



WHERE THE LANDSCAPE RESONATES

B**RGHI**
DELLA CULTURA
E DEL BENESSERE

Welcome to the Hamlets of Culture and Wellbeing. Set in the heart of the Bassa Cremonese, where the gentle flow of the Oglio River meets the ancient Via Postumia, two hamlets preserve centuries of noble courts and rural traditions. In Isola Dovarese and Torre de' Picanardi, the legacy of aristocratic families harmonizes with the tranquil landscapes of Oglio Sud Park.



Lands of the Dovara, Picenardi and Gonzaga, along the Oglio River

Between Cremona and Mantua, Isola Dovarese and Torre de' Picenardi bear the mark of the noble families who shaped them: the Ghibelline Dovara, immortalised by Dante, the Gonzaga of Mantua, and the Picenardi, who transformed their estates into refined Renaissance courts. Fertile countryside and the natural beauty of Oglio Sud Park frame these historic hamlets, where arcaded squares and elegant villas set within centuries-old gardens invite quiet discovery. Tradition runs deep here in exceptional local cuisine and the meticulous pageantry of the Palio di Isola Dovarese, while ancient residences find new life as vibrant cultural and artistic spaces.

This is a landscape made for unhurried exploration, on foot or by bike through farmsteads and along green riverbanks, where time stands still and life flows as gently as the Oglio itself.

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Palazzo Dovara

DVARIA

CICLICA DESIGN



Along the Oglio River: the Gonzaga, Dovara and Picenardi lands

Nestled between the Cremonese countryside and the banks of the **Oglio River**, Isola Dovarese and Torre de' Picenardi sit in an area of great strategic importance since Roman times. The ancient **Via Postumia** once cut straight through here, linking Genoa to Aquileia across the entire Po Valley. In the centuries that followed, this became a fiercely contested crossroads between the Duchy of Milan, the Republic of Venice and the Lordship of Mantua: a stage where the **Dovara**, **Gonzaga** and **Picenardi** families played out their ambitions, leaving an indelible mark on local architecture and cultural heritage.

Today, these lands welcome visitors seeking authentic experiences where history and nature converge. The **sweeping Gonzaga piazza** in **Isola Dovarese** takes center stage during the celebrated Palio, while the villas and noble gardens of **Torre de' Picenardi** invite visitors to linger and explore. Throughout the seasons, events bring both hamlets together in celebrations that blend culture and leisure. Tucked away along village lanes and Renaissance corners, restaurants in Isola Dovarese serve the genuine flavours of regional cooking, while the quiet countryside and Oglio Sud Park provide the perfect setting for nature lovers, walkers and cyclists, with dedicated paths and the Oglio Greenway.



By the Numbers

25 km

Distance from
Cremona

45 km

Distance from Mantua

1.062 residents
Isola Dovarese

2.188 residents
Torre de' Picenardi

12.800 ha
Oglio Sud Park
GAL Oglio Po

The
boundless
plain meets
the banks of
the Oglio.
In its *piazze*,
farmsteads
and noble
palaces, the
soul of Isola
Dovarese
quietly reveals
itself.





CULTURE

Surrounded by countryside, steeped in noble heritage and rural traditions

*Isola Dovarese,
the village embraced
by the river*

Despite what its name suggests, **Iso-la Dovarese** stands firmly on dry land. The ancient name *Insula* comes from the settlement's unusual position, built on an embankment embraced on three sides by the **Oglio River**. The hamlet's true identity, however, lies in the second part of its name: a reference to the **Ghibelline Dovara family** of Cremona, who became lords of the territory at the end of the twelfth century. In 1322, Anna Dovara, descendant of that Buoso da Duera immortalised in **Dante's Inferno**, married Filippino Gonzaga, binding the fate of Isola to the powerful Mantuan dynasty. From the fifteenth century, Isola Dovarese became a Gonzaga enclave surrounded by the Republic of Venice and the Duchy of Milan, a position as delicate as it was privileged,

which shaped its rich architectural and cultural heritage today. The heart of the hamlet is **Piazza Giacomo Matteotti**, one of the finest Gonzaga squares in Lombardy, built in the late sixteenth century and lined with elegant arcades. Here stand Palazzo Dovara and the **Palazzo Pretorio**; the latter, now home to the Town Hall, still houses the old prison cells, where visitors can see the marks etched by those once imprisoned. A short walk away, the **Church of San Nicolò** holds works by **Bernardino Campi** and the Annunciation, known as the "Madonna del Gatto" (Madonna of the Cat) attributed to Altobello Melone, while the **Oratory of San Giuseppe** served as a **military hospital** during the Risorgimento, testament to Isola's fervent patriotic spirit. From the atmospheric **Ponte Vecchio**, also known as the Bridge of the Three Martyrs of the Resistance, riverside walks lead into the natural landscape of Oglio Sud Park.

