



The luxurious Agriturismo Cascina Barac sits in its own impossibly picturesque vineyard.

## Italian 'Piki Piki' Tour

Scooter touring holidays are fine if you have a large capacity scooter or lots of time to spare. What about those who can only afford a short break and don't want to slog hundreds of miles to visit a scenic destination? For the rest of us there's the Piki Piki (African slang for scooter) tour around Alba by Vespa: a sort of scooterist fly-drive to Italy.

**I**taly is still growing as a holiday destination for the Brits. Most people have heard about Rome, Rimini and handbag robbery in Naples. Tuscany has grown in fame with our Prime Minister's regular sojourns there, but have you ever considered the Piedmont region?

Piedmont literally means 'foothills', and quite conveniently occupies the hilly top corner of Italy between France, the Alps and the Mediterranean

like a poorly hidden gem.

Nestled around an hour or two south of Fiat's 'Italian Job' base in Turin is the medieval city of Alba. It is from there that Roberta Ferrero runs scooter tours of the surrounding wine region.

The basic holiday package gets you transfers from Turin airport, four nights' accommodation including evening meals, hire of a Vespa ET4 and three days of touring around the ancient vineyards with guided stop-offs. Rather than shepherding her clients each day, Roberta has

produced three tour programmes and road books so that you can ride at your own pace. The road books offer pictorial views of every junction and the area is excellently signposted so the routes are easy to follow.

### Cascina Barac

One excellent aspect of the tour is that you stay in the same hotel each night with the tours looping out in a different direction each day. This avoids the laborious process of packing and unpacking



Well-surfaced winding roads backed by a vista of snow-capped Alps. Could this be scooterist heaven?

Food here is so good because the chefs use quality raw materials. In Italy tomatoes taste of tomato, not of Dutch greenhouses and quick-grow compost.

that accompanies a normal touring holiday. We arrived quite late at Cascina Barac, but the warmth of our greeting made up for the chill of the November evening. Set up in the middle of its own vineyard a couple of kilometres outside Alba, Cascina Barac is the best accommodation that Roberta uses. It's not really a hotel – the official term is an 'Agriturismo' – which is means a typically Italian way to get tax breaks for building a hotel-cum-restaurant in rural surroundings.

