

A holiday in Liguria with mushroom enthusiasts.

The Ligurian Alps are a hidden gem nestling in Italy close to the French border, a short drive from the Mediterranean and just over an hour from Nice airport but they could be a thousand miles away from the Riviera. Densely wooded forests cover the hills and mountains, with beautiful and historic old towns and villages crowded on the tops of the hills.



Pigna

We stayed in a Bed & Breakfast near Pigna, Casa Valeria, run by Valerie and Vilmo (www.casavaleria.it). Valerie is English and Vilmo lived and worked in England for 20 years. Vilmo is a passionate mushroom hunter and five years ago they returned to the area where he was born and grew up. They renovated the building that is now the B&B and it provides a wonderful place to relax, with views of nearby Pigna and the surrounding hillsides and an arbor where our party of four enjoyed breakfast every morning sheltered from the sun by vine leaves and flowers.

The towns and villages are a higgledy-piggledy mix of houses added over the centuries one on top of the other connected by a maze of narrow streets and alleys. Our first visit was to the charming town of Dolceacqua, where we discovered lots of really good restaurants serving local specialities like wild boar and rabbit, along with whatever local fungi were in season. The locals' passion for fungi was plain to see on the boards outside and the food was excellent, plentiful and good value.





Pigna



Dolceacqua

On other days we wandered around Pigna or just bought local bread, cheese, fruit and salad and enjoyed a picnic high in the hills above Casa Valeria, where the Oaks, Hazel and other deciduous trees give way to Pine and fungi and wild flowers are everywhere to be seen.

There is so much to explore but the local roads are narrow, so make sure you don't hire too wide a car. In fact, there is very little traffic on the mountain roads but squeezing past oncoming vehicles can be a bit of an ordeal! The best day was when Valerie and Vilmo took us to see the villages and towns where Vilmo grew up and where his family still live. We followed them around the hills from place to place, occasionally stopping to look at flowers and fungi, and enjoying lunch in the town of Triora.



Hunting for fungi with Vilmo





A shop front in Triora with Porcini in olive oil



The village where Vilmo grew up, viewed from Triora

We left so much unexplored that we are determined to go back again. To collect fungi in Liguria, you need a permit from the local commune and Vilmo is able to organise this if you are staying at Casa Valeria. The cost of the permit is around 5 euros a day. Casa Valeria costs 60 euros per couple per night including breakfast.



Macrolepiota heimii (above) and *Russula aurata*, two of many fungi seen in the hills above Pigna

