

Trentino-Alto Adige



The blurred lines of Europe's porous borders have never been greyer than they are in Italy's extreme north. Here in the two semi-autonomous provinces of Trentino and Alto Adige, Tyrolean traditions are laced with a whiff of the Mediterranean in one of the continent's most improbable cultural juxtapositions. Imagine Austro-German efficiency blended with Italian panache, the rationalism of Kant married with the spontaneous passion of the Renaissance. Baffled? You will be.

Until 1919 Trentino-Alto Adige was part of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. Embedded in the cultural DNA, Austro-German influences are ubiquitous, permeating everything from the food (sausages and strudel), the architecture (gabled roofs) and the collective personality (fewer hand gesticulations and more head nodding).

The region is dominated by the Dolomites and protected by seven natural parks, including northern Italy's largest, Stelvio. While not the Alps' tallest mountains, these red-hued pinnacles are their most spectacular and they've produced some of the world's greatest climbers, including Tyrolean legend Reinhold Messner.

Both regions are crisscrossed by valleys and, though few are remote these days, most retain esoteric cultural quirks, be they Austrian, Italian or – even more confusing – Ladin.

Southerly Trentino is the most Italian enclave. Heading north along the Adige river, *alberghi* advertising *camere* (rooms) are gradually replaced by *Gasthofs* advertising *Zimmer* until, by the time you reach Merano in the South Tyrol, you're culturally closer to Vienna than Venice.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Mix snow sports with celebrity-spotting in the ritzy ski village of **Madonna di Campiglio** (p324)
- Get a head for heights on a vertiginous *via ferrata* in the brooding **Brenta Dolomites** (p324)
- Round off your fettuccine with apple strudel in the harmonious yet culturally diverse city of **Trento** (p321)
- Hike up historic 2457m Rifugio Bolzano in the **Parco Naturale Sciliar-Catinaccio** (p338)
- Contemplate man's eternal relationship with the mountains at Bolzano's **Messner Mountain Museum** (p331)
- Soothe your sore hiking feet at the recently renovated Terme in balmy **Merano** (p334)



■ POPULATION: 1 MILLION

■ AREA: 13,613 SQ KM

Information

Tourist offices in Trentino's capital, Trento, and Alto Adige's capital, Bolzano, each have province-wide information, including updated lists of *rifugi* (mountain huts) and B&B farmhouses.

Activities

SKIING IN THE DOLOMITES

Ski resorts abound in the areas encompassing the Dolomite peaks, including fashionable Cortina d'Ampezzo, the Brenta Dolomites and the Val di Fassa, as well as the Val Gardena's championship runs.

Good accommodation and ski facilities are plentiful, offering access to downhill and cross-country skiing, as well as *sci alpinismo*, which combines skiing and mountaineering skills on longer excursions. Snowboarding and most other winter sports are also equally well catered for.

High season runs from mid-December to early January and then February to mid-March.

On the eastern side of the region, the **Dolomiti Superski** (www.dolomitisuperski.com) pass allows access to 464 lifts and some 1220km of ski runs. It costs €102 for a three-day pass and €180 for a six-day pass (in high season €128 and €225 respectively). Alternatively, the **Super Skirama** (www.funiviecampiglio.it) pass covers the western side, known as the Brenta Dolomites, including Madonna di Campiglio and Andalo-Fai della Paganella. Super Skirama passes start at €100 and €177 for three or six days (in high season €109 and €188). Cheaper passes covering individual resorts and areas are available for localised skiing, but these two passes provide the best flexibility.

OUR TOP FIVE SKI EXPERIENCES IN TRENTINO-ALTO ADIGE

- **Sella Ronda – Val di Fassa** (p329)
- **Marcialonga cross-country skiing race – Val di Fassa** (p328)
- **Plan de Corones – Val Pusteria** (p341)
- **Passo della Stelvio – Parco Nazionale del Stelvio** (p335)
- **Madonna di Campiglio – Brenta Dolomites** (p324)

Ski schools at every resort offer boarding lessons and classic downhill-skiing lessons. A six-day course (three hours of group tuition per day) costs around €130, and private lessons average around €40 per hour.

WALKING IN THE DOLOMITES

The fact that some of the world's greatest walkers and mountaineers have come from the Dolomites (including the incomparable Reinhold Messner; see box p332) is no accident; the region's hiking terrain is superb.

Numbered trails are generally well marked in the area with red-and-white bands painted on trees and rocks along the route, or inside different coloured triangles for the *alte vie* (high routes). Italians don't really go in for back-country camping; instead a comprehensive network of *rifugi* offers youth hostel-style lodging and meals located within approximately a day's easy walk from each other.

Excellent maps with clearly marked trails are available in most bookshops and newsagents. Touring Club Italiano's 1:200,000 *Trento-Alto Adige* gives a good overview of the area. For greater detail use the various 1:25,000 scale maps produced by Kompass and Tabacco.

Those wanting to undertake guided walks or tackle more difficult trails that combine mountaineering skills with walking (with or without a guide) can seek information at Guide Alpine offices in the region (listed under the relevant town sections).

The walking season extends from the end of June to the end of September (sometimes into October, depending on the weather). Note that most mountain huts close from mid-September.

The best areas for walking in the Dolomites:

Alpe di Siusi, Sciliar and Catinaccio group All accessible from Siusi, Castelrotto and surrounding villages, as well as the Val Gardena.

Brenta Dolomites Accessible from the Altipiano della Paganella or Madonna di Campiglio.

Cortina This area straddles Alto Adige and the Veneto, incorporating the Parco Naturale di Fanes-Sennes-Braies and, to the south, Monte Pelmo, Monte Civetta and the Val di Zoldo area.

Gruppo del Sella Accessible from the Val Gardena, Val Badia, Pieve di Livinallongo and the Val di Fassa.

Pale di San Martino Accessible from San Martino di Castrozza and Fiera di Primiero.

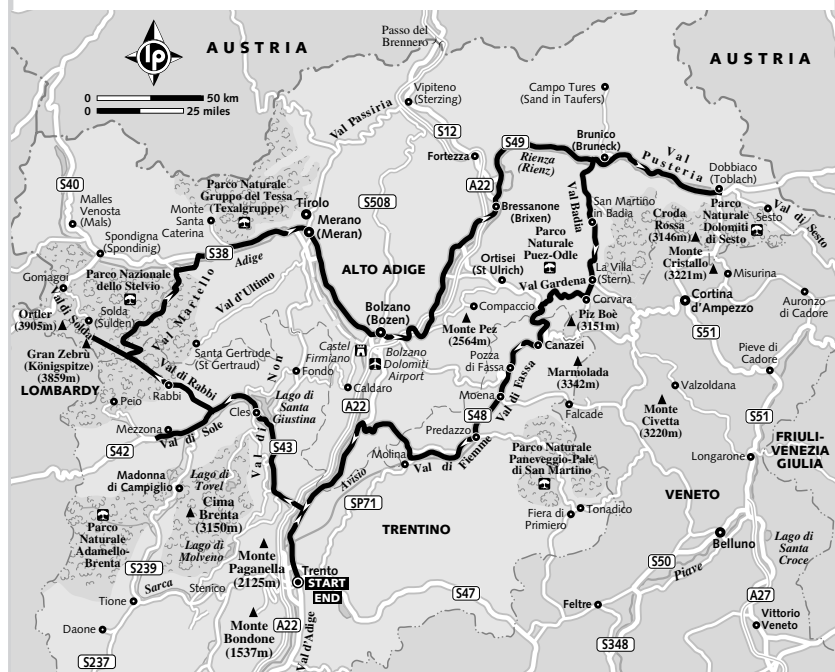
REGIONAL ITINERARY INTO THE VALLEYS

One Week / Trento

In Trentino-Alto Adige different valleys don't just demarcate different drainage basins; they support radically different cultures, a fact manifested not only in the pasta recipes or the way of concocting cheese, but in the crafts, the local customs and, more often than not, the language.