Torre de' Picenardi, the Villa and the Castle

Torre de' Picenardi takes its name from the noble **Picenardi** family of Cremona: cultured, enlightened aristocrats who, over the centuries, transformed this quiet corner of the plain into a court of exceptional refinement. The hamlet first took shape in the thirteenth century around a fortification known as **Torre de' Malamberti**. In the centuries that followed, the Picenardi settled in the area, gradually extending their influence until they acquired the entire territory, setting in motion a transformation that went far beyond a simple change of name. The family gradually abandoned the castle's **military function**, reshaping it into a **stately home**. This transformation reached its peak between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During this period, the ancient walls were demolished to make way for an architectural design that blended the characteristics of Villa di Delizia with striking neo-Gothic elements, celebrating the family's medieval roots.

Today **Villa Sommi Picenardi** is considered one of the region's most important historic buildings, renowned for its English-style garden, among the earliest and most spectacular of its kind in Italy. In the hamlet of Torre stands the **San Lorenzo Castle**, built from the fifteenth century by another branch of the family, which retains a more austere character, faithful to its medieval and Renaissance origins. Both historic residences open their doors to visitors by appointment and during public events.



Palazzo Dovara

Casa della Musica

With its elegant portico, this historic seat of the **Dovara family** stands proudly on the western side of Piazza Giacomo Matteotti, forming a corner with Palazzo Pretorio. The palazzo took its current form in the eighteenth century, remaining in the family's hands until the 1990s. Following the passing of Ena Dovara, the last descendant of the hamlet's branch of the family, the building faced a period of disuse and uncertainty before being recently acquired by the Municipality of Isola Dovarese. Today, through an ambitious **regeneration project**, Palazzo

Dovara begins a new chapter as Isola Dovarese's **Casa della Musica**. The stately rooms of this historic residence now serve as exceptional **art residencies** for international musicians seeking inspiration and **advanced training**, while the barn in the inner courtyard has been transformed into a **Music Room** whose concert season will bring music to the entire hamlet. Meticulous architectural and engineering care has ensured perfect acoustics for the auditorium. On the ground floor, beneath the nine arches of the portico, the **Spazio d'Arti e Mestieri** opens its doors. This is a socio-cultural hub of workshops and local businesses involved in the project, including the Pro Loco **tourist information** point.





TASTE AND TRADITION

The Palio of Isola Dovarese: the Renaissance brought to life

Every year, on the second weekend of September, Isola Dovarese turns back the clock five centuries. The **Palio delle Contrade** recreates the 1458 visit of Ludovico Gonzaga and Barbara of Brandenburg to the **Dovara family**, then allies of the Lords of Mantua. For over half a century, this celebration has transformed the hamlet into a fifteenth-century stage, where the four historic districts of **San Bernardino, San Giuseppe, Porta Tenca** and **Le Gerre** compete in traditional contests for the prestigious banner. Processions of costumed **ladies** and **knights** wind through the streets, while the four neighborhood **taverns** serve dishes prepared according to **Renaissance recipes**, using only ingredients available at the time. The festivities open on Friday evening as the Mayor officially welcomes the *Podestà*, continuing on



