



SACRI MONTI OF PIEDMONT AND LOMBARDY

UNESCO World Heritage Site  
 REGIONE PIEMONTE  
 Regione Lombardia

# Sacro Monte of Orta



**SACRO MONTE OF ORTA**  
 Surface area: 13 hectares  
 Elevation: 370 - 401 metres  
 Environment: Hilly/Lake  
 Property: Commune of Orta San Giulio

## PROTECTED AREA AND ENVIRONMENT

The Sacro Monte di Orta is located at about 400 metres above sea level in a majestic panoramic position overlooking the town of Orta and the homonymous lake. The territory of the Reserve covers 13 hectares, broken down into two distinct zones: the hill slopes, populated mostly by broadleaf trees, and the monumental area, where the vegetation has always been cared for as a historical garden. The creator of the Sacro Monte di Orta project did not simply plan the pathways among the chapels, but he put great effort also in designing the environment and vegetation pattern along the trails: the result is a unique combination of nature, the lake and the chapels which today still represents one of the major characteristics of this Sacro Monte. The flora features evergreen species and typical mountain plants such as blueberries. Among the tree species, worth mentioning are Scotch pines, yews and ashes, along with an enchanting trail of century-old hornbeams overlooking the town and Lake of Orta. The Sacro Monte di Orta is a protected area of Regione Piemonte (1980) and since 2012 it has been part of Ente di Gestione dei Sacri Monti.



Photo A. Langhi



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Access to the Sacred Mount is free of charge

**HOW TO GET THERE**  
 By car: Motorway A26 exit Borgomanero direction Gozzano - Orta (SS 229)  
 By train: railway station Orta-Miasino (20 minutes on foot from the Sacred Mount), connections with Novara and Domodossola. Info: www.trenitalia.com  
 By bus: connections for Novara and Domodossola. Info: tel +39 0322 844862 - www.comazzibus.com  
 Info: Local public transportation - PRONTO TPL - tel 800333444  
 http://prontotpl.5t.torino.it/

**Accessibility note:** visitors can leave their cars at the parking of Orta, and walk to the Sacred Mount (about 10 minutes), or reach the parking lot at the entrance of the Park. Buses cannot climb up the Mount and must park at the beginning of the road.

**INFORMATION**  
 Ente di gestione dei Sacri Monti  
 Riserva speciale Sacro Monte di Orta (G)  
 Via Sacro Monte - 28016 Orta San Giulio (NO)  
 tel +39 0322 911960 - fax +39 0322 905654  
 info.orta@sacri-monti.com - https://www.sacrimonti.org/en/sacro-monte-di-orta

**Sanctuary (C)**  
 Santuario Sacro Monte - Convento Padri Francescani  
 Via Sacro Monte, 3 - 28016 Orta San Giulio (NO)  
 tel e fax +39 0322 90149

**SERVICES**  
 Info-point e Guardiaparco Office (G) - tel + 39 0322 911960  
 info.orta@sacri-monti.com

**Tourist Office**  
 Tourist Office of Orta (IAT) - Via Panoramica - 28016 Orta San Giulio (NO)  
 tel +39 0322 905163  
 Tourist Office of Novara and province - tel +39 0321 394059  
 info@turismonovara.it - www.turismonovara.it  
 Tourist Office Distretto dei Laghi - tel +39 0323 30416  
 info@distrettodeilaghi.it - www.distrettolaghi.it

**Guided Tours on reservation at Riserva speciale del Sacro Monte di Orta**  
 tel +39 0322 911960 - info.orta@sacri-monti.com

**MUST SEE**  
 Borgo antico di Orta - Isola di San Giulio  
 Monte Mesma e Torre di Buccione

**LINKS**  
 Comune di Orta San Giulio - www.comune.ortasangulio.no.it  
 Ente di gestione delle Aree Protette del Ticino e del Lago Maggiore  
 www.parcotcinolagomaggiore.it  
 Unesco Italia - www.unesco.it  
 Regione Piemonte turismo - www.visitpiemonte.com