To understand the nuances of northern Italian valley politics, catch a train in **Trento** (p316) in the vine-flecked **Val d'Adige** and head north into the Italian-speaking **Val di Non** p326, famous for its apple orchards and storybook castles. Rail and road tunnels connect to the adjacent **Val di Sole** p326, where outdoor activities such as rafting and cycling are complemented by access to numerous winter ski areas. A side valley of the Sole, the **Val di Rabbi** (p326) harbours a much-lauded spa and provides foot access to the magnificent Parco Nazionale dello Stelvio. Hikers can mark a path over to the German-speaking **Val Martello** (p336), renowned for its strawberries, or ply further west to the unhurried **Val di Solda** (p336), a low-key ski resort that also harbours one in a quintet of resplendent mountain museums conceived by Tyrolean climbing legend Reinhold Messner.

Skimming Merano and Bolzano, head east next to the verdant **Val Pusteria** (p341), where the turreted Sesto Dolomites lure hikers with challenging *vie ferrate* trails and historians with outdoor WWI memorabilia. **Val Badia** (p339) is the most mysterious and spiritual of the region's five Ladin-speaking valleys and allows easy access to the Alta Via 1 hiking trail (summer) and Sella Ronda ski circuit (winter). If you head anticlockwise on the Ronda circuit you'll drop serendipitously into the **Val Gardena** (p337), celebrated for its woodcarvers and esoteric Ladin museum, and the similarly ethereal **Val di Fassa** (p328), a white-hot cross-country skiing centre and host to the annual Marcialonga race. Revert briefly to *Guten Morgens* in the German-speaking **Val de Fiemme** (p327), an erstwhile quasi-republic that still fosters a strong community spirit, before tracking back to Italian-speaking Trento.



Sesto Dolomites North of Cortina towards Austria, accessible from San Candido or Sesto in Val Pusteria.

Val di Genova and Adamello group Both accessible from Madonna di Campiglio (the Brenta and Adamello groups form the Parco Naturale Adamello-Brenta).

There are four Alte Vie through the Dolomites, each taking up to two weeks. Routes link existing trails and incorporate new trails, which make difficult sections easier to traverse.

Each route links a chain of *rifugi*, and you can opt to only walk certain sections.

Alta Via No 1 Crosses the Dolomites from north to south, from Lago di Braies to Belluno.

Alta Via No 2 Extends from Bressanone to Feltre and is known as the 'High Route of Legends' because it passes through Odle, the mythical kingdom of ancient Ladin fairytales.

Alta Via No 3 Links Villabassa and Longarone.

Alta Via No 4 Goes from San Candido to Pieve di Cadore.

The Alte Vie are marked by numbers inside triangles – blue for No 1, red for No 2 and orange-brown for No 3; No 4 is marked by numbers on red-and-white bands. Booklets with the routes in detail are available at most tourist offices in the region.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Summer pastimes include rafting, mountain biking, hang-gliding and rock climbing. Trentino alone has some 400km of paved cycling roads away from the traffic, as well as more than 4500km of mountain bike trails. Tourist offices keep updated details of trails, bike-rental outlets and hang-gliding schools.

Getting There & Around

Bolzano airport (p333) is only served by a couple of European flights. Otherwise the nearest airports are Verona, Bergamo and Innsbruck (Austria), from where trains run south to Bolzano.

Public transport is managed by two main companies: **Trentino Trasporti** (☎ 0461 82 10 00; www.ttspa.it, in Italian) in Trentino and **Servizi Autobus Dolomiti** (SAD; ☎ 0471 45 01 11; www.sad.it) in Alto Adige. The main towns and many ski resorts can be reached directly from major Italian cities, including Rome, Florence, Bologna, Milan and Genoa.

Most of the major urban centres and some of the smaller valleys are on the national rail network: www.trenitalia.it.

TRENTINO

TRENTO

pop 110,200 / elev 194m

In a country bedizened with more beauty than a Caravaggio canvas, understated Trento often gets rudely ignored. Set in a wide glacial valley guarded by the crenellated peaks of the Brenta Dolomites, this left-leaning but proudly Catholic regional capital has long stood at an important geographical and historical crossroads. During the tumultuous years of the Counter-Reformation (1548–63), the powerful Council of Trent convened here, dishing out condemnations to uppity Protestants and reaffirming the power of the Catholic Church.

These days Trento is more down-to-earth and less preachy. Bike tyres glide around cobbled piazzas, cappuccino-quaffing students cavort next to Renaissance fountains, and a dozen historical eras intermingle seamlessly amid a grab bag of stone castles, shady porticos and the city's signature medieval frescoes.

Set amid a patchwork of vineyards and apple orchards, Trento impresses visitors consistently with its spotless streets that fan out like bicycle spokes from its atmospheric main square. While not as Teutonic as Bolzano or Merano, Trentino has notable German influences at play (taste the apple strudel) and most residents are bilingual, if not trilingual.

Trento's proximity to the Brenta Dolomites has cemented its popularity as an outdoor-activity centre and explains why most of its willowy-framed undergraduates are able to gorge nightly on gelati and never get fat. When they're not riding their city bikes, sporty Trentinos like to take to the hills on their off-roaders, skis, snowboards or two feet.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Libreria Ancora (Via Santa Croce 35) Stocks quality walking maps.

Libreria Ubik (Corso III Novembre 10) Has English-language novels.

Libreria Viaggeria (Via Vigilio 20) Excellent travel bookshop.

EMERGENCY

Police station (☎ 0461 89 95 11; Piazza della Mostra 3)

INTERNET ACCESS

Wireless Internet Café Olimpia (☎ 0461 98 24 45; Via Belenzani 33/1; per hr €5; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon & Tue, to midnight Wed-Sat)

LEFT LUGGAGE

Main train station (per hr €1; ☎ 8.30am-12.15pm & 1.30-5.30pm)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Guardia Medica (☎ 0461 91 58 09) Emergency doctor.

Hospital (☎ 0461 90 31 11; Largo Medaglie d'Oro 9) Southeast of the centre.

POST

Post office (Piazza Vittoria; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 0461 21 60 00; www.ap.trento.it; Via Mancini 2; ☎ 9am-7pm) Information on the city and surrounds.

Trentino Agritur (☎ 0461 23 53 23; Via Aconcio 13; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Info point for *agriturismi* (farm-stay accommodation), places to eat and activities in the Trentino countryside.

Sights

You could linger for days in Trento just counting frescoes (it's not nicknamed 'the Painted City' for nothing) but, in many ways, the best attractions are visceral – the romantic piazzas, the purr of conversation outside a bar, the subtle Austro-Italian interchange. Sit down, grab a gelato and become an observer; it's a highly satisfying experience.

