



SACRI MONTI OF PIEMONTE AND LOMBARDY

REGIONE PIEMONTE Regione Lombardia

# Sacro Monte of Domodossola



**SACRO MONTE OF DOMODOSSOLA**  
 Superficie: 26 ettari  
 Altitudine: 279 - 414 metri  
 Ambiente: montagna  
 Property: Rosminian Fathers

## PROTECTED AREA

The history of the hill called "Colle di Mattarella", on which the complex of the Sacro Monte Calvario rises, is quite ancient. Among the most important pieces of evidence of its age, is the fragment of a paleo-Christian memorial tablet in marble dating back to 539 A.D.; it is the oldest document attesting the presence of Christianity in Ossola. On the hill there was once a castle originally built during the Longobard period (VI century) on pre-existing Roman structures and enlarged over the years. The land initially is almost flat and ruins of the ancient convent and traces of fields and terraces once dedicated to farming are visible. The wood, covering about half of the area, has mostly chestnut, oak, British oak, and durmast trees. The higher levels feature mixed vegetation: ash, black alder, poplars and birch along with numerous exotic species introduced in the last century. With the progressive abandonment of farming, the extension of the woods has encouraged the spread of the fauna, mainly birds, insects and small mammals. The Sacro Monte di Domodossola is a protected area of Regione Piemonte (1991) and since 2012 it has been part of Ente di Gestione dei Sacri Monti.



Photo A. Maniscalco

Access to the Sacred Mount is free of charge

**HOW TO GET THERE**  
 By car: Motorway A26 and Freeway 33 of the Simplon, exit Domodossola, directions for Sacro Monte  
 By train: connections for Milan, Losanna and Geneva (CH), Novara, Locarno (CH)  
 Info: [www.trenitalia.it](http://www.trenitalia.it). From the station it is just a short drive by taxi to the Sacred Mount  
 By bus: connections from and to Novara. Info: Autoservizi Comazzi - tel +39 0324 240333 [www.comazzibus.com](http://www.comazzibus.com)  
 On foot: follow directions for the Via Crucis along the pedestrian path starting from downtown Domodossola.  
 Info: Local public transportation: PRONTO TPL - tel 800333444 <http://prontotpl.5t.torino.it/>

**INFORMATION**  
 Ente di gestione dei Sacri Monti  
 Riserva speciale del Sacro Monte di Domodossola (A)  
 Borgata Sacro Monte Calvario, 5 - 28845 Domodossola (VB) - tel +39 0141 927120  
[info.domodossola@sacri-monti.com](mailto:info.domodossola@sacri-monti.com)  
[info@sacri-monti.com](mailto:info@sacri-monti.com) - <https://www.sacrimonti.org/sacro-monte-di-domodossola>

**Sanctuary (B) Centro di Spiritualità Rosminiana**  
 Sacro Monte Calvario - 28845 Domodossola (VB)  
 tel 39 0324 242010 - fax +39 0324 44 460  
[RettoreCalvario@Hotmail.com](mailto:RettoreCalvario@Hotmail.com) - [www.sacromontecalvario.it](http://www.sacromontecalvario.it)

**Tourist Office - Distretto Turistico dei Laghi, Monti e Valli d'Ossola**  
 tel +39 0323 30416 - [infoturismo@distrettolaghi.it](mailto:infoturismo@distrettolaghi.it) - [www.distrettolaghi.it](http://www.distrettolaghi.it)

**SERVICES**  
**Hotels and Restaurants**  
 Hospitality - Centro di Spiritualità Rosminiana - tel. 39 0324 242010 - [www.sacromontecalvario.it](http://www.sacromontecalvario.it)  
 Restaurant - Circolo Adli Santa Croce, Borgata Sacro Monte Calvario  
 28845 Domodossola - tel +39 0324 47049  
 Stockalper Parking - Underground parking lot at the entrance of the Sacred Mount  
**Guided Tours**  
 Service on reservation at Riserva speciale del Sacro Monte di Domodossola  
 tel +39 0324 241976 - [info.domodossola@sacri-monti.com](mailto:info.domodossola@sacri-monti.com)