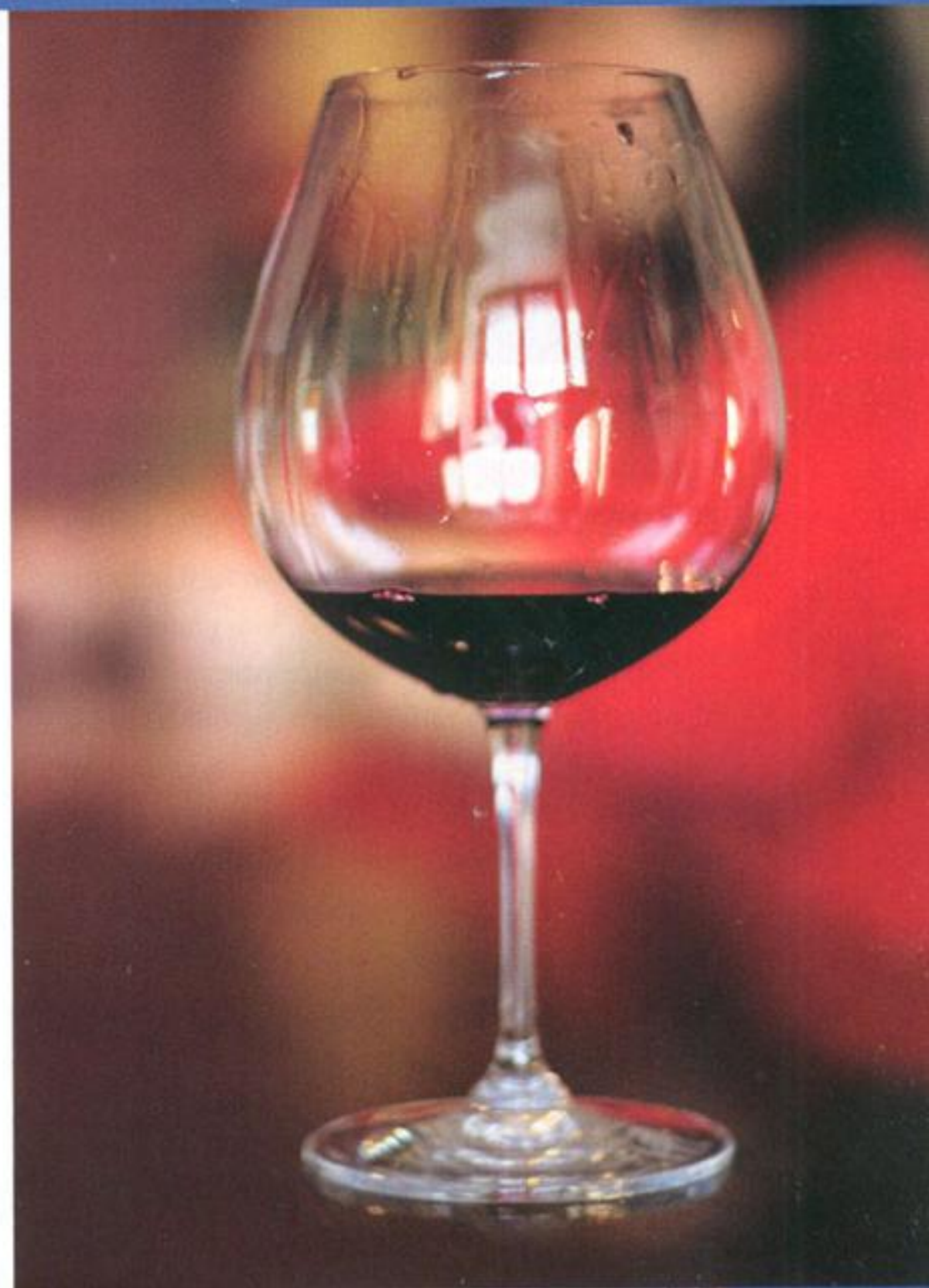
Upon arrival Roberta met us to hand over the road books and instructions and then it was straight in to our first dinner. Normally you'd expect included holiday meals to be hot buffets at best, but this meal in the hotel was an endless parade of top class gastronomic delights making us glad that we dressed up a bit, and know enough etiquette to choose the correct glasses for each drink. The sheer volume of food caused us to admit defeat before the final plates and call it a night.

By the time we arose the scooters had already been delivered to the hotel. Given that our trip was after the normal tourist season – which runs from April to October – we were quite glad of

our own full-face helmets to keep off the chill; rather than using the open-faced helmets provided. It was also gratifying to find that the two-tone blue ET4s were nearly new and still in excellent condition.

### Barbaresco Tour

Roberta starts you off gently with the first day's tour only being 65km (40 miles) long. This holiday isn't about racing around – though the excellent winding roads are up to it – but more stopping off en route and enjoying the ambience and architecture of the wonderful hillside towns and villages. On each of the three days there is a point where Roberta – whose English is excellent – can meet up with you and take you for a guided tour. Given the nature of the region these outings are very wine-centred, with our first being shown round the Fratelli Cigliuti vineyard followed by tasting of the red wines that they produce. As someone who doesn't really enjoy red wines at all, I still found the tour interesting, but I'd probably have been happier just riding these roads and stopping occasionally for food or a coffee in one of the many bars scattered around



Some wines are aged for months in these French oak barriques.

Roberta (left) accompanies us on a tour of the Cigliuti family vineyard with Claudia (centre) who explains the elaborate process.