Trento's centrepiece is the busy yet intimate Piazza del Duomo, dominated by its stalwart Romanesque **cathedral** (☎ 6.40am-12.15pm & 2.30-8pm). Once host to the Council of Trent, the dimly lit church displays fragments of medieval frescoes inside its transepts. Two colonnaded staircases flank its nave, and

the foundations of an early Romanesque-Gothic church form part of an archaeological area that also has some extraordinary Roman remains dating from prior to the first church. The town's bishops are buried in the adjacent mausoleum.

On the opposite side of the square is the former bishop's residence of **Palazzo Pretorio**, dating from the 11th century. Here, illuminated manuscripts, paintings depicting the Council of Trent and liturgical vestments form part of the outstanding collection in the **Museo Diocesano** (☎ 0461 23 44 19; Piazza del Duomo 18; adult/child €4/1; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Wed-Mon). Admission to the museum also includes entry to the cathedral's archaeological zone and treasury.

Frescoes decorate the facades of two Renaissance houses known as the **Casa Cazzuffi-Rella**, on the piazza's northern side. Centre-stage is the beguiling **Fontana di Nettuno**, a magnificent 18th-century fountain dedicated to the trident-wielding Neptune.

Subterranean Trento can be explored at the fascinating **Tridentum La Città Sotterranea** (☎ 0461 23 01 71; Piazza Battisti; adult/child €2/1; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Tue-Sun Sep-May, 9.30am-1pm & 2-6pm Jun-Sep). The extensive remains were discovered less than two decades ago during restoration works on the piazza's theatre, and include sections of paved streets and the city walls, a tower, a house with mosaics, and a workshop.

Guarded by hulking fortifications, **Castello del Buonconsiglio** (☎ 0461 23 37 70; www.buonconsiglio.it; Via Bernardo Clesio 5; adult/child €7/4; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-Oct, 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun Nov-May) was home to Trento's bishop-princes until Napoleon's arrival in 1801. Behind the walls are the original 13th-century castle, the **Castelvecchio**, and the Renaissance residence **Magno Palazzo**, which provides an atmospheric backdrop for a varied collection of art and antiques and hosts regular temporary exhibitions.

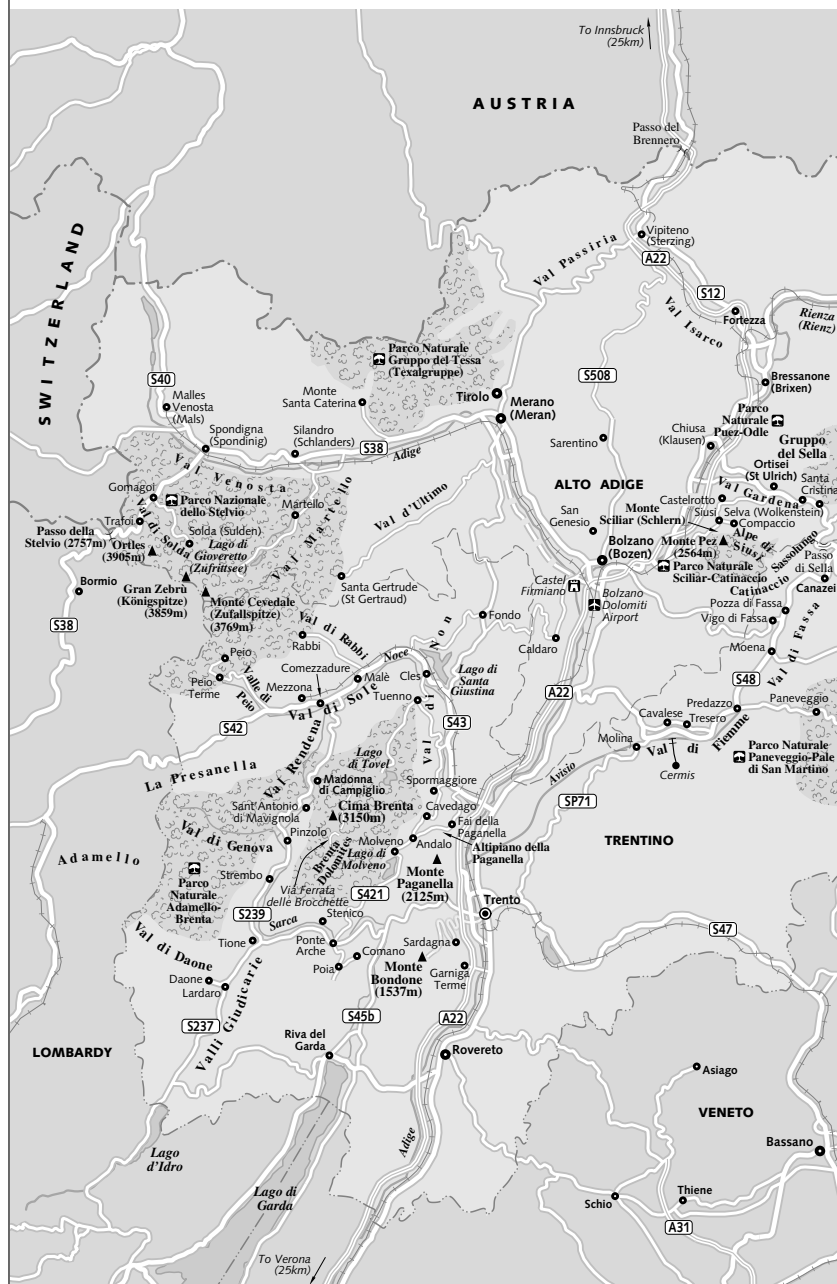
Near the main train station, the 12th-century **Badia di San Lorenzo** (Via Andrea Pozzo 2; ☎ 6.30am-noon & 3-7pm), once attached to a long-gone monastery, is worth a look for its cross-vaulting festooned with red stars and its bronze statue of Padre Pio. The abbey was badly damaged by WWII bombing and again during the 1966 floods, but has now been faithfully restored.

Housed in the regal Palazzo delle Albere is Trento's small **Museo di Arte Moderna e**

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR EURO

To get the most out of your visit to Trento, the **Trento Card** (per 24/48hr €10/15) includes free access to city museums, city tours, bicycle use, unlimited public transport, a ride on the Funivia Trento-Sardagna, guided tours and wine tastings, plus various other discounts. Cards are sold at the tourist office and some of the participating museums.

TRENTINO-ALTO ADIGE





Contemporanea (MART; ☎ 0461 23 48 60; Via Roberto da Sanseverino 45; adult/child €6/4, incl MART in Rovereto €10/7; ☒ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), part of MART in Rovereto (see p321). Works displayed inside the museum include 19th- and early-20th-century impressionist and symbolist paintings by Trentino artists, the most impressive being Luigi Bonazza's huge triptych, *La leggenda di Orfeo* (1905). Look out for the colourful fragmentary frescoes on the walls, too.