**MUST SEE**  
 Borgo della Cultura (Historical centre of Domodossola), [www.borgodellacultura.it](http://www.borgodellacultura.it)  
 Musei della Città di Domodossola - info: tel +39 0324 4921 (Comune) - [info@visitossola.it](mailto:info@visitossola.it)  
 Associazione Musei dell'Ossola - [www.amossola.it](http://www.amossola.it)

**LINKS**  
 Comune of Domodossola - tel +39 0324 4921 - [www.comune.domodossola.vb.it](http://www.comune.domodossola.vb.it)  
 Parco Nazionale Valgrande - tel +39 032487540 - [www.parcovallgrande.it](http://www.parcovallgrande.it)  
 Ente di gestione Aree Protette dell'Ossola  
[www.areeprotetteossola.it](http://www.areeprotetteossola.it)  
 Sesia Valgrande Geopark - [www.sesialvalgrandegeopark.it](http://www.sesialvalgrandegeopark.it)  
 UNESCO Italy - [www.unesco.it](http://www.unesco.it)  
 Regione Piemonte turismo - [www.visitpiemonte.com](http://www.visitpiemonte.com)

REGIONE PIEMONTE ENTE DI GESTIONE DEI SACRI MONTI



Ente di gestione dei Sacri Monti (legal seat)  
 Documentation Centre of the European Sacred Mounts, Calvaries and Devotional Complexes  
 Cascina Valperone, 1 - 15020 Ponzano Monferrato (AL)  
 tel +39 0141 927120 - fax +39 0141 927800  
[info@sacri-monti.com](mailto:info@sacri-monti.com) - <https://www.sacrimonti.org>

Sacri Monti - Official #sacrimontisocial [sacrimontidelpiemonte](https://www.instagram.com/sacrimontidelpiemonte)

## HISTORY

This Sacro Monte Calvario is the northernmost of the Sacri Monti thanks to both its geographical position and the cultural influence of nearby Switzerland. The devotional path winds from the town centre of Domodossola to the hill of Mattarella. The construction of the Calvary Mount was started by the Capuchin monks Gioacchino da Cassano and Andrea da Rho, who in 1656 began the work for the realization of a monument that would allow pilgrims to relive the Passion of Christ in a sort of biblia pauperum. The project earned the approval of local populations, which contributed with substantial offerings and with their individual professional skills. The themes of the catechist-devotional path of the Sacro Monte are the episodes of the Way of the Cross and the Passion of Christ on Calvary. In 1657 the Sanctuary of the Crucifix, the culminating point of the devotional path, was built. Inside it are two chapels: Jesus Dies on the Cross - Gesù muore sulla croce, and the Deposition - la Deposizione. The other chapels were built in the following years in isolated positions along the paved road that ascends from the city. When in 1810 the Napoleonic suppression drove the Capuchin monks away, the Sacro Monte was still incomplete. In 1828, upon the arrival of Antonio Rosmini, who founded the Istituto della Carità - Institute of Charity - the work that led to the completion of the Sacro Monte Calvario received new impetus. Today the Mount is made up of fifteen chapels. The long period between the initiation and completion of the complex, almost two centuries, endows the chapels with architectural features that range from the baroque to the neo-classical. The list of artists who contributed their skills includes names like Dionigi Bussola, Carlo Mellerio and Giovanni Battista de Magistris.