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 - https://www.sacrimonti.org

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## HISTORY

Standing on the summit of a hill overlooking the Lake of Orta, this Sacro Monte fits perfectly in with the surrounding landscape. The woods, the variety of architectural and decorative styles, the enchanting panorama over the lake are all elements that make this place unique, pervaded by a sense of meditation and serenity. The Sacro Monte of Orta is dedicated to Saint Francis of Assisi and each of the twenty chapels recounts episodes of the saint's life, interpreted as simile of the life of Jesus. It is this dedication to a saint, rather than to Christ or to the Madonna, that makes it different from the other Sacri Monti. The devotional complex was built, emulating the nearby Sacro Monte di Varallo, starting at the end of the XVI century, on the initiative of the abbot of Novara, Amico Canobio. Its construction was entrusted to the Capuchin Father, Cleto da Castelletto Ticino, who immediately planned for the careful insertion of the architectural elements into the surrounding landscape. The construction of the chapels, which follow one after the other a spiral pattern, took more than a century, interpreting the path as an opportunity to showcase different architectural styles: from late Renaissance to the baroque of the mid XVII century and to the rococò of the buildings built between the XVII and XVIII century. The internal decoration, rich of statues and frescoes portraying the life of Saint Francis, stands out for the realism of the figures. The worksite enjoyed the contributions of great artists such as Cristoforo Prestinari, Dionigi Bussola, the Fiammenghinis, the d'Enrico Brothers (the Rightis) and many others. The devotional path ends with the Church of Saint Nicolao, a proto-Romanic building completely remodelled in the XVII century to imitate the Lower Basilica of Assisi.



Photo A. Langhi

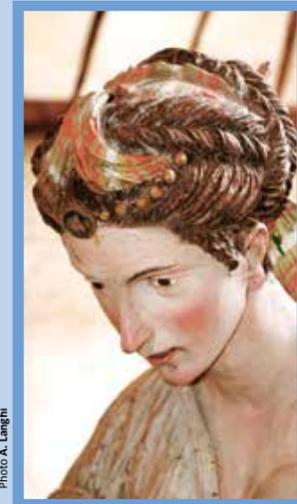
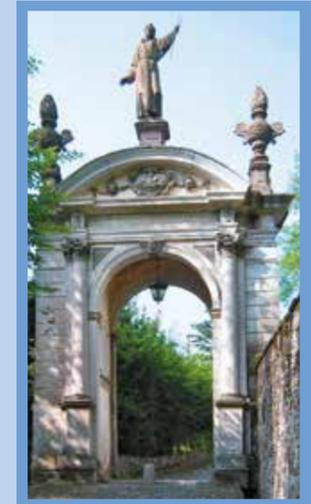