Activities

A scenic cable-car ride from Trento on the **Funivia Trento-Sardagna** (☎ 0461 23 21 54; Via Montegrappa 1; one-way €0.90) brings you to Sardagna. From here 15km of winding road (you'll need a car; there's no public transport available) brings you to the small ski station of **Vaneze di Monte** (1350m), connected by cable car to its higher counterpart, **Vasòn** – where most ski schools and ski-hire shops are located – and the gentle slopes of 1537m-high **Monte Bondone** (www.montebondone.it).

Crisscrossed by 37km of cross-country ski trails and nine downhill runs in winter, Monte Bondone's pristine slopes are home during the summer months to the **Giardino Alpine Botanico** (☎ 0461 94 80 50; Viote di Monte Bondone; adult/child €2/1; ☒ 9am-noon & 2-5pm Jun & Sep, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Jul & Aug).

On weekends between December and March, Skibus Monte Bondone, run by Trentino Trasporti, wends its way from Trento to Vaneze (€0.90 one-way).

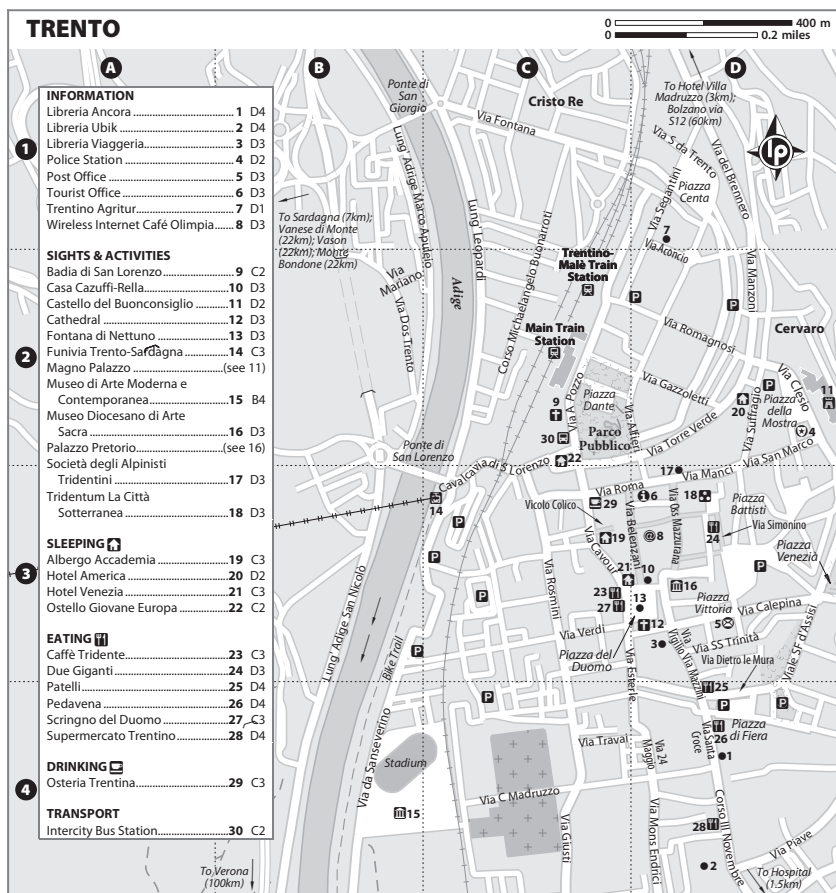
For walking information, including itineraries and *rifugi* in Trentino, contact the local **Società degli Alpinisti Tridentini** (SAT; ☎ 0461 98 18 71; Via Mancì 57; ☒ 8am-noon & 3-7pm Mon-Fri).

Tours

The tourist office runs informative guided walking tours of the city centre and tours of the Castello del Buonconsiglio (both tours adult/child €3/free). Tours (usually around two hours) generally take place on Saturday morning. Otherwise, ask at the tourist office about arranging a private guided tour. All tours are in Italian, German and English.

Festivals & Events

Feste Vigiliane Costumed parades, craft and produce fairs, raft races, historical re-enactments, music and fireworks entertain during this exuberant week-long



festival celebrating the feast of Trento's patron saint, St Vigil, in mid-June.

Polenta Festival On the last weekend of September, Trento celebrates its most traditional culinary dish.

Christmas Market Takes over Piazza di Fiera from the end of November till Christmas Eve.

Sleeping

Trentino Agritur's office (p317) has reams of information on B&Bs located on farms and in other idyllic rural settings outside of town, if you're travelling with wheels.

Ostello Giovane Europa (☎ 0461 26 34 84; info@gayaproject.org; Via Torre Vanga 9; all incl breakfast dm €16-20, s/d €28/50; ☎ reception 7.30am-11am & 3-11pm) Spelling out the word 'Welcome' in 32 different languages, this squeaky-clean place pretty much

guarantees you a warm one, bang in the middle of town and just a few minutes' walk from the main train station. It's a welcome sight for backpackers, considering Italy's dearth of decent hostels. Some rooms have balconies and mountain views.

our pick Hotel Venezia (☎ 0461 23 41 14; www.hotelveneziatn.it; Piazza del Duomo 45; all incl breakfast s/d €49/69, without bathroom €38/55) The Venezia is a comfortable two-star with a gorgeous location right in happening Piazza del Duomo. Rooms with whitewashed walls and dark timber furniture are plain but not without character, while the breakfast is more substantial and Teutonic than the Roman coffee and croissant.

Hotel America (☎ 0461 98 30 10; www.hotelamerica.it; Via Torre Verde 50; s €68-88, d €102-110, apt per week

€350; (P) (X) (Q) (S) Your best bet if you're driving and need somewhere to park is this bright, contemporary, colourful spot situated near the main train station. Stylish guest rooms have loads of space to stretch out, and for longer stays there's also a clutch of neat, self-contained apartments (minimum stay one week). Wi-fi's available in the hotel and its public areas, but not inside the apartments. Breakfast is a generous buffet served at the onsite restaurant. Set menus cost €20 to €28.

Albergo Accademia (☎ 0461 23 36 00; www.academiahotel.it; Vicolo Colico 4/6; s €102-118, d €160-180; (P) (X) (Q) (S)) An elegant choice bivouacked in a historic medieval house that has been restored enough to merit wi-fi, flat-screen TVs and bright, airy rooms. If you're feeling flush (and flash) the top-floor suite (€224) is huge, including a roof terrace and a dining table crying out for a private dinner party.

Eating & Drinking

It's a pleasure to eat in Trento and there are some atmospheric spots to choose from. Wines to look out for include Trento DOC, a sparkling white made from chardonnay grapes; and the so-called 'prince of wines', Teroldego Rotaliano DOC, a smooth, extremely drinkable red.

Caffè Tridente (☎ 0461 98 52 65; Piazza del Duomo 35; snacks €3-3.50, lunch dishes €5-7) Look out for this unmissable joint in the main square (there's no sign) open all hours to anyone with a student textbook and a penchant for cappuccino alternated with German beer. Later on, romantic types can be seen cavorting next to the grand central fountain, or pausing in the dark shadows beneath the church to exchange *ti amos*.

Due Giganti (☎ 0461 23 75 15; Via Simonino 14; buffets from €7) It sounds like an oxymoron, but it isn't. At last, a 'fast-food' restaurant that's tasty and not conducive to heart attacks. American-style fast-food franchisers would do well to send their researchers to Due Giganti to sample the fresh pizzas, buffet salads and regularly topped-up pastas. A height measure invites children under 1m tall to eat for free.

