

## **BALESTRINO – CASTELVECCHIO DI ROCCA BARBENA – ZUCCARELLO (BY CAR)**

This day-excursion takes you inland to picturesque remote villages and hamlets of Liguria, driving along a part of the old *Via Del Sale*, the ancient route, which twists and turns among Piedmont, France and Liguria, where tradesmen once used to carry salt from the coast to the hinterland.

Drive down to BORGIO and then in the direction of VENTIMIGLIA, pass PIETRA L., LOANO and when you get to BORGHETTO, turn right following the direction for TOIRANO. After passing TOIRANO, take a narrow road on your left following the road signs for BALESTRINO and drive for 5 kms.

On top of a hill, surmounted by a big castle, you have **BALESTRINO**, which is the first recommended stop. There is not much to see, apart from the ruins of an earthquake which took place in 1964 and forced inhabitants to abandon the place. Today, it looks like a “ghost village”. In 2015, the reconstruction should have started but works never began and most buildings still look as they were after the quake. After passing the village, from the main road, you have a beautiful view to take pictures.



You drive for 25 minutes (about 12 km.) on a winding road and you arrive in **CASTELVECCHIO DI ROCCA BARBENA**. Leave your car at the parking space on the hairpin turn, before getting into the village, which is only pedestrian. Since it might be lunch time, we recommend “AGRITURISMO ANTICO MELO – [www.anticomelo.it](http://www.anticomelo.it)” which has an amazing view over the village and the 11<sup>th</sup> century castle (ask for a table on the terrace).

After lunch, take your time for a walk through the alleys and tiny squares, the old stone houses, and tuff arcades.

From here, you drive in the direction of ALBENGA and stop in **ZUCCARELLO** (around 10 minutes, 6 km.). This enchanted place was on the cover of TIME in the Sixties. The fortified village was founded in 1248 and since then protected by the medieval “*Del Carretto*” castle. The main street, skirted by the typical low porticoes, leads you to *Porta Sottana*, with two medieval towers. From the main street, take a walk through the maze of narrow alleys (*caruggi*) and do not miss the late medieval bridge, which crosses the Neva river.



Before leaving, taste the *Rocche*, typical biscuits made with hazelnuts, in one of the cafés or pastry shops.

From Zuccarello, drive along the river in the direction of ALBENGA. After passing CISANO SUL NEVA, you can take a fork on the left, following the signs for CERIALE and then, along the coast, back to BORGIO-VEREZZI.

The total itinerary is a ring path of approximately 75 kms.