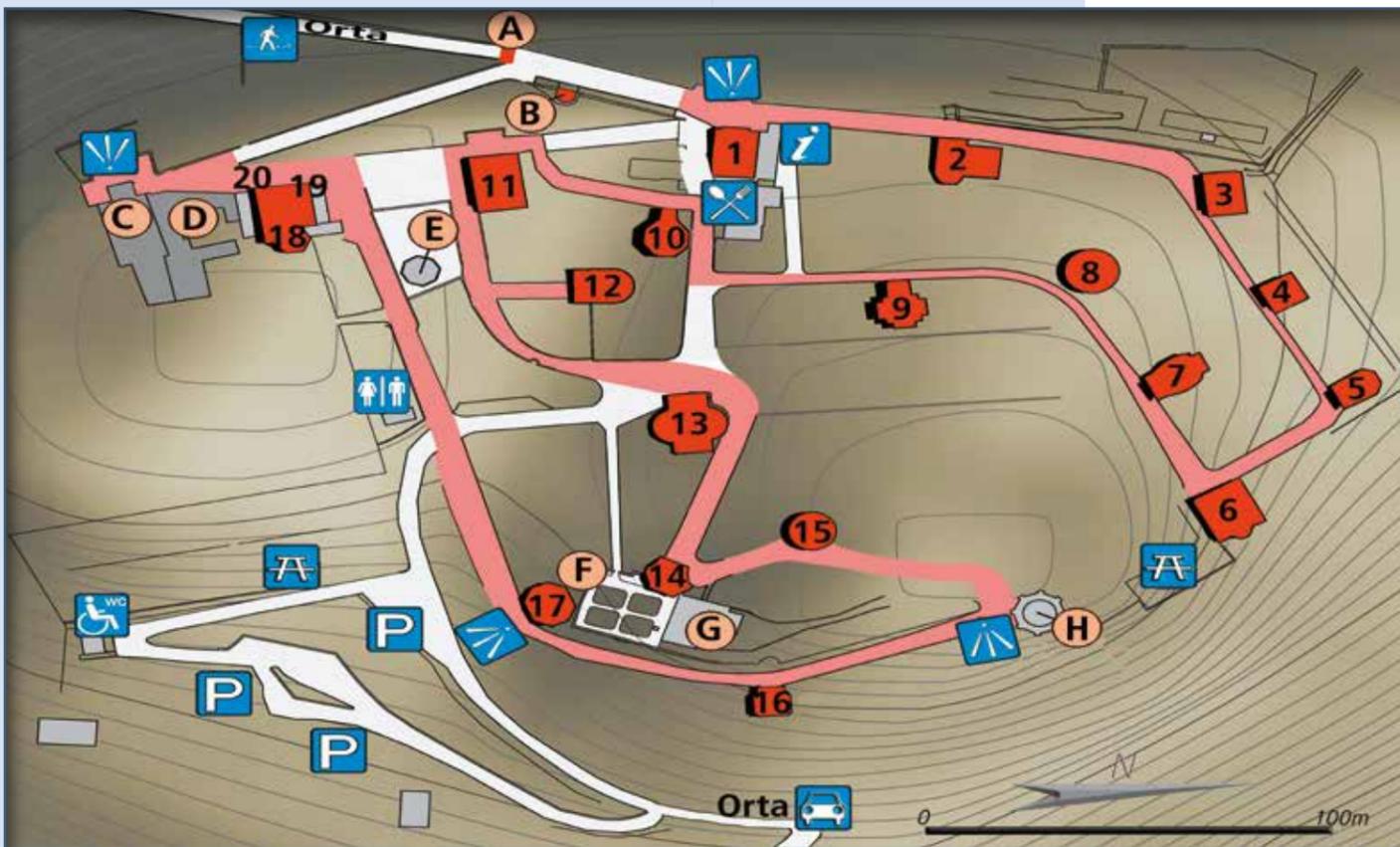
Photo A. Langhi



## 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, Oropa, 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)



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

## LEGEND

- (A) Entrance Arch
- (B) Pillar of Saint Francesco
- (C) Church of Saint Nicolao
- (D) Convent
- (E) Well
- (F) Botanical Garden
- (G) park Office
- (H) "Cappella Nuova" - Exhibition hall

- Information Point
- Toilet
- Toilets equipped for disabled people
- Picnic area
- Pedestrian path
- Viewpoint
- Parking
- Carriage road

## THE CHAPELS

**Entrance Arch (A)** - Already existing in 1648; interventions attributed to Maurizio Caminada and Guglielmo da Soriso; the top statue is by Dionigi Bussola (1661).

**Chapel 1. Birth of Saint Francis** - Started in 1592, its façade is from the XIX century; sculptures by Cristoforo Prestinari (early 1600s); frescoes by Giacomo Filippo Monti.

**Chapel 2. The Cross speaks to Saint Francis inside the Church of Saint Damian** - Built between 1606 and 1609 it houses statues by Cristoforo Prestinari and Dionigi Bussola; frescoes by Giovanni Mauro and Giovanni Battista della Rovere (known as the Fiamminghinis).