Where tradition meets the table

The local cuisine brings together the **gastronomic traditions** of **Cremona** and **Mantua** in an original blend, enriched by freshwater fish caught in the Oglio. On restaurant tables and menus, *marubini ai tre brodi* (a classic of Cremonese tradition) sit happily alongside Mantuan pumpkin *tortelli*, together with many other local favourites: hearty mixed boiled meats with fruit mustard, delicate frog *risotto*, and countless other specialties rooted in tradition. Freshwater catches from the Oglio River take pride of place in local fish dishes: pike, eel, carp and many other species find their way to the table in both traditional recipes and original interpretations. Upholding Isola Dovarese's gastronomic tradition are **Il Caffè la Crepa** and **Hotel Ristorante Palazzo Quaranta**, two notable culinary establishments overlooking Piazza Matteotti, beloved by locals and visiting food lovers alike. Those wishing to host celebrations and banquets in the green setting of the Oglio's banks can refer to **Ristorante Molino Vecchio**, also located in **Isola Dovarese**. Local gastronomy is celebrated each year in two popular food festivals organised by the Pro Loco of Isola Dovarese: the **Quinto Quarto Carnival** in February and the **Festa del Luartis** in June. The event is dedicated to the use of the humbler cuts of pork in traditional Po Valley cooking: offal and parts that some might consider waste are, in skilled hands, transformed into delicious and sustainable dishes. In June the focus shifts to **luartis**, the local name for wild hop shoots, with their fresh, slightly bitter flavour, used in frittatas, risottos and more. A special mention goes to the **Isolini**, a signature treat that, as the name suggests, is Isola Dovarese through and through. These fragrant, elongated biscuits are created by the **Bottega del Biscotto**, the hamlet's only bakery, active since 1966. The dough is enriched with hazelnuts and the biscuits are decorated with apricot jam; they quickly won over palates across the Cremonese area, making them a true symbol of local identity. In Torre de' Picenardi, local specialties can be enjoyed in exceptional settings at **Villa Sommi Picenardi** and the **San Lorenzo Castle**, both available as prestigious venues for private receptions.



NATURE AND LANDSCAPE

Outdoor experiences along the riverbanks

When visitors cross the Ponte Vecchio in Isola Dovarese, within moments they find themselves immersed in the **Oglio Sud Regional Park**, where time and rhythm are set by nature. The reserve stretches across the Cremonese and Mantuan territories along the river's southern course, protecting one of Lombardy's richest and most intact river ecosystems. Here the Oglio River flows calmly between green embankments, carving bends and oxbow lakes that are home to an **extraordinary variety** of wildlife. Reed beds and riparian woodland provide refuge for rich birdlife including grey herons, kingfishers, little egrets and mallards, while roe deer, foxes and badgers are frequent sights along the riverbanks. The wetlands scattered throughout the park create a mosaic of habitats where amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates live in balance with the surrounding fauna. Along the main embankments, where silence is broken only by birdsong and the murmur of water, natural trails wind through the landscape, creating the perfect setting for long walks and cycling enthusiasts. **Isola Dovarese** and the Oglio Sud Park are crossed by the **Oglio Greenway**, a **cycle route** that follows the entire course of the river for

over 280 kilometres. Following paths and quiet secondary roads, the route offers a sustainable and scenic way to discover authentic Lombardy, passing through historic hamlets, green oases and panoramic viewpoints. Isola Dovarese is also the starting point for various cycling routes catering to different abilities, allowing visitors to explore the Cremonese countryside, alternating stretches along the embankments with routes through **historic farmsteads** and **cultivated fields**. Beyond the park boundaries, the countryside remains just as captivating. Generations of farmers have shaped this land, turning vast marshlands into the fertile plains you see today. **Family farms** and innovative sustainable producers work side by side with larger estates, sustaining a proud agricultural heritage characterised by farm-to-table dining and locally sourced produce. Here, between the quiet countryside of Isola Dovarese and Torre de' Picenardi and the protected banks of Oglio Sud Park, time seems to slow, and the landscape rewards those who explore without hurry.

Canoeing on the river

By the time it reaches Oglio Sud Park, the Oglio River has left behind the turbulent waters of its Alpine birthplace. At Isola Dovarese it winds slowly across the plain, carving wide, vegetation-fringed bends that make this a natural haven for canoe and kayak enthusiasts. Paddling between willows and reed beds opens up a different perspective on the landscape, providing the perfect opportunity to observe local wildlife.

The Ca' d'Andrea Hostel

In Ca' d'Andrea, a hamlet of Torre de' Picenardi, a thoughtful restoration project has breathed new life into the old primary school, transforming it into a welcoming hostel. Much more than just a place to rest, it offers a vibrant shared space for cultural and community events, the perfect base for exploring Oglio Sud Park and the area's historic hamlets on foot or by bike.

The Bine Oasis

On the banks of the Oglio in Calvatone, a charming historic farmstead welcomes visitors to Le Bine Oasis and houses the Oglio Sud Park visitor centre. One of Italy's pioneering WWF reserves, it protects a rich yet delicate ecosystem where countless waterbirds, amphibians and mammals make their home. A natural paradise for birdwatchers, the oasis brings local wildlife to life through engaging nature activities designed for every age.