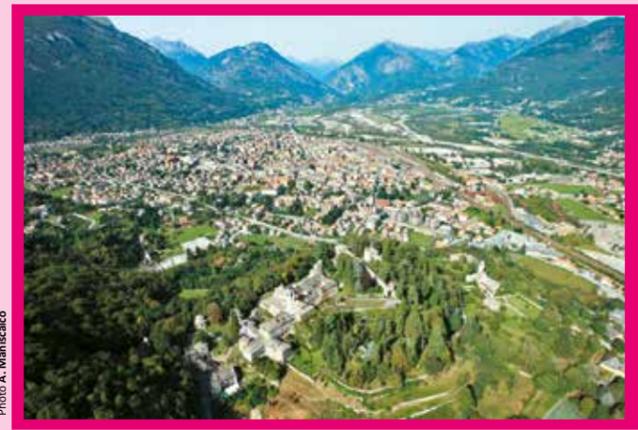


Photo A. Maniscalco

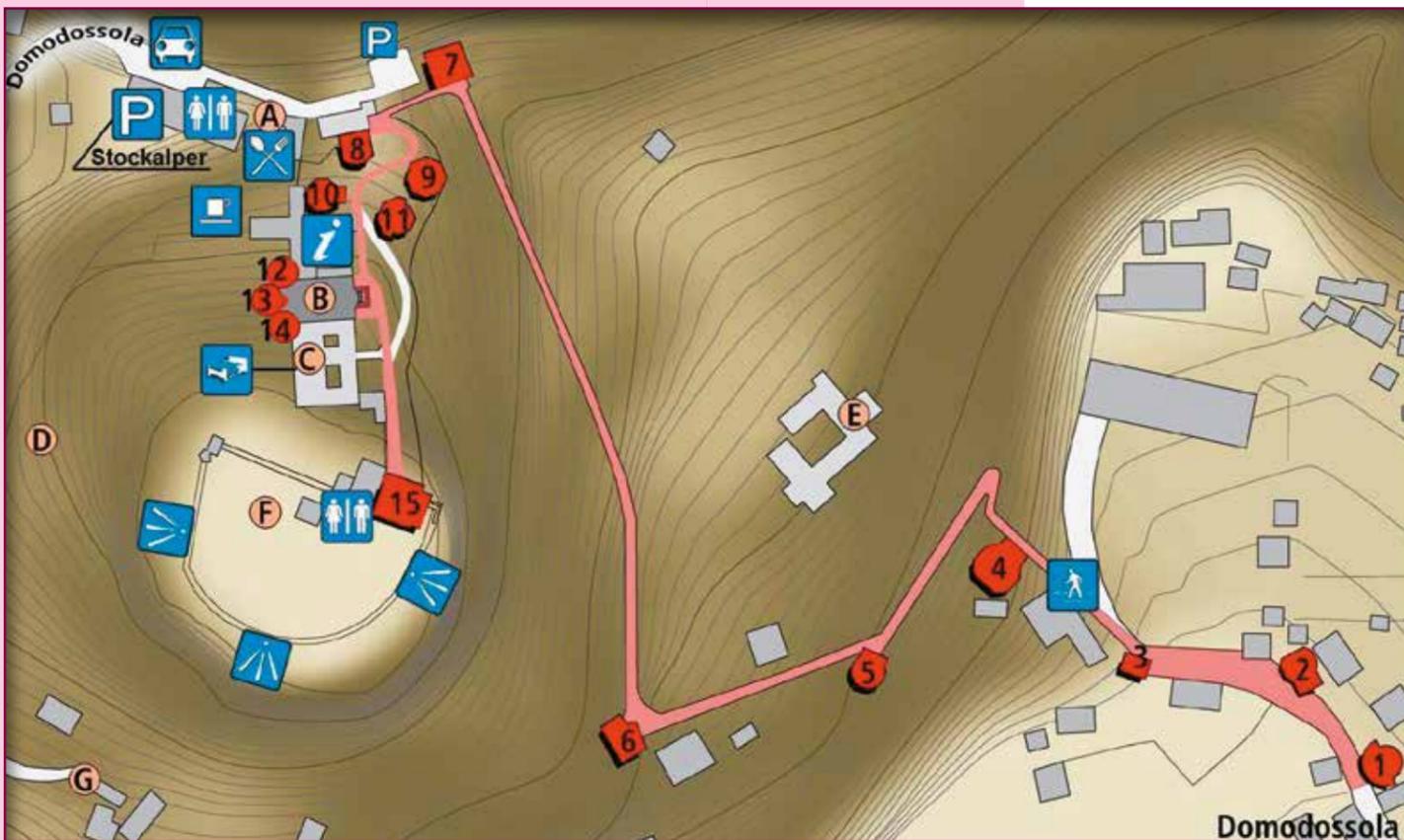


## SACRI MONTI UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE

"The nine *Sacri Monti* of Northern Italy are groups of chapels and other architectural handmade works built between the XVI and XVII century dedicated to different aspects of the Christian faith. Besides their symbolic and spiritual meaning, they feature notable characteristics of beauty, virtue and charm as they blend in with natural and scenic environments of hills, woods and lakes. They also contain very important artistic remains (frescoes and statues)". This is the motivation according to which in 2003 UNESCO included the "Sacri Monti di Piemonte e Lombardia" site in its World Heritage List. This prestigious acknowledgement confers universal value to seven *Sacri Monti* of Piedmont (Belmonte, Crea, Domodossola, Ghiffa, Orta and Varallo) and two of Lombardy (Ossuccio and Varese), highlighting the extraordinary richness, qualities and values of these historical, artistic and nature gems. The chapels series depicts episodes and mysteries of sacred life through statues, paintings and frescos while blending in with the embracing environment and contributing in defining the features of each monumental complex. *Valuable examples of landscape architecture, the Sacri Monti represent an important meeting point for believers and lovers of art.* First arising on the western Alps, where this phenomenon originated more than five hundred years ago, the *Sacri Monti* then inspired similar models in many parts of Catholic Europe. The seven *Sacri Monti* of Piedmont are part of the protected area system of Regione Piemonte which provides for historical and artistic preservation, maintenance and protection of the surrounding environment.