**Chapel 3. Saint Francis renounces to his family possessions in the hands of the Bishop** - Started in 1596; sculptures by Cristoforo Prestinari; frescoes by the Rovere brothers.

**Chapel 4. Saint Francis attends the mass** - Built between 1609 and 1629; sculptures by Cristoforo Prestinari; frescoes by the Della Rovere brothers.

**Chapel 5. First followers of Saint Francis take the habit** - Built in 1612; statues by Cristoforo Prestinari; frescoes and sculpture decorations by Giovanni Battista della Rovere (1615).

**Chapel 6. Francis invites the friars to preach** - I miracoli confermano la predicazione (nave) (The miracles confirm the preaching) – Built between 1614 and 1615; sculptures by Cristoforo Prestinari and Dionigi Bussola; frescoes by the Della Rovere brothers.

**Chapel 7. Innocent III approves the life propositions of Saint Francis and of his first companions** - Built between 1619 and 1623; statues by Giovanni and Melchiorre d'Enrico (1634) and Dionigi Bussola (1661); frescoes by Antonio Maria Crespi (1629).

**Chapel 8. Saint Francis appears to the friars in their dreams, enraptured on a chariot of fire** - Built and almost finished in 1629; sculptures by Giovanni and Melchiorre d'Enrico, Giacomo Ferro and carver Bartolomeo Tiberino; frescoes by Cristoforo Martinoli known "the Rocca".

**Chapel 9. Saint Claire takes the habit** - Built in 1639; sculptures by Giovanni d'Enrico, Giacomo Ferro (1642) and Dionigi Bussola; frescoes by Cristoforo Martinoli.

**Chapel 10. Saint Francis overcomes the temptations** - Built between 1640 and 1650; statues attributed to Dionigi Bussola; frescoes by Carlo and Francesco Nuvolone (1660-1665).

**Chapel 11. Saint Francis obtains indulgence from the Porziuncola** - Built between 1606-1607; sculptures by Cristoforo Prestinari; frescoes by Pier Francesco Mazzucchelli known as the "Morazzone" (1616).

**Chapel 12. Christ dictates the rule to Francis** - Finished in 1597, restored in 1619, modified in 1772; sculptures by Cristoforo Prestinari; frescoes by Giovanni Battista Cantalupi (1772).

**Chapel 13. Saint Francis humbly has himself led along the streets of Assisi naked** - Built in late XVII century; the 61 statues are works of the sculptors Giuseppe Rusnati and Bernardo Falconi; decorations and frescoes by brothers Giovanni Battista and Gerolamo Grandi and by Federico Bianchi.

**Chapel 14. Saint Francis meets the Sultan of Egypt** - Last chapel built on the Sacred Mount and completed in mid 1700s; sculptures by Carlo Beretta, frescoes by Federico Ferrari.

**Chapel 15. Saint Francis is given the Stigmata on Mount Verna** - Built and completed in 1594 by Cleto da Castelletto; statues by Cristoforo Prestinari; frescoes by Riccardo Donino (end of XVIII).