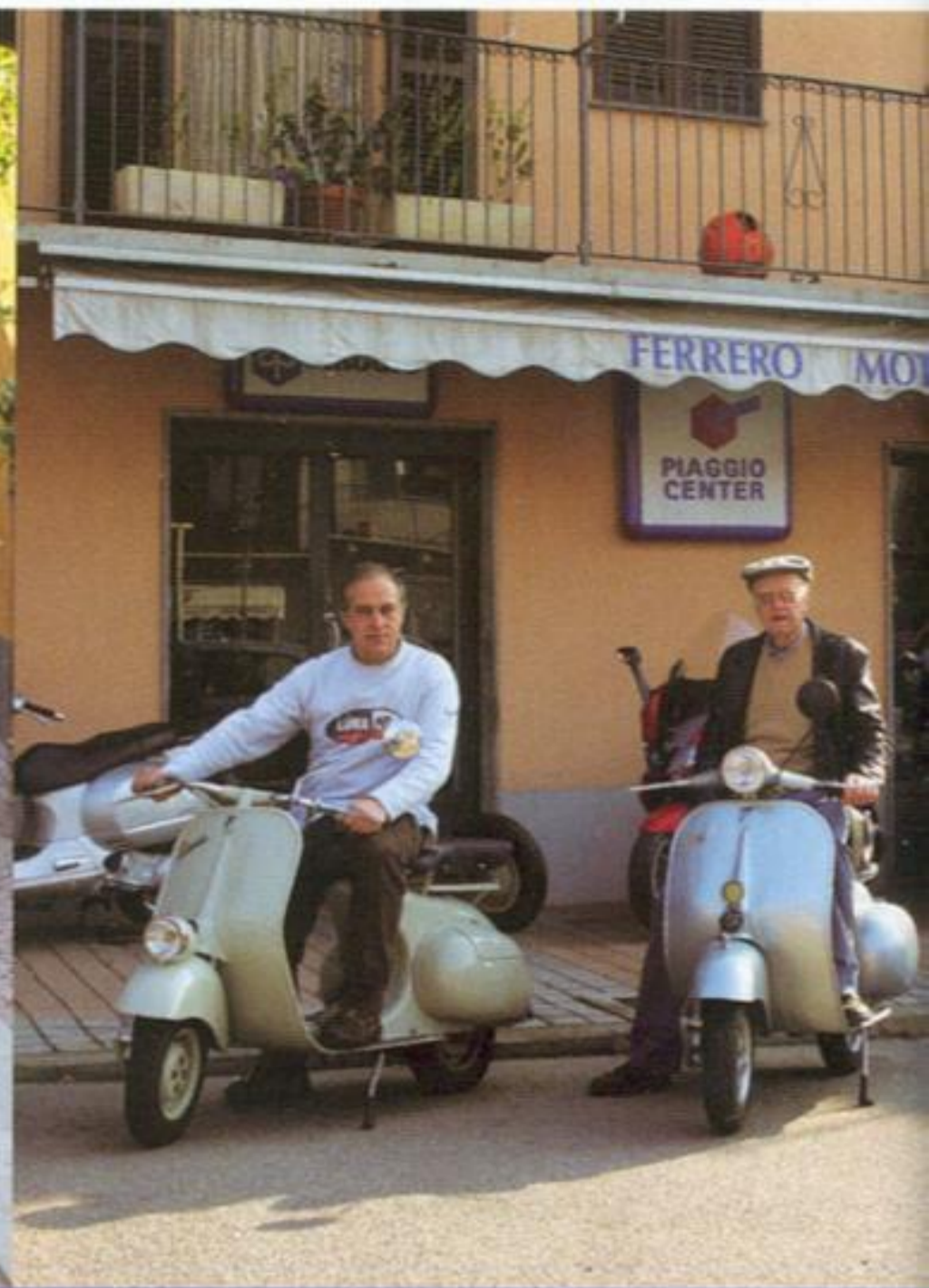




The passion for wine in this region borders on religious fervour and there is ceremony even in preparing the glasses for tasting.



Tiny medieval streets – accessible only to scooters and small Fiats – wrap their way round historic castles. Riding these on a Vespa is to understand why the Vespa exists.



