

Museum. Remark the **Cross Reliquary** dating back to 1600's, probably created by an artist from Bernini's circle, the silver ostensorium, donated by Maria Cristina of Savoy, the reliquary displaying St. Mary's veil is a refined item whose shape reminds of the architecture of St. Peter's Roman temple in Maurizio and the crown **Pope Pius VII** crowned the Virgin's statue with, in 1814, on the occasion of his return from Fontainebleu where he had been exiled by Napoleon's order, from 1809 to 1812. Observe the rich collection of sacred vestments, especially the polychrome silk, gold and silver "**planeta**", with a goblet veil portaying the Madonna of Mercy, made in Vienna in the late 1700's and donated by merchant Nicolò Gioia, or the 1700's frontal with a "bizarre" pattern on red silk, embroidered with unusual, peculiar motifs probably derived from the Far East tradition.



*The reason why Savona is also known as the **Popes' Town** is that **Pope Sixtus IV** (Francesco Della Rovere 1471-1484) and **Julius II** (Giuliano Della Rovere 1503-1513) belonged to a family from Savona. Sixtus IV had the **Sistine Chapel** in Rome erected and a smaller version of the chapel built in Savona as a mausoleum for his parents. Julius II, who commissioned **Michelangelo** to fresco the ceiling of the Roman Chapel, actually was Sixtus IV's nephew. Thanks to the protection it got through its Popes, Savona enjoyed high status and many of the monuments and palaces around the town date back to that golden age. More recently, another Pope was linked to the town: **Pope Pius VII** in fact, was not born in Savona, but was held captive here by **Napoleon**, from 1809 to 1812 and then in 1814. The historic and fully furnished rooms of the **Palazzo Vescovile** (Bishop's Palace) can be visited on appointment. During his captivity, the Pope often visited the Shrine of Our Lady of Mercy and 200 years later, another Pope, **Benedict XVI**, blessed the Shrine with the award of the **Golden Rose** during a solemn ceremony on May 17th 2008 and recalled the town's identity as the **Popes' Town** during a high mass held on Piazza del Popolo.*



Bus Timings and Infos:

From Savona, Piazza Mameli (in front of the Memorial) to Santuario:
9.30 - 10.30 - 11.30 - 13.15 - 14.15
From Santuario to Savona, Piazza Mameli:
10.00 - 11.00 - 12.00 - 13.45 - 16.15
Bus tickets: 2,5 Euro
(Price includes full Museum admittance).
Shrine and Museum opening hours:
From 9 A.M. to 4 P.M.
Shrine admission is free.

Time: 2 hrs.
20 min. bus-ride
from Savona:
Piazza Mameli Bus Stop

Partially accessible

Available on the iPhone
App Store

Available in
Android Market

SVD
& SAVONA & DINTORNI
Tourist guide and local events application

The Shrine of Our Lady of Mercy

Savona and the Santuario di Nostra Signora della Misericordia are linked by a common destiny of faith, art and history which commenced on March 18th 1536, when the Virgin Mary appeared to elderly peasant Antonio Botta, in the green San Bernardo valley, about 7 Km from the town centre. The event gave enough strength to the town to take courage again after the subjugation by the Genoese who had destroyed both the port and the citadel on the Priamar hill to make room for a new fortress. The place where the Virgin had appeared



immediately became a pilgrimage destination known to both locals and foreigners. Visited by numerous illustrious pilgrims, it came to be the second best known Marian cult centre after Loreto Holy Home. In August 1536, a basilica was erected where the Virgin had appeared, followed by the Poor People's Home, the pilgrims' hostel and the Old Inn which has been the village tavern (today a family-run restaurant) and hotel ever since.

The recent visit of **Pope Benedict XVI**, in May 2008, gave new prestige and religious reputation to the site as the Pope bestowed on the Shrine the prestigious **Golden Rose**, the Vatican gift offered on rare and special occasions only. The token-gift is presently on display inside a glass case placed in the church.

On your way to the shrine, while retracing the steps of the yearly 18th March Holy Procession, you will notice the nine votive chapels erected along the street from Lavagnola neighbourhood to the **Sanctuary** in the 1600's and, eventually, the **Crocetta Chapel**, dating back to 1680. You can stop at each chapel before finally reaching the **Crocetta**, located on top of a hillock on the left side of the basilica. Go up the steep, narrow staircase, embellished with frescoes by **Bartolomeo Guidobono**, who also painted the dome with a series figures portraying the pilgrims on the Procession Day.

The churchyard offers a perfect scenography where the palaces and statues from the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries evoke theatre wings designed to make visitors focus their attention on the very heart of the stage: the basilica. Also the angel, sculpted by **Giacomo Ponsonelli** in 1708, which embellishes the fountain in the middle of the square, is actually pointing to the remarkable Finale stone and speckled white marble façade, realized by Ticinese sculptor Taddeo Carlone between 1609 and 1611. The interior, whose building was supervised by Lombardy-born architect Pace Antonio Sormano, is a



three nave structure, frescoed by **Bernardo Castello** (Genoa 1557-1629). A staircase at the end of the main nave leads to the crypt which houses the 1560 sculptural group portraying "**L'apparizione della Madonna di Misericordia ad Antonio Botta**" (The Apparition of Our Lady of Mercy to Antonio Botta) by **Pietro Orsolino**. Remarkable works of art are on display in the eight side-chapels; among them, the **Altare della Visitazione** (Visitation Altar) by **Gian Lorenzo Bernini**, or the painting on canvas "**Natività della Vergine**" (Nativity of the Virgin) by Roman painter **Orazio Borgianni** (1578-1616), and the "**Presentazione della Vergine al Tempio**" (Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple) by Domenico Zampieri, a.k.a. **Domenichino** (1581-1641) are really noteworthy. Also the valuable main altar, dating back to the 1700's and decorated with polychrome marbles is a truly remarkable piece and so is the wooden choir by Giuseppe Vincenzo Garassino, an inlay masterpiece from the second half of the XXth century.

The basilica has always kept its status of prominent pilgrimage destination and it has recently become a landmark for all Italian Fraternal Orders. Savonese people are all deeply devoted to the Virgin of Mercy who is also the town's patron saint. They pay homage at the shrine, pray for grace, worship the Holy Lady and never forget to write down their thoughts or vows on the "Pilgrims' Book" which is kept inside the church and has records of the names of such notable visitors as Giovanni Roncalli, former Venice Archbishop and then **Pope John XXIII**, President **Sandro Pertini** and **Pope Benedict XVI**. On leaving the basilica, on the left side of the square, you will find the **Museo del Santuario**.

Sacred silverware and vestments, ex-votos, either paintings or objects and jewels that aristocratic families, bishops, priests, but also common people offered to the Holy Lady through the centuries are on display in the