**On foot among the Sacri Monti - UNESCO**  
**The Sacri Monti of Piedmont and Lombardy, a path where to meet art, landscape and spirituality**  
 The Sacri Monti of Piedmont and Lombardy are connected by an articulated pedestrian path that intersects and overlaps the ancient Italian and European devotional paths. The complete route of the **Devoto cammino dei Sacri Monti** is being updated but it can be largely downloaded from the website [www.sacrimonti.org](http://www.sacrimonti.org)

Graphic layout and printing Industria Grafica Borgosesia s.r.l.



Cartography by University of Genoa - Polytecnic School - D.S.A. Department

## LEGEND

- (A) Park Office
- (B) Sanctuary
- (C) Convent and Rosminian Spiritually Centre
- (D) Botanical Garden
- (E) Ancient Convent Remains
- (F) Gardens of Castello di Mattarella

- Bar
- Information Point
- Toilet
- Hospitality
- Pedestrian path
- Viewpoint
- Parking
- Restaurant
- Carriage road

## COSTRUCTION PHASES

### First phase (1657-1690)

Sanctuary, chapels 2, 4, 9, Madonna delle Grazie, Holy House of Loreto, Convent of Capuchins.

Artists: Tommaso Lazzaro, Dionigi Bussola.

### Second phase (1690-1735)

Chapel 15, building for religious exercises.

Artists: Antonio and Domenico Perini, Giuseppe Rusnati

### Third phase (1764-1778)

Chapels 1,6,7,8, 10, 11; the main road takes final shape.

Artists: Pier Maria Perini, Lorenzo Peracino.

### XIX century (1828-1855): chapel 5

XX century: reconstruction of the 1st chapel, destroyed in 1830. Construction of the 3rd chapel (1907)

## THE CHAPELS OF THE VIA CRUCIS

**Chapel 1 - Gesù davanti a Pilato (Christ before Pilate)** - Constructed in the mid-1700s. Used to store explosive powder, it was devastated by an explosion in 1830. The present chapel, on a circular base, was built in 1900. The statues are by the sculptor Pietro Mosca from Biella.

