

BIODIVERSITY PARK: STROLL THROUGH THE GREENERY OF ITALY'S NATURAL HERITAGE AND LANDSCAPES; EXPERIENCE THE BIODIVERSITY AND THE RICH VARIETY OF AGRICULTURE

Biodiversity Park, the themed area of Expo created by BolognaFiere and dedicated to natural and agricultural biodiversity, welcomes all visitors to the immense rural visitor route, the only location of its kind within the exhibition area.

Here visitors can experience and learn about the Italian landscapes, some of which have been shaped by years of agriculture.

Arriving from the Tree of Life and Palazzo Italia, visitors can begin an extensive pathway, covering an area of approximately 5000m², including samples of productive environments that testify to Italian agricultural biodiversity and different types of cultivation in the Alps, the Apennines, the Po Valley, the Plateaus and the lower Apennines and finally, the environments of the islands and the coast.

Along the path are more than 300 species of plants including large trees, shrubs and meadows: all cultivated with full respect for the plants, which were sourced in order to avoid unnecessary uprooting, and are contained in vases above ground, while the meadows were cultivated on mats in nurseries, each one destined for a specific environment.

The pathway begins with a reconstruction of the Alpine Dolomites, symbolizing the overland entrance into Italy. The reconstruction was created using powdered stone materials mixed with natural resins in order to uphold the principles of sustainability and, at the same time, to create a real example of Alpine material rather than an artificial façade of this natural area protected by UNESCO.

Descending from the mountains visitors encounter the conifer forests composed of white firs, black pines, Swiss pines and European larch, alternating with cut meadows and pastures, home to a rich variety of flora and nutrition for the herds that graze during the summer all over the alps. Leaving behind the meadows visitors reach the terraced slopes, where black alders and wild apples can be found on the mountainsides made cultivable by man.

From the Alpine landscape the biodiversity walk leads visitors to the Apennine area. Along the pathway are downy oaks, Austrian oaks, South European flowering ash and the chestnut, which are all typical of the central and Northern Apennines and the landscape of the plateaus that reaches 700 to 1000 metres in altitude. Beyond the European hornbeams are shrubs such as the bird cherry, used as an ornamental plant due to its wonderful blossom, and the reddish berry sorbus. Further on can be found the walnut trees and beyond, the olives.

The path turns into a narrow country track that leads visitors on a journey to the heart of the plains all the way to the Po delta. The robinias include shrubs and small

bushes, dog roses and wild blackberries and open the visitors' gaze onto cultivations of different varieties of cereals, the symbol of a high level of agricultural biodiversity in food production. A thin channel of water crosses the field of crops; on its banks are typical plants like mulberries and vines.

Brambles, dog roses, wild blackberries, sea buckthorns accompany the visitor towards the Po delta, represented by a landscape inspired by the Mesola forest with rushes, sand and silt.

Leaving the plains behind, visitors reach the landscape of the lower Apennines and the plateaus: the Austrian oaks, the holly oaks, the South European flowering ash followed by the kermes oak, the carob tree and the cypresses recreate the landscapes of Tuscany, Umbria and Marche and the path then continues Southwards to the Murge. Here visitors can admire a field of durum wheat, then the chalky shelves and their dry stonewalls open the vista onto the olive groves.

Travelling along the boot of Italy, the journey through the wealth of landscapes and the varieties of fauna and agricultural production leads towards the islands. The landscape of the Nebrodi mountain range welcomes visitors: the almonds, the carobs, the citruses and the grapefruits represent the landscape along the coast and the cliffs down to the sea that are home to the low *macchia* shrubland that includes evergreens such as pistachios and capers as well as more exotic species such as the prickly pear.

The walk through the Italian landscapes approaches its conclusion with the environment of Sardinia and the coast. The pomegranate, the cork oak and the olives share space with the natural vegetation of the Mediterranean *macchia* shrubland such as the myrtle and the strawberry tree.

The guided tour through the greenery of Biodiversity Park continues through the centre of the area to reach the organic vegetable gardens, where the city and agriculture interact: above ground and in vertical crates, private and public productive urban gardens show families and collectives how, with sufficient commitment, even the city and its surrounding areas can become green and productive.