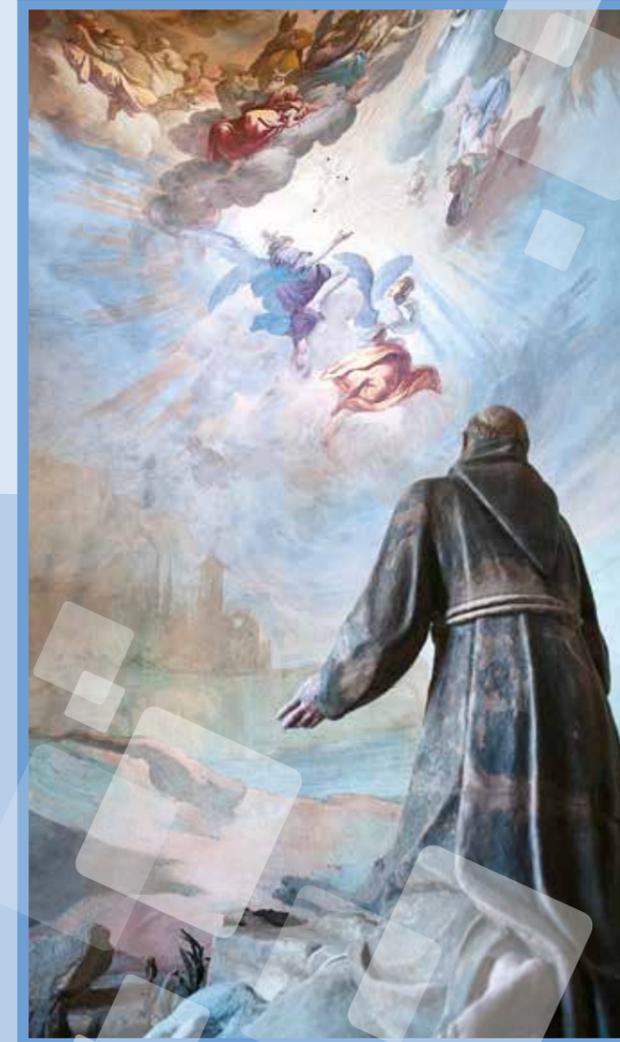


Photo A. Langhi

**Chapel 16. Francis, seriously ill, returns to Assisi just before dying** - Completed late XVII century; sculptures by Dionigi Bussola; XVIII century frescoes by Stefano Maria Legnani.

**Chapel 17. Death of Saint Francis** - Built around mid XVII century; statues by Dionigi Bussola (1661-1665); frescoes by brothers Carlo Francesco and Giuseppe Nuvolone (1660-1662) and by Giovanni Battista Grandi (1690).

**Chapel 18. Sepulchre of Saint Francis** - Started in 1591 and completed in 1670; sculptures by Giovanni d'Enrico (early XVII century); together with the last two chapels it forms the "Canobian chapels" complex.

**Chapel 19. The Miracles of Saint Francis** - Contemporary of chapel 18 (1591-1670); sculptures by Giuseppe Rusnati (second half of XVII century); frescoes by Antonio Busca.



Photo A. Langhi

**Chapel 20. Canonization of the Saint** - Built contemporarily with chapels 18 and 19 (1591-1670); statues by Dionigi Bussola; frescoes by Antonio Busca.

**The "Nuova" Chapel (H)** - Built between 1788 and 1795 by architect Santini of Lagna it was supposed to house a sculpture group never realized.

**Church of Saint Nicolao (C)** - Worship building of Romanic origins; it houses painting works connected to the artists who participated to the construction of the Sacred Mount; the artist of the wooden statue of the Madonna of Mercy is unknown.

**Botanical Garden - The Garden of the Humbles (F)** - This garden is at the Reserve office entrance and here are cultivated medicinal and officinal herbs typical of the Franciscan herbarium tradition.



Photo A. Langhi

## INFORMATION

**The Chapels are open 7 days a week, Christmas Day, S. Stefano, New Year's Eve, Epiphany and January 31 excluded.**

**Opening times** - In winter, from Monday to Wednesday, 9.30 a.m. - 4.00 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 9.30 a.m. - 4.30 p.m. In summer from Monday to Wednesday, 9.30 a.m. - 6.00 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 9.30 a.m. - 6.30 p.m. Visitors, schools and students can contact the Reserve staff for information and researches dedicated to the park and artistic complex of the Sacred Mount. Visitors can have their packed lunches in the two picnic areas near the parking lot and at Chapel 6. Next to Chapel 1 the tour centre provides brochures and information about the Piedmontese Sacred Mounts.