**Chapel 2 - Gesù è caricato della Croce (Christ takes the cross upon his shoulder)** - This is one of the most interesting chapels from an artistic standpoint: it contains thirteen statues by Dionigi Bussola, master sculptor of the Duomo di Milano (Cathedral of Milan) and the most important artist who worked on the Sacro Monte di Domodossola. The arcade was frescoed in 1735 for the official establishment of the Way of the Cross.

**Chapel 3 - Gesù cade la prima volta (Christ falls for the first time)** - In the third chapel the scene depicted on the masonry is worthy of note. This was the last chapel built in 1907.

**Chapel 4 - Gesù incontra Sua Madre (Jesus meets his mother)** - The fourth chapel is of remarkable artistic value: the group depicts the encounter of Jesus Christ and his Mother. The artist was Dionigi Bussola. This is one of the most successful works of the entire complex.

**Chapel 5 - Il Cireneo (The Cyrenaic)** - The fifth chapel, built in neoclassical style on a circular plan with a domed ceiling, was built in 1835 thanks to a donation by an illustrious citizen of Domodossola, Count Giacomo Mellerio, once Grand Chancellor of Lombardo Veneto and Vice Governor of Milan. It contains wooden statues of recent workmanship and frescoes from the XIX century by the painter Luigi Hartmann, who portrayed the episode of the Cyrenaic.

**Chapel 6 - La Veronica (The Veronica)** - The sixth chapel depicts the encounter of Christ with the Veronica in a fresco by the painter Raineri of Cannobio, which was later covered with a scene in masonry and repainted. The same scene is now portrayed in modern wooden statues by Vincenzo Demetz from Val Gardena.

### Chapel 7 - Gesù cade la seconda volta (Jesus falls for the second time)

**Chapel 8 - Gesù incontra le donne di Gerusalemme (Jesus encounters the women of Jerusalem)** - The seventh and eighth chapels represent Christ falling for the second time and his encounter with the women of Jerusalem. The two moments are represented with many expressionistic details in a rather emphatic baroque style, typical of the popular taste of the time (T. Bertamini).

### Chapel 9 - Gesù cade la terza volta (Jesus falls for the third time)

**Chapel 10 - Gesù è spogliato e abbeverato di fiele (Jesus is stripped and made to drink gall)**

**Chapel 11 - Gesù è crocifisso (Jesus is crucified)** - The statues of the ninth chapel (Christ falls for the third time) are by a disciple of Bussola, the Barnabite Giuseppe Rusnati from Gallarate, a sculptor working in the rococo style. He also worked on the tenth chapel, which depicts the undressing of the Christ. The frescoes characterized by lively colours are by the painter Lorenzo Peracino from Cellio di Valsesia (mid XVIII century). Impressive backgrounds from the mid XVIII century are also present in the 11th chapel (the Crucifixion).



Photo A. Langhi

**Chapel 12 - Gesù spira sulla croce (Jesus dies on the cross)** (Sanctuary of SS. Crocifisso)

**Chapel 13 - La Deposizione (The Deposition)** - Sanctuary of the SS. Crocifisso - The twelfth and thirteenth stations contain the statues of Christ dying on the Cross and his deposition. They are located inside the Sanctuary. Sculpted by Dionigi Bussola, they are considered the best of those he created for the Sacro Monte di Domodossola. In the Dying Christ, located on the high altar, the artist captured the instant when living breath abandons the body of the Redeemer. Flanking the Cross are the statues of the Virgin Mary and Saint John; at Christ's feet is Mary Magdalene. The fresco that is the background of the Deposition is by Giovanni Sanpietro. High on the corbels stand the imposing statues of the prophets (sculpted by Bussola as well).

**Chapel 14 - Il Sepolcro (The Sepulchre)** - Sanctuary of SS. Crocifisso. The first statue Bussola created for the Calvary of Domodossola was of the dead Christ, to which he later added the two Angels (in the so-called Sepulchre chapel, the fourteenth, located beneath the chapel floor). As mentioned in the memorial plaque, Giovanni Matteo Capis, son of the first historian of the Ossola Valley and "great benefactor and founder of the Calvary", was buried in this crypt.

