Artificial Intelligence serving Ligurian tourism: from visitor flow management to youth training

Liguria is undergoing a profound transformation in the way it welcomes visitors. With its fragile natural environment, highly seasonal tourist flows and the need to promote the inland areas alongside iconic destinations such as the Cinque Terre, Portofino and Genoa, technology is no longer simply a digital support tool, but an increasingly important strategic asset. In this context, **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** is transforming tourism planning across the region, moving from theory to concrete applications and projects, as well as to education and training.

One of the long-standing challenges facing Ligurian tourism is the concentration of visitors in specific areas and periods of the year – the now familiar phenomenon of *overtourism* – alongside the untapped potential of the villages and communities in the inland areas.

Through initiatives such as the **Reg4IA** project, with the Liguria Region playing a leading role as the interregional coordinator, AI is being used to analyse large volumes of *big data* from transport, mobile phone data and bookings. The aim is to anticipate peaks in visitor numbers, ease pressure on the busiest areas and dynamically suggest alternative routes, helping redistribute visitors towards inland villages and the network of hiking trails.

Generazione Turismo 4.0: training the next generation through ITS Academies

The introduction of Artificial Intelligence into tourism requires new professional skills. **ITS Academies**, the region's highly specialised post-secondary technical institutes, play a central role in meeting this challenge.

In particular, **ITS Turismo Liguria** has renewed its practical, laboratory-based training programme by introducing modules focused on the **practical use of Artificial Intelligence and virtual reality in hospitality**.

Through free, two-year post-secondary programmes, students learn how to analyse data and apply *revenue management* techniques, using AI algorithms to forecast room occupancy and optimise rates; develop welcome assistants and chatbots; innovate destination marketing; and experiment with virtual reality to design immersive tours and experiences, allowing customers to "try" a hotel or excursion before they arrive.

Through direct collaboration with local businesses and work placements, these programmes enable young people to move from being simple technology users to becoming **"Destination & Guest Experience Managers 4.0"** – professionals capable of combining Liguria's traditional, warm approach to hospitality with the opportunities offered by digital transformation.

LIGURIA
THE ITALIAN RIVIERA
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Cammini di Liguria: walking between the mountains and the sea

Historic and natural routes and trails, offering challenges for pilgrims, sports enthusiasts and curious travellers.

It is an old way of travelling, perhaps the oldest we know. Yet it continues to offer new sensations and discoveries. Several well-known pilgrimage and walking routes reach or cross Liguria. Among them is the **Via Francigena**.

One of Europe's best-known and oldest pilgrimage routes, the Via Francigena runs from the Great St Bernard Pass to Rome in 45 stages, ending at St Peter's Basilica in Vatican City. It follows the journey made by Archbishop Sigeric at the end of the 10th century, from Canterbury to Rome. The Ligurian section lies entirely in the east of the region. It runs from Aulla to Sarzana, Santo Stefano Magra and Luni, once a flourishing Roman city whose important archaeological remains can still be seen today. The route passes through a landscape shaped by vineyards, home to the Colli di Luni white wine, and offers opportunities to discover traditional local cuisine along the way, including *panigacci* – round, unleavened breads served with cheese and cured meats – and *testaroli*, an ancient pasta dish made with water, flour and salt and traditionally served with pesto.

Still in the mood for walking? Here are some more ways to explore Liguria on foot.

Alta Via dei Monti Liguri

Mountain meadows and woodland trails. Grassy passes, watershed ridges and steep alpine slopes. A route for everyone: athletes, sports enthusiasts and families. Easy sections are perfect for a weekend in nature, while more demanding high-mountain stretches are popular with experienced *trekkers*. With 440 kilometres and 43 stages, the **Alta Via dei Monti Liguri** offers spectacular landscapes to suit different levels of experience. From the Maritime Alps to Monte Beigua, from the mountains around Genoa to the slopes of Monte Zatta, and on to the unspoilt forests of Val d'Aveto and Val di Vara, every stage of the Alta Via offers a different experience. The route also lends itself to shorter, less demanding stages for a weekend getaway, combined with visits to villages, castles and museums or participation in one of the traditional festivals and local fairs that animate the Ligurian territory throughout the year.

Via Marenca and Alta Via del Sale

A historic route linking Piedmont and France, stretching for more than 100 kilometres and characterised by major changes in elevation, from alpine ridges – mostly between 1,800 and 2,000 metres above sea level – down to the coast. The name *Mare-nca* refers to this descent towards the sea. The route passes through the villages of the Impero, Maro and Prelà valleys before reaching Oneglia, once a landing place for merchant ships involved in the trade of salt, olive oil and anchovies.