Father and son business Ferrero Dalmazzo have been selling Vespas in Canale since time immemorial. This shop also supplies the ET4s for the tour.

the countryside. Roberta seems keen to tailor the tours to suit people of different interests; so if you have little passion for viticulture and would rather do your own

thing, then it is simply a matter of saying so.

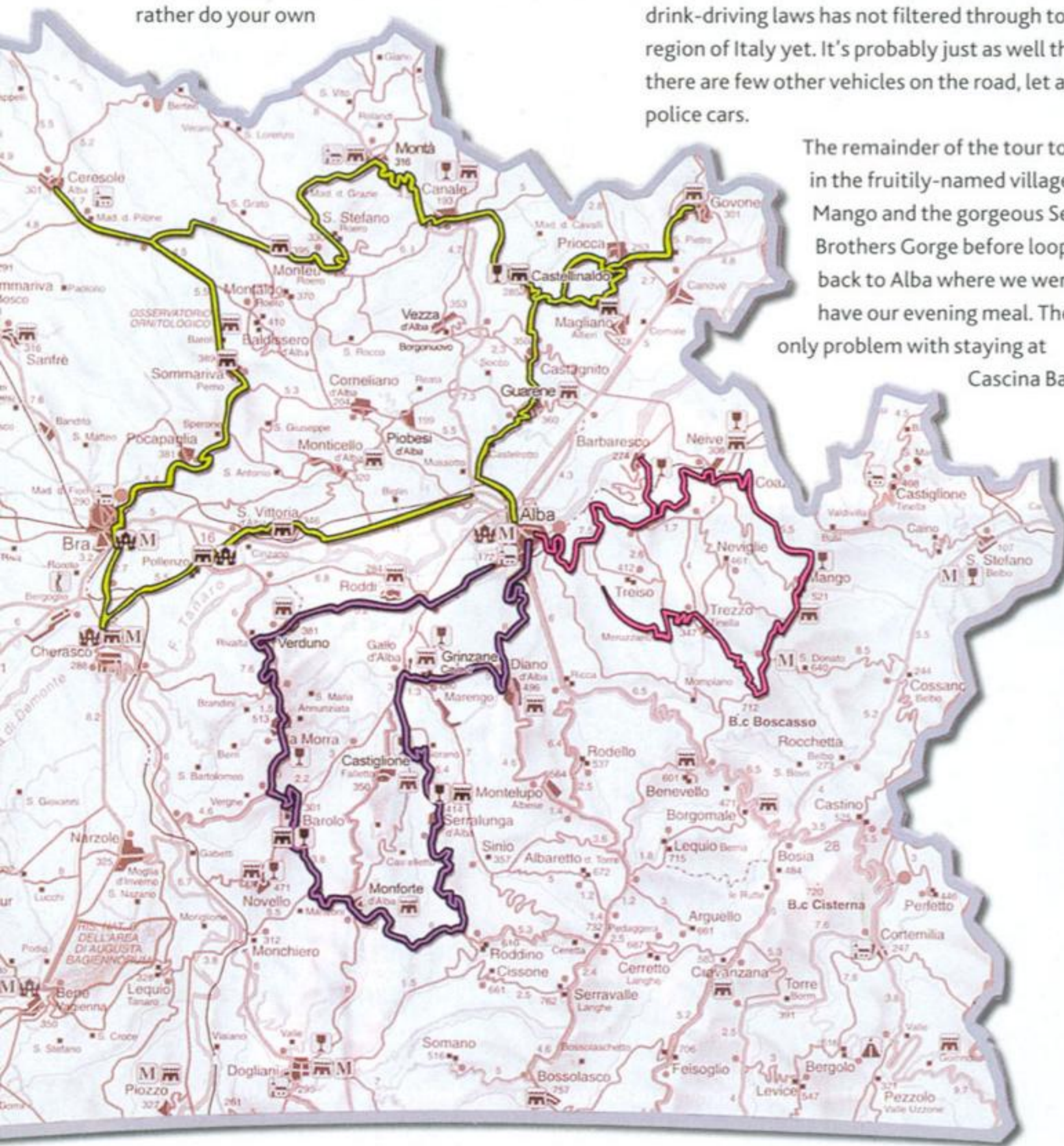
It is obvious from the consumption of the locals that the traditional English respect for drink-driving laws has not filtered through to this region of Italy yet. It's probably just as well that there are few other vehicles on the road, let alone police cars.