**Chapel 15 - La Resurrezione (The Resurrection)** - The fifteenth and last chapel, considered "extra" because it is numbered beyond the "canonical fourteen", is called the "Paradise Chapel". It is located outside and just above the Sanctuary. Nine terracotta statues by Rusnati represent the scene of the Resurrection.

**Sanctuary of SS. Crocifisso (B)** - Built in 1657, it contains sculptures of the prophets and Christ risen by D. Bussola and G. B. Volpini. Paintings by F. Bozzetti (1910), Francesco Zamboni (1911), Enrico Volonterio (1913), and Giuseppe de Giorgi (1913).

**Chapel - Visione della Croce (The Vision of the Cross)** - Sanctuary of SS. Crocifisso sculptures by D. Bussola (1681) and G. Rusnati (early 18th century). Paintings by G. Sampietro.

**Oratorio della Madonna delle Grazie (Oratory of Our Lady of the Graces)** - Built in 1660, it contains stucco sculptures by C. G. Giovanninetti (1703) and paintings by Carlo Mellerio and G. Sampietro (late XVII century).

## THE ROSMINIAN FATHERS' GARDEN

Open to visitors, they represent a true oasis of peace and quietness. Already back in 1658 the Bishop of Novara commissioned the enlargement of the gardens positioning the vegetation in a manner "evoking the natural order" as opposed to the rigid symmetric setting of Renaissance gardens. The garden features various refined essences, including exotic ones, such as sequoia, camphor, yew, overseas conifers as well as numerous ornamental shrub species.

## THE CHURCH OF SAINT QUIRICO

On the southern slopes of the Mattarella hill stands the oratory dedicated to Saints Quirico and Giulitta. Recent studies lead to believe the pre-existence of a heathen temple dedicated to a Celtic-Etruscan deity. The current church reveals structures dating back to the XI century, while the internal frescoes are from century XIV and XV. The most ancient frescoes are attributed to the same sculptor (unknown) of the Madonna of the Sanctuary of Re (Val Vigezzo) while those from XV century are attributed to Giovanni de Campo and his workshop.

## THE PRESS AND MILL WAY

Behind Domodossola and Villadossola a wide piedmont area preserves ancient rural villages. Stone buildings clinging to the mountain and surrounded by terraced fields recounting the "Mountain rural culture". The press and mill way is an excursion itinerary winding halfway up the hill between Villadossola and the Sacro Monte up to Bognanco. It is walking trip following the ancient stone roads and enables to view the agriculture landscape along the mountain. A dive into the past at a very short distance from the towns to enjoy the pleasure of walking surrounded by nature and discover an ancient civilization which we all come from.

### Walk time

Villadossola - Sacro Monte: 3h and 30 min. (8,7 km)

Calvario-Bognanco: 4h (10,5 km)



Photo A. Langhi



## BLESSED ANTONIO ROSMINI AND THE ROSMINIAN FATHERS

The great crisis which followed the French Revolution and involved all civil and religious institutions at the end of the XVIII century hit the Calvary Sacred Mount as well. All religious properties were liquidated and for over 30 years not even maintenance was done on the church and the chapels. Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855), priest and philosopher, settled on Mount Calvary in 1828. He began his work by founding the Istituto della Carità whose members would become known as Padri Rosminiani (Rosminian Fathers). In 1863 the Rosminian Order acquired the entire Calvary estate, thus rescuing it from the destruction to which it seemed destined and initiating important restoration and extension projects. In the 1880s, retaining its function as headquarters of the novitiate, the complex was endowed with a Rosminian Spiritual Centre open to both priests and laymen in an atmosphere of not only silence and prayer, but also of the evocative and surprising environment of orchards, gardens, castle ruins and the view over the vast Ossola landscape.