Patelli (☎ 0461 23 52 36; Via Dietro le Mura 45; set menus €20-28, mains €8-12; ☎ noon-2.15pm, 7-10.30pm) A long, cavernous restaurant with waiters in waistcoats, and delicately folded napkins, Patelli still feels like the kind of place where you can wear Umbro shorts and get away with it. Traditional trattoria fare includes a

memorably fresh gnocchi with chestnuts and pistachios accompanied by fruity red wines.

Pedavena (☎ 0461 98 62 55; Piazza di Fiera 13; set menus €20-28, mains €8-12; ☎ Wed-Mon) Bratwurst, tripe and hearty pasta dishes fill the menu of this Germanic 1920s beer hall adorned with wall-mounted stag heads.

ourpick Scringno del Duomo (☎ 0461 22 00 30; Piazza del Duomo 29; upstairs mains €8.50-20, downstairs set menus €50-70; ☎ upstairs lunch & dinner daily, downstairs lunch Tue-Fri & Sun, dinner Tue-Sun) Skip the set menus and you can actually dine in this refined establishment – Trento's oldest building, dating back to the 1200s – for a good price. Tables in Scringno's gastronomic downstairs restaurant look into a glassed-in Roman cellar that holds more than 1000 different wines. The rustic upstairs restaurant serves local specialties such as *canederli di pomi con fonduta di taleggio* (oven-baked dumplings with cheese) and lake-caught *salmerino* fish. *Delizioso* without exception.

If you're hitting the hills, pick up picnic supplies at **Supermercato Trentino** (Corso III Novembre 4-6).

Getting There & Away

The town is well connected. Regular trains leave the **main train station** (Piazza Dante) for Verona (€5.40, one hour, every 30 minutes), Venice (€8.40, 2½ hours, hourly), Bologna (€11.30, 3¼ hours, every two hours) and Bolzano (€3.35, 30 minutes, four per hour). Next door to the main station, the Trento-Malè train line connects the city with Cles in the Val di Non.

From the **intercity bus station** (Via Andrea Pozzo), local bus company **Trentino Trasporti** (☎ 0461 82 10 00; www.ttspta.it, in Italian) runs buses to and from various destinations, including Madonna di Campiglio, San Martino di Castrozza, Molveno, Canazei and Rovereto.

ROVERETO

pop 35,200

Vineyards string along the pretty road from Trento 15km south to Rovereto. The trip is a must, not only for wine buffs but for contemporary-art lovers.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0464 43 03 63; www.apr.roverso.tn.it; Corso Rosmini 6a; ☎ 8.30am-12.15pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Fri) has lots of information on the town.

Rovereto's acclaimed **Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea** (MART; ☎ 0464 43 88 87; www.mart.trento.it, in Italian; Corso Bertini 43; adult/child €8/5, incl MART in Trento €10/7; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Thu, Sat & Sun,

10am-9pm Fri) is in a building that is itself a work of art, with a monumental glass dome designed by Swiss-born architect Mario Botta. Inside are dozens of priceless pieces from the early 20th century to the present day, including Andy Warhol's *Four Marilyns* (1962), Tom Wesselman's *Seascape* (1966), several Picassos and various wrapped creations by Christo.

The **Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra** (Italian War History Museum; ☎ 0464 43 81 00; Via Castelbarco 7; adult/child €5.50/2; ⌚ 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, 9.30am-6.30pm Sat & Sun Oct-Jun, 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Jul-Sep) is worth a peek, as is the world's largest ringing bell, **Campana della Pace** (Bell of Peace; adult/child €1/0.50; ⌚ 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, 9am-6pm Mar & Oct, 9am-4.30pm Nov-Feb), which was cast in 1924 from bronze cannons from the 19 countries that fought in WWI. The 3.36m-tall bell tolls every evening around 9pm from its perch atop Miravalle Hill on Rovereto's eastern fringe. To get here, follow the signs in town from Via Santa Maria.

In the medieval heart of old Rovereto, **Scala della Torre** (☎ 0464 43 71 00; Via Scala della Torre 7; mains around €10) is a cosy decades-old trattoria and *birraria* (pub) dishing up typical mountain fare.

Regular buses connect Rovereto with Trento (30 minutes, 10 daily).

BRENTA DOLOMITES

The Brenta group lies like a rocky island to the west of the main Dolomite range. Protected by the **Parco Naturale Adamello-Brenta**, these sharp, majestic peaks are well known among mountaineers for their sheer cliffs and tricky ascents; consequently they are home to some of the most famous *vie ferrate* (climbing trails with permanent steel cords; see p341) routes ever constructed. Harnesses and ropes are essential for most of the high-altitude trails, including one of the group's (and world's) most famous, the **Via Ferrata delle Bocchette** pioneered by British climbing trailblazer, Francis Fox Tuckett in the 1860s.

On the eastern side of the Brenta group is the **Altipiano della Paganella**, a high plateau home to five small villages offering a huge range of activities between them. On the western side is **Madonna di Campiglio**, one of Europe's most glamorous ski resorts. Both make good bases for winter skiing and summer walking, though they tend to shut down in spring and autumn. The wiggly S421, S237 and S239 linking the two is a scenic, if peril-

ous, drive. Otherwise there are regular bus connections with Trento.

Altipiano della Paganella

pop 5000

Less than an hour's drive northwest of Trento, this balconylike plateau looks out onto the towering Brenta Dolomites. The Altipiano incorporates five small villages: the ski resorts of **Fai della Paganella**, touristy **Andalo**, lakeside **Molveno**, little **Cavedago**, and **Spormaggiore**, which is home to the mountains' reintroduced brown bears.

INFORMATION

Information for all of the Altipiano della Paganella is coordinated through a website, www.esperienzatrentino.it.

Andalo tourist office (☎ 0461 58 58 36; Piazza Dolomiti 1; ⌚ 9am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun) The main tourist office, with stacks of information on summer and winter activities throughout the plateau.

Fai della Paganella tourist office (☎ 0461 58 31 30; Via Villa; ⌚ 9am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun)

Guardia Medica (☎ 0461 58 56 37; ⌚ 8pm-8am) Nighttime medical call-out service.

Molveno tourist office (☎ 0461 58 69 24; Piazza Marconi 5; ⌚ 9am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat, 9am-12.30pm Tue & Thu, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun)

Tourist medical service (☎ 0461 58 60 45) Daytime medical aid.

ACTIVITIES

Alpine guide **Dolomiti di Brenta-Paganella** (☎ 329 582 41 46; guidealpine@esperienzatrentino.it; ⌚ seasonal, vary) Andalo (Sports Centre); Molveno (Piazza Marconi) organises rock climbing and guided walks in summer and ski-mountaineering, frozen-waterfall climbing and snowshoeing excursions in the Parco Naturale Adamello-Brenta in winter. Scheduled activities cost from €6 for walking to €10 for snowshoeing, and €30 for dinner in a mountain hut reached via snowmobile. You can also organise private expeditions with the association's guides.

The Paganella ski area is accessible from Andalo (by cable car) and Fai della Paganella (by chairlift). It has two cross-country skiing trails and 50km of downhill-ski slopes, ranging from beginner-friendly green runs to heart-lurching black runs. Plenty of sports shops in Andalo and Fai della Paganella rent gear. See p324 for ski-pass details.

