceilings, offering a vibrant burst of colour to those seeking inspiration in their studies.

## ROLLI DAYS

Three weekends a year, the remarkable Heritage of the Rolli comes alive for the public, showcasing its nearly intact splendour during the **Rolli Days**. During these special events, skilled guides lead visitors on a journey to uncover not only the stunning architecture and artistic treasures but also the rich legacy of the Rolli world, which has profoundly shaped the essence of Genoa with its unique charm. Most visits are either free or offered at reduced prices, and reservations are required.


## ROLLI EXPERIENCE

Have you ever dreamed of experiencing the grandeur of the Rolli as if you were

a distinguished guest visiting the aristocrats of Genoa? You can enjoy a taste of that exclusive welcome during the **Rolli Experience** weekends, which offer special packages featuring overnight stays, guided tours, tastings, and a Renaissance-themed dinner. This experience invites you to immerse yourself fully in the opulence and charm of the Golden Age of the Superba, crafting unforgettable moments —like the magic of wandering past stunning frescoes as you make your way to your hotel room. The remarkable venues for the dinners, such as Palazzo Tobia Pallavicino, now housing the Chamber of Commerce, and Palazzo Imperiale, elevate the flavours of Ligurian cuisine to new heights, making each meal a truly extraordinary experience.







Created by EDT for the Municipality of Genoa  
December 2024

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Photographs: Listed photographers

Editorial coordinator: Cristina Enrico

Graphic designer: Leila Librizzi

Texts by: Luca Iaccarino and Annalisa Bruni

EDT srl, via Pianezza 17, 10149 Turin  
[b2b@edt.it](mailto:b2b@edt.it) | [lonelyplanetitalia.it](http://lonelyplanetitalia.it)