The remainder of the tour took in the fruitily-named village of Mango and the gorgeous Seven Brothers Gorge before looping back to Alba where we were to have our evening meal. The only problem with staying at Cascina Barac

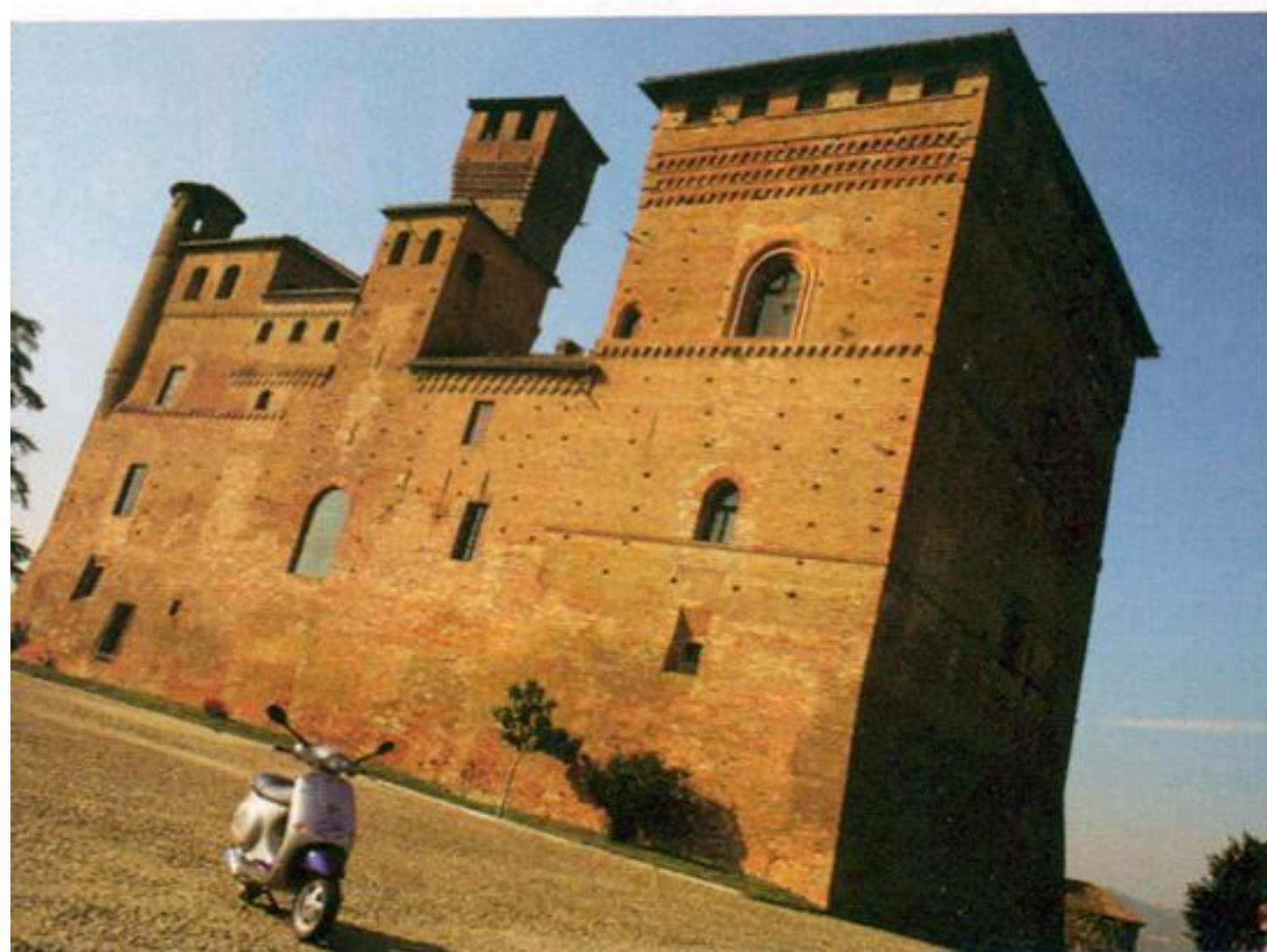
compared to the tour's usual hotel in Alba is that you can't walk into town to visit the restaurants. These open – unhurriedly – at around 8 o'clock. For the locals dining is a whole-evening experience which should be relished rather than rushed. This region is at the forefront of the 'Slow Food' movement which was set up to oppose the unseemly spread of Fast Food around the world.