From the top of Molveno village, a two-seater **cable car** (☎ 0461 58 69 81; one-way/return €3.50/6.50) transports you in two stages up to Pradel (1400m), from where trail No 340, which is a pleasant and easy one-hour walk, leads to the **Rifugio Croz dell'Altissimo** (☎ 0368 98 92 42; ☞ Jun-Sep) at 1430m. Several other trails, of varying difficulty, start off from here. Tourist offices have complete lists of mountain huts; always check the status of huts before heading out to be sure what facilities are available.

Riding Center Andalo (☎ 0461 58 59 00; Andalo Sports Centre; ☞ 9.30-noon & 3-7pm mid-Jun-Aug) offers 50-minute horseback rides or lessons for €22. For a gentler pace, hour-long horse-drawn carriage rides are €15.

One of the highlights of the Parco Naturale Adamello-Brenta is the home of its reintro-

duced brown bears, Spormaggiore – see the boxed text, below.

SLEEPING & EATING

The plateau's five villages have 120 hotels between them. Many close in the off-season (April, May, October, November). There are also numerous farmhouses and self-catering apartments, if you have your own wheels – tourist offices can help with details.

Camping Spiaggia (☎ 0461 58 69 78; www.campingmolveno.it; Via Lungolago 25; 2 adults & car €20-44; ☞ reception 9am-noon & 2-7pm year-round; P ☎) A site at Spiaggia, on the shores of Lago di Molveno, gets you free admission to the neighbouring outdoor swimming pool, tennis court and table-tennis tables. It's an easy stroll into Molveno's buzzing little village centre, and

PARCO NATURALE ADAMELLO-BRENTA & ITS BEARS

This wild and beautiful area – encompassing more than 80 lakes and the vast Adamello glacier – was once home to the Alps' only brown bears. It became a protected area in 1967 and a provincial park in 1988. By that time, bear numbers had dwindled to just three, partly because their habitat had been destroyed, and partly because they'd been shot by farmers clinging onto making a living from dairy farming.

Beginning in 1999, park authorities set about reintroducing the bears, bringing 10 Alpine brown bears over from Slovenia. The first cubs were born in the park in 2002, and there have been cubs born every winter since, with a total of 20 bears inhabiting the park at the time of writing.

The brown bears measure 1.2m when on all four paws, and over 2m when standing; they weigh anywhere from 100kg to 250kg, depending on the season. They're closely monitored by park authorities via radio collars, and some can be viewed at the enclosure outside the **Centro Visitatori Spormaggiore** (☎ 0461 65 36 22; Via Alt Spaur 6; bear enclosure €2 Jun-Sep, free Oct-May; ☞ 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 2-6pm Sat & Sun) in Spormaggiore, 15km northeast of Molveno. The centre has some excellent exhibits about the bears' reintroduction, including some cute displays for kids. It's hoped that in 50 to 100 years there will once again be bears all over the Alps.

Of course, happy bears often mean unhappy farmers, but Trentino's provincial government pays for farmers to install electric fences and for any damage the bears cause.

Bears aside, the 620-sq-km park – Trentino's largest protected area – is also home to ibexes, red deer, marmots and chamois and 82 bird species, along with 1200 different species of mountain flowers, including two (*Nigritella luschmannii* and *Eryshimum auranthiacum*) that are unique to the area.

Wildlife is prevalent around the banks of **Lago di Tovel**, set deep in a forest some 30km north of Spormaggiore in the park's heart. Until the 1960s the lake was blood red, due to a rare alga, but inexplicably turned clear and has never gone back, even though the alga is still present. An easy one-hour walking trail encircles the lake. The lakeside **visitors centre** (☎ 0463 45 10 33; ☞ 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Jul & Aug, 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Sat & Sun Sep) has extensive information on other walks in the park.

More information on the park, including mountain huts, Alpine guides, maps and itineraries, as well as ecofriendly accommodation adhering to strict environmental guidelines, can be obtained in Sant'Antonio di Mavignola, 7km south of Madonna di Campiglio, from the helpful **visitors centre** (☞ 9am-noon & 4-8pm Apr-Sep) or from the **park headquarters** (☎ 0465 80 66 66; www.pnab.it; in Italian; Via Nazionale 12; ☞ 8.30am-noon & 2-7pm Jul & Aug, 8.30am-noon & 4-6pm Mon-Fri Sep-Jun) a few kilometres south in Strembo (population 440).

onsite entertainment and watersports are on tap here in high summer.

ourpick Hotel Alexander Cima Tosa (☎ 0461 58 69 28; www.alexandermolveno.com; Piazza Scuole 7, Molveno; per person r €39, half-board €54-100, full board €58-104; ☒ closed Nov; ☐ ☒ ☒ ☒) Molveno's oldest hotel once hosted early British and German Brenta skiers and climbers, and it's still owned by the same family. These days things have gone a bit more upmarket with 40 well-equipped rooms (with balconies), gym, indoor pool, kids playroom, mountain bikes and the obligatory wellness centre. The multifunctional restaurant is handy if you're on half- or full-board rates. Open year-round, except November.

Hotel Corona (☎ 0461 58 58 72; Via Dossi 6, Andalo; per person full board €55-84; ☐ ☒ ☒ ☒) There's a weathervane atop a turreted tower, frescoes on the bay windows, a steeply gabled roof, and wrought-iron balconies. Sound enticing? Then pull over in the ski resort of Andalo for some 'home sweet home' treatment in the peach-coloured Corona, where full-board rates include some lavish meals. Wood furnishings and modern finishes add a sleek yet laidback feel.

Alp & Wellness Sport Hotel Panorama (☎ 0461 58 31 34; www.sporthotelpanorama.it; Via Carletti 6, Fai della Paganella; d €100-200; ☐ ☒ ☒ ☒) With namesake panoramic views, rooms in this multicoloured modern edifice indeed have clean lines and pared-down furnishings, and some have lofts. Also, as the name suggests, there's every kind of wellness facility here you could wish for, including indoor and outdoor pools.

Al Penny (☎ 0461 58 52 51; Viale Trento 23, Andalo; meals €22-25; ☒ 11am-3pm & 5pm-2am) Sink into a big, comfy booth at this relaxed restaurant on the edge of Andalo to feast on traditional Trentino specialties such as spinach dumplings, and both lake and ocean fish. All the bread here is homemade – if you can't decide, try a mixed basket that includes wholegrain bread, crusty white-flour bread and delicious still-warm potato bread. Al Penny also has a handful of rooms and apartments with prices available on request.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Trentino Trasporti (☎ 0461 82 10 00; www.ttspa.it, in Italian) runs buses between all five villages and Trento (€2.90 to €3.30, 3½ hours, up to nine daily) and services to Madonna di Campiglio (€8.60) and Riva del Garda (€5.60) on Lago

di Garda. Tourist offices give away schedules in clearly marked booklets.

Free ski buses serve the area in winter.

Madonna di Campiglio & Pinzolo

This small village (population 600 without the tourists) is the Dolomites' 'Gucci resort' where the rich and glamorous come to compare expensive ski-wear and hit some formidable downhill runs. Austrian emperor Franz Joseph and his wife set the tone in the 19th century – an era relived in late February when fireworks blaze and costumed pageants waltz through town during the annual Habsburg Carnival.

