

The best experiences you can have when visiting the Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System, discovering the Great Po River.

Natural Experiences

- 1

Walk through the woods to discover the forests which once covered the Mantuan Oltrepò area and the whole of the Po Plain.
- 2

See how the willow groves colonised the new terrain created by the river and mankind, giving rise to the long process which led to the formation of the Mantuan Oltrepò woods.
- 3

Walk along the sandy beaches which form when the river is low, looking at the different kinds of plants which take root there – they will only survive for a season, until the Po swells once again.
- 4

Move around the marshlands, along the canals, in the abandoned quarries, look out from a hut to watch and listen to ducks, herons, hawks and the myriad of small birds which live there.
- 5

Walk along the canals and ditches in the marshland and listen to the croaking of the frogs; if you are lucky you might even come across the Italian agile frog – a red frog which lives only on the Po Plain – European pond turtle, or the viviparous lizard.
- 6

Take a walk through the woods to discover the extraordinarily rich range of wildlife in the Mantuan Oltrepò – you will hear the song of the great tit and the nightingale, the hammering of the red woodpecker and the laughing call of the green woodpecker.
- 7

Enter a reed thicket and feel the soft ground under your feet, like a trampoline. Touch the rough, sharp leaves of the reeds and the sedge, plants which the inhabitants of this area have used for centuries to make many products.
- 8

Discover the signs of life left by great and small animals – fox, hedgehog and heron tracks imprinted in the dried out silt, gastropod trails, insect holes in decaying tree stumps, raptor regurgitations, fallen feathers, birdsong among the branches...
- 9

Walk around a “bugno” or an oxbow lake and discover the biodiversity contained in these small areas of still water.
- 10

Linger in front of the monumental trees which punctuate the landscape and wonder at their magnificence, trying to guess their age and their history.

As well as these experiences, you can also:

- Walk through the poplar woods and notice their regular layout – they are not true woods, but rather plantations destined to be felled after a decade or so. In spring you can witness the snowfall as their cotton-wool-like seeds fall.
- Look out on the river shallows from an observation point (👁️), with dozens of terns and gulls on the foreshore, rows of old willows on the banks with cormorants perched on top drying their feathers, the sandy banks where bee-eaters, sand martins and kingfishers have dug out their nests.

Cultural Experiences

- 1

Stop and chat with the local fishermen and hear stories of the legendary sturgeons which used to live in the Po and the new “monster”, the wels catfish.
- 2

Cross the Po in a boat to feel its strength, to grasp its majesty.
- 3

Enjoy traditional local dishes, such as squash tortelli (*i turtei ad suca* in the local language), agnoli (*i caplet*) – like Bolognese tortellini, the exquisite white truffle (*la trifula*), tiroto (*al tiròt*) – an onion foccacia, tortelli guazzarotti (*turtei sguasaròt*) – pasta stuffed with chestnuts and beans and served in a wine sauce, and the innumerable pig (*al guget*) products, all washed down by a good Mantuan lambrusco (*al lambrusch*). Buy local products at the numerous stores and delicatessens or at food festivals and farmers’ markets.

- 4

Visit a drainage plant and see the syphons, drainage systems, the network of canals, the banks, groynes, waterways, locks and docks, to take in the extraordinary complexity of drainage, water management and navigation of the rivers and canals.
- 5

Get to know the history of the Mantuan Oltrepò by visiting the pievi matildiche (Matildic churches), the Polirone Abbey, the *Santuario della Comuna* sanctuary, the museums, mansions, courts and castles.
- 6

Learn about the centuries-old relationship between man and the land by discovering the agricultural lifestyle and ancient crafts, visiting the agricultural courts, material culture museums and ship mills on the Po.
- 7

Relax by the river – sunbathe on the beaches, go for a river cruise, fish, stroll through the flood plains, ride along the embankments bathed in sun or fog.
- 8

Stop at the visitors’ centre of a nature reserve, in a town square, at a rest point on the Parks Cycle Route, a farm holiday centre or a restaurant; take refreshments, get information packs, talk with the locals and learn about their lifestyles and language.

As well as these experiences, you can also:

- Ride along the Mantuan Oltrepò Parks Cycle Route, enjoying the silence, the smells and the colours in order to fully appreciate the countryside of the Po plain and meet the hospitable locals.
- Look around from up on the river embankments, gazing over the river, the flood plains, the fields, the courts and villages, taking in the scale of this network of dykes which the inhabitants of the Mantuan Oltrepò trust to keep them safe.

Parks Cycle Route Network

- 1

Rest Areas
- 2

Infopoints
- 3

Mechanics
- 4

Bike point - Rest area - Infopoint

Park System bikes are available at the Bike Points

- PATH TYPE**
- Paved routes
 - - - Gravel routes
 - ... Dirt routes
-
- Other cycle routes
 - Viewpoints
 - Railways
 - Railway stations
 - A22 Motorway
 - ✦ Motorway junctions
 - Main roads
 - Nature Reserves
 - Supra-municipal interest local Parks
 - Special Protection Areas (SPA)