### Barolo Tour

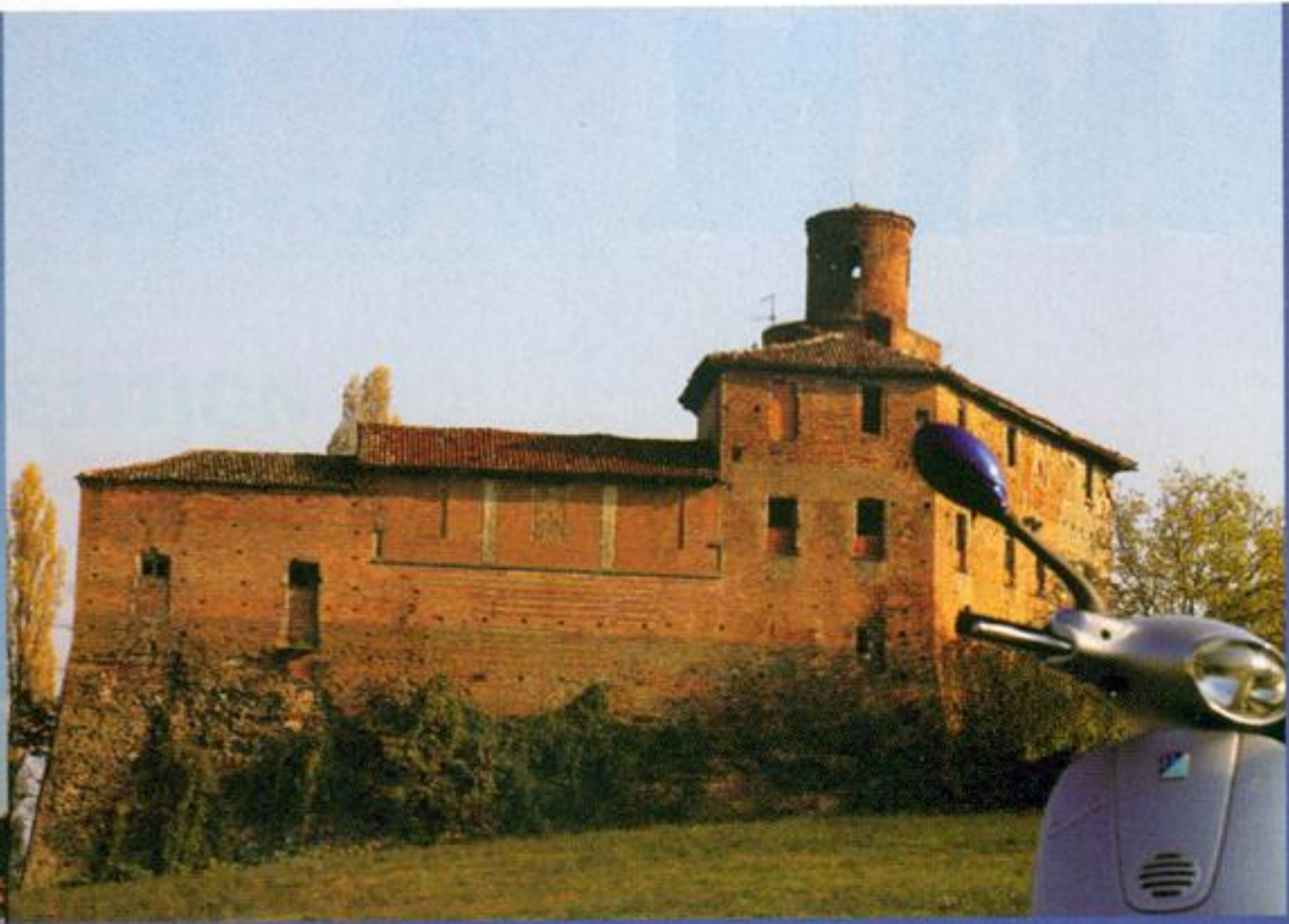
Where the previous day's tour took us eastwards from Alba, this time we headed southwest to the region of Barolo wine; which is said to have been a favourite of both King Louis XIV and Pope Pius VII (known – at least by me – as Pope Pius the