Fortunately Madonna di Campiglio has retained its essence, enshrined in a pretty village square overlooked by the castlelike battlements of the Brenta Dolomites. In summer this is an ideal base for hikers and *via ferrata* enthusiasts.

Less-expensive Pinzolo (population 2000, elevation 800m), 16km south, has a lively centre populated by residents year-round.

INFORMATION

Guardia Medica (☎ 0465 44 05 38, 0465 80 16 00) Emergency doctor.

Madonna tourist office (☎ 0465 44 75 01; www.campiglio.to; Via Pradalago 4; ☒ 9am-12.30pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun)

Pinzolo tourist office (☎ 0465 50 10 07; www.pinzolo.to; Piazzale Ciciamimo; ☒ 9am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-12.30pm Sun)

Tourist medical service (☎ 0465 44 30 73; ☒ early Dec-Easter & mid-Jun–mid-Sep)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

A network of chairlifts and several **cable cars** (☎ 0465 44 77 44) take skiers and boarders from Madonna to its numerous ski runs and a snowboarding park (with half-pipe, slide park and boarder cross) in winter, and to walking and mountain-biking trails in summer. In Pinzolo there is just one **cable car** (☎ 0465 50 12 56; www.funiviepinzolo.it, in Italian; Via Nepomuceno Bolognini 84; ☒ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm mid-Dec–Apr & Jun–mid-Sep), which climbs the mountain to 2100m-high Doss del Sabion (one-way/return €5/8, 20 minutes), stopping at midstation Pra Rodont (1530m; one-way/return €5/6, 10 minutes) en route. Mountain bikes can be hired at this cable-car station in summer.

In winter, a one-/three-/six-day **ski pass** for Madonna di Campiglio costs €34/98/173

(high season €37/105/183). The Super Skirama Dolomiti Adamello-Brenta pass covers both resorts, as well as others in the valley including the Altipiano della Paganella area; for three/seven days it costs €102/196 (high season €114/223), but there are numerous pass options available.

Opportunities for independent walkers are infinite. Madonna's tourist office teams up with the Parco Naturale Adamello-Brenta to run particularly lovely guided walks (€15) to a traditional Alpine pasture hut in the national park on Wednesday from mid-July to September. The tourist office also arranges a number of other summertime walks and cultural and artistic events under the banner 'Mystery of the Mountains', providing an insight into the geology of the Dolomite peaks and their relationship with the surrounding mountains.

In Campo Carlo Magno, 2km north of Madonna, the **Cabinovia Grostè** (one-way/return €10/15; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2-5pm mid-Dec-Apr & Jun-mid-Sep) cable car takes walkers up, in two stages, to the Passo Grostè (2440m), from where you can set off into the Brenta Dolomites. The Via Bocchetta di Tuckett (trail No 305) – the *via ferrata* for which the Brenta group is famous – also leaves from the cable-car station. Only experienced mountaineers with the correct equipment should attempt it. Otherwise, take trail No 316 to **Rifugio del Tuckett** (☎ 0464 44 12 26; ☎ mid-Jun-mid-Sep) and Q Sella (2271m). From there take trail No 328 and then No 318 to the **Rifugio Brentei** (☎ 0465 44 12 44) at 2182m. All trails heading higher into the group from this point cross glaciers and need special equipment.

Pinzolo's 16th-century **Chiesa di San Vigilio** merits a visit for its external mural *La danza macabra* (The Dance of Death). North of Pinzolo is the entrance to the **Val di Genova**, often described as one of the Alps' most beautiful valleys. A series of spectacular waterfalls along the way enhances its reputation as great walking country. Four mountain huts strung out along the valley floor make overnight stays an option – Pinzolo's tourist office has details.

SLEEPING & EATING

There are few budget options in Madonna and most insist on full- or half-board, and there may be a minimum stay during peak times.

Most hotels located in the area (including residential Pinzolo) open from early or mid-December to Easter, and mid-June to mid-September.

Camping Parco Adamello (☎ 0465 50 17 93; www.campingparcoadamello.it; Carisolo; per person €8-9, tent & car €12-18; ☎ year-round; ☐) Beautifully situated within the Parco Naturale Adamello-Brenta, 1km north of Pinzolo, this camping ground is a natural starting point for outdoor adventures such as skiing, snowshoeing, walking and biking, while you breathe in the pure mountain air.

Hotel Bellavista (☎ 0465 50 11 64; www.bellavistanet.com; in Italian; Pinzolo; half-board per person per day €55-80, per week €273-406; ☎ year-round; ☐) Pinzolo's 57-room 'beautiful view' hotel – one of the few hotels to open all year – is a modern place with plain but clean and comfortable rooms done out with a lot of brown wood. The hearty local fare dished up at its restaurant will sustain you on the slopes.

Hotel Crozzon (☎ 0465 44 22 22; www.hotelcrozzon.com; Viale Dolomiti di Brenta 96, Madonna; per person half-board €55-90; ☐) This friendly hotel offers bright, clean rooms (some with mountain views). Full board at the onsite restaurant costs just an extra €10 per person. Dinner is served by candlelight in winter; in summer, guests can dine at the hotel's little chalet in the mountains.

Obersler Design Hotel (☎ 0465 44 11 36; www.hotelobersler.it; Via Monte Spinale 27, Madonna; d half-board €150-240; ☐ ☎ ☐) Madonna's uberhip hotel sits right at the bottom of the Spinale ski lift, and blends the traditional charm of a mountain hideaway with cutting-edge decor, a decadent wellness centre and restaurant meals presented like works of art. Even if you're not staying here, drop by the retro-space-age chalet-bar, **Ober 1** (☎ 10am-2am), which looks like the Jetsons just landed in Madonna. Live music plays on Friday night, DJs spin on Saturday, and there's a sushi bar, as well as a thumping sound system.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Madonna di Campiglio and Pinzolo are accessible year-round by bus from Trento (€8, 1½ hours, five daily) and Milan (€12, 3¼ hours, one daily), as well as Brescia.

From mid-December to mid-April **ski-shuttle buses** run to and from Madonna and Pinzolo once a week from Milan's Malpensa and Linate airports via Bergamo's airport

(one-way €36), and Verona's Villafranca airport via Brescia's airport (one-way €30).

VAL DI NON, VAL DI SOLE & VAL DI RABBI

Sandwiched between the Brenta group and Parco Nazionale dello Stelvio (p335) and easily accessed by train from Trento, this triumvirate of Italian-speaking valleys is worth a visit in its own right. The main hub is Malè in the Val di Sole.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Ferrovie Trento-Malè (☎ 0463 90 11 50) buses connect Rabbi, Madonna di Campiglio and Malè. Cles (€2.90, 45 minutes) and Malè (€5, 1½ hours, eight daily) are on the Trento-Comezzadure train line. A **cable car** (one-way €5) ferries skiers and walkers up the mountainside from the train station.

Free ski buses loop around the area in winter; tourist offices have schedules.