The route also includes the **Alta Via del Sale**, built at the end of the 19th century between the fortifications along the Italian-French border. It runs for around 40 kilometres between the Colle di Tenda, dominated by the Forte Centrale, and Monesi di Triora. Motorised traffic on the Alta Via del Sale is subject to restrictions. For details, please visit: https://www.altaviadelsale.com/ita/#inline-auto911

La Via del Sale

This route, made up of mule tracks once used over the centuries to transport salt from the coastal areas to the Po Valley, is now one of the most popular destinations for those who love walking.

The Via del Sale runs from Genoa to Varzi, in the province of Pavia, crossing the Apennines through Piedmont, Lombardy and Liguria. On the Torriglia–Uscio and Uscio–Camogli stages, the landscape changes from the mountain environment of Monte Antola to the Mediterranean setting of Monte di Portofino.

Cammino dei Ribelli

A journey through history and memory: 130 kilometres among bandits, partisans and peasant communities in the spectacular Val Borbera, on the borderlands between Piedmont, Liguria and Emilia-Romagna. A slow journey along the slopes of Monte Antola, the banks of the Borbera and the valley carved by the Scrivia, where every historical period has left stories to tell: medieval, feudal and partisan. The “Rebels” were the partisans who fought against Nazifascism, the bandits who survived the abuses of local rulers, and even the ancient Ligurians, who fought Roman rule in this area.

Itinerario Storico Colombiano

The hiking trail associated with Christopher Columbus’s ancestors, also known as the *Itinerario Storico Colombiano*, runs for 19 kilometres along an ancient mule track linking the Fontanabuona Valley with Genoa. A sign marking the route was recently unveiled at the Giardini di Quinto, together with renewed trail signage.

The route dates back to 1992, when it was created as part of the celebrations marking the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America. For many years, it has represented an important link for preserving and promoting the history of Liguria’s inland areas.

The 19-kilometre trail takes around seven hours to complete. It runs from Terrarossa Colombo to Quinto, passing through Tribogna, Colle Caprile, Calcinara, Cornua, Valico del Monte Becco, Valico del Monte Cordona and Nervi.

Along the route, there are numerous historical points of interest, from the ruins of the ancient Genoese castle on the summit of Monte Tuggio to the ancient *hospitalis* of San Giacomo di Pozzuolo.

More information is available at: https://lamialiguria.it/itinerari/cammini-di-liguria/

The Ligurian model for managing visitor flows and protecting and promoting the territory

Liguria is a unique and inherently fragile region. Wedged between the Apennines and the Ligurian Sea, with historic villages perched on cliffs and an outstanding natural heritage, the region has long faced the challenge of tourist pressure, concentrated mainly in a number of specific areas.

While tourism is a key economic driver, the concentration of visitors in certain destinations and periods of the year can put pressure on the environmental balance, affect residents' quality of life and reduce the quality of the visitor experience.

Today, Liguria is addressing this strategic challenge through a new approach: moving beyond the simple promotion of the destination towards active, sustainable governance of visitor flows.

World-famous destinations such as the Cinque Terre, Portofino, San Fruttuoso and some of the most attractive areas of western Liguria have long experienced the complexities of mass tourism during the summer months and holiday periods.

To protect the landscape without closing it off to visitors, the Liguria Region and local authorities are adopting advanced monitoring tools and *data-driven tourism* strategies. Experiences such as regulating access to the bay of San Fruttuoso di Camogli and managing flows along the trail network of the Cinque Terre National Park provide examples of how to ensure safe and sustainable access.

The real turning point for sustainable tourism in Liguria, however, lies in the ability to diversify the offer and redistribute visitors across both space and time. The strategy for promoting the inland areas is based on three pillars: outdoor activities, villages and experiential tourism. Promoting these areas means helping to spread tourism across the region and throughout the year, taking advantage of Liguria's excellent autumn, mild winter and outstanding spring.

Managing visitor flows is not simply a logistical or technological issue: it requires a shared commitment between institutions, residents and visitors. Promoting responsible tourism means informing those who arrive about the fragility of the territory, encouraging respectful behaviour towards the environment and guiding travel choices towards the low season and lesser-known destinations.

Soft mobility projects, well-signposted trails and targeted communication campaigns can help transform visitors from mere consumers of the landscape into temporary custodians of Liguria's territory.

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