If you follow the well planned road book it's hard to get lost, but a map would be handy for those who are happier to explore on their own.



Like almost every impressive building in the region – churches included – part of Grinzane Cavour castle is given over to the sale of local wines.



Volta Castle was the original ancestral home of Marquises Falletti, but now stands abandoned. In ancient times the family moved to a 'new' castle after the floor collapsed during a feast, killing many guests. Now that's a proper party...

pi\*\*head). The scenery was even more breathtaking than around Barbaresco. Eleven hillside towns marked the route; each with its own fortifications to defend against the Saracen armies of the tenth century or the numerous invaders that followed. At any stop you could see the next castle in the distance with a valley of vineyards and winding, sinewy tarmac in between. As a confirmed petrol-head I was surprised at my own willingness not to go charging around the countryside at full throttle and instead follow in my wife's tyre tracks. It was almost as if the views were too splendid not to savour them.

The castles and corners of the Barolo tour still only cover less than 50 miles, meaning we had yet to fill up. With no straight on the route longer than a decent sized pencil the ET4s are well suited to the terrain provided you are one-up. The hire company are considering putting GT 125s on fleet for couples who'd rather tour

in more comfort on a single machine.

### Roero Tour

The final day's tour is the longest, covering 112 km (70 miles) around north and west Alba. Due to an early flight home we couldn't complete the entire route but took in enough at the impressive castles of Guarene and Govone to know that Roberta hadn't saved the worst until last. For us the tour ended at Canale, home of the Dalmazzo family's Vespa shop who supply the scooters for the tour.

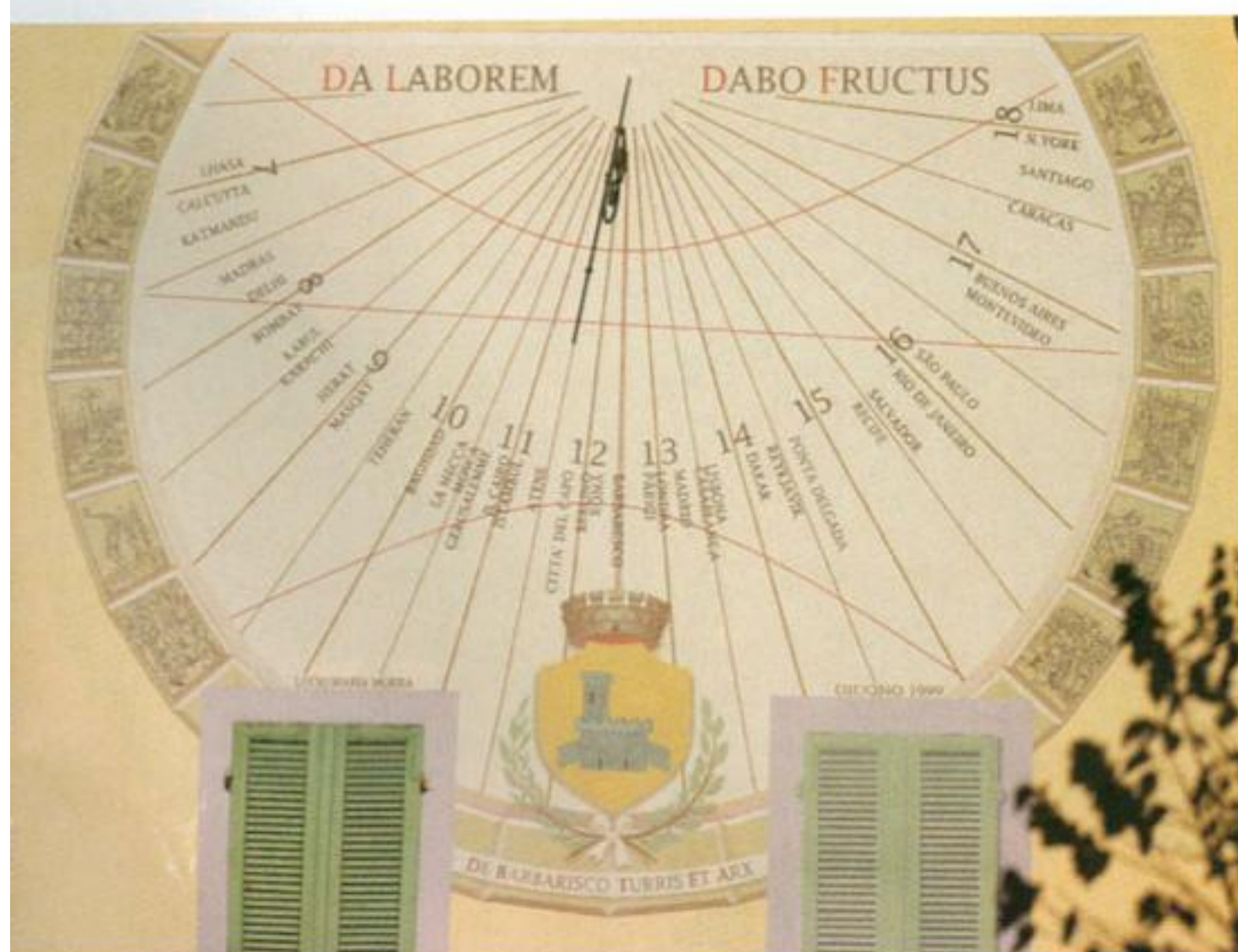
### Verdict

Roberta admits that this holiday is not for everyone. It is ideally suited to couples who fancy a romantic break in the countryside, but who have enough adventurism and confidence to ride scooters in a foreign country following only a road book. Those interested in red wine and Italian cuisine will love it, though it really helps if

you know a smattering of Italian or are at least willing to try from a phrasebook.

This exact holiday will feature in the Motoring Holidays brochure of at least one major travel agency, but UK clients will need to book direct through Kalitumba Travel – which has the advantage of being cheaper anyway. Roberta then has the opportunity to try and tailor things more to your individual requirements. The break including four nights' hotel, three days' scooter hire, evening meals (drinks are extra), guided tours and airport transfers costs from 545 euro (approx £380) per person sharing double room. Not included are flights or a hire car if the weather turns bad, though these can be arranged if required. For more details call Roberta on 0039 011 197 055 75 or email [kalitumbatravel@libero.it](mailto:kalitumbatravel@libero.it) for further information. ▣

Sticky



The intricate sundial in Barbaresco indicates not only the time but also midday in various world cities and even denotes the season by the position of the shadow over the equinox and solstice lines at 12 o'clock. The inscription says 'give work and I will give fruits.'



When Ferrero Moto was still called Ferrero Dalmazzo (Dalmazzo Brothers) in the late 50s and early 60s they used an early Piaggio Ape three-wheeler as a distribution and promotional tool.