Val di Non

The first thing you notice about **Val di Non** is the apple trees; they're everywhere, though the gnarly, well-pruned branches are at their best in spring when they sprout a fragrant white blossom. The second eye-catcher is the castles that materialise over the orchards like prints from a Hans Christian Anderson fairytale. The valley is centred on its main settlement, **Cles**, whose **tourist office** (☎ 0463 42 13 76; Corso Dante 30; ☎ 9am-noon Mon, to noon & 3-6pm Tue-Sat) is just off the main road through town.

On the town's southern limits, you can watch videos, taste apples, take cooking lessons and tour the apple-processing plant of **Melinda Mondo** (☎ 0463 46 92 99; Cles; mondodelinda@melinda.it; tour prices on request; ☎ office 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sat), famed for its golden delicious apples. In summer you can also take a guided cycling trip through the orchards on Melinda's mountain bikes, and if you're here in September or October, you can help with the harvest. Next door to Melinda Mondo is **Trentingrana** (☎ 0463 46 94 56; www.trentingrana.it; Cles; tour prices & hr on request), where 'Parmesan-style' Grana cheese is made; its factory can also be toured.

Val di Sole

Leaving Cles in the rear-view mirror, the apple orchards draw you west into the aptly named **Val di Sole**, tracing the course of the foaming river Noce.

This valley is renowned for its accessibility (there's a train line from Trento) and outdoor pursuits aside from the usual skiing and hiking staples. Rafting on the Noce is perennially popular. **Centro Rafting Val di Sole** (☎ 0463 97 32 78; www.raftingcenter.it; Via Gole 105, Dimaro; ☎ Jun-Sep) runs rafting trips (from €39), as well as kayaking, canyoning, Nordic walking and other adventures. Sole also guards a flattish 35km section of the Brenta Dolomite Bike Loop and runs a special bike train June to September, allowing cyclists to step on and alight when they get tired. Of nine different bike-hire places, **Cidi Andreis Specialized** (☎ 0463 90 28 22; Via Condi, Malè) is the most handily located. Day rental plus unlimited train use costs €20.

The Malè **tourist office** (☎ 0463 90 12 80; www.valdisole.net; Piazza Regina Elena 19; ☎ 9am-noon & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon Sun) has extensive information on the entire valley, and can advise you on ski facilities and walking trails in nearby Stelvio National Park.

Dolomiti Camping Village (☎ 0463 97 43 32; www.campingdolomiti.com; Via Gole 105; 2 adults, tent & car €21-29, 2-person bungalow €45-65; ☎ mid-May-mid-Oct & Dec-Easter; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎), riverside and adjacent to the rafting centre, is surely the camping ground that has everything. In addition to campsites (wi-fi'd, no less), there are 20 gleaming, new bungalows along with apartments in a timber chalet. Among a plethora of onsite facilities are a wellness centre, indoor and outdoor pools, volleyball courts and trampolines. Guests and nonguests can recharge at the Dolomiti's excellent **restaurant** (meals €15-20), which has mountainous portions of food, including pizzas topped with smoked trout and walnuts. The camping ground is 1km east of the train station and cable car at Comezzadure.

For a more bucolic experience, **Agritur Fior di Bosco** (☎ 0462 91 00 02; Valfioriana; prices & dates by arrangement; ☎ ☎) is a delightful *agriturismo* (farm-stay accommodation) serving organic farm products, including cheese from its own dairy (you can even have a hand in processing the milk). You'll need your own wheels to get here.

Val di Rabbi

Val di Rabbi is a refreshingly tranquil alpine valley, bereft of ski resorts, which provides the best southern entry into Stelvio National Park. It is also known for its Antica Fonte spring waters 'discovered' in 1650 by a venerable pas-

tor and revered ever since for their supposed capacity to 'cure' nasty illnesses. The **Terme di Rabbi** (☎ 8am-noon & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat May-Sep, 8am-noon Sun Jul & Aug) in the eponymous village 12km up the valley from Malè offers a wide range of recuperative treatments. It is served by the rather businesslike **Grand Hotel Rabbi** (☎ 0463 98 30 50; www.grandhotelrabbii.it; Fonti di Rabbi 153; d half-board €100-160; (P) ♿). Next door is a small **visitors centre** (☎ 0463 98 51 90; ☎ 8am-1pm & 3-7pm Jun-Sep, 8am-noon & 2-6pm Oct-May) and the starting point for a network of paths into Stelvio, some of which connect to Val Martello in Alto Adige (p336).

Regular buses head up the valley from outside Malè train station.

VAL DI FIEMME

In a region where few valleys speak the same dialect (let alone agree on the same cheese recipe), the Val di Fiemme stands out. In the 12th century, independently minded local noblemen set up their own quasi-republic here, and the magnificent Community of Fiemme, and the ethos and spirit of the founders lives on.

Cavalese's **tourist office** (☎ 0462 24 11 11; www.aptfiemme.tn.it; Via Bronzetti 60; ☎ 9am-noon & 3.30-7pm Mon-Sat) acts as a contact point for local Alpine guide groups which organise, among other things, mountaineering ascents on Pale di San Martino, Cima della Madonna and Sass Maor, a 120km-long high-altitude skiing excursion.

Today the slightly less bolshie 'Community' is headquartered in the wonderfully frescoed **Palazzo Vescovile** (Piazza Battisti) in the valley's main town of **Cavalese** (population 3600; elevation 1000m). The building is well worth an admiring look. A few doors down you can seek solace at the **Centro Arte Contemporanea Cavalese** (☎ 0462 23 54 16; www.artecavalese.it; Palazzo Firmian, Piazzetta Rizzoli 1; admission free; ☎ 3.30-7.30pm Fri-Sun), a striking exposition of mountain art.

From Cavalese, skiers can take a cable car up to the Cermis ski area (2229m), part of the extensive Superski Dolomiti region.

There are plenty of places to eat and sleep in town.

Check out **Hotel Garni Laurino** (☎ 0462 34 01 51; www.hotelgarnilaurino.it; Via Antoniazzi 14; d €76-120; (P) ♿), a perfect little nook exquisitely decorated with floral fabrics and timber furniture in a 17th-century building. The price is a steal when you consider that most of the rooms are minisuites, and free add-ons include a

garden, scenic balcony, mountain bikes and a visit to the wellness centre. It's right in the middle of town.

Something of a legend in the valley and recent recipient of a Michelin star (meaning it ain't cheap), **El Molin** (☎ 0462 34 00 74; Piazza Battisti 11; meals upstairs €12-18, downstairs €40-50; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed lunch Tue & Wed) is housed in an old mill; at street level you can sit at small tables on high stools and dine on delicious fish, meat and pasta dishes. Downstairs, next to the old waterwheels, it's a wonderland of stone nooks and crannies, candlelight and the concoctions of chef Alessandro Gilmozzi. Think local, seasonal ingredients embellished with a quirky, playful twist.

PALE DI SAN MARTINO

Pink blends seamlessly with green in the Pale di San Martino (elevation 1467m), where the luminous Dolomite mountains rise like ghosts above the ancient forest of Paneveggio, whose wood is made into prized violins. The mountains are embraced by the **Parco Naturale Paneveggio-Pale di San Martino** (☎ 0439 76 88 59; http://parcopan.org; Via Laghetto, San Martino), home to roe deer, chamois, marmots, wildfowl and birds of prey such as the golden eagle. At the park's impressive headquarters in the 1853-built **Villa Welsperg** (☎ 0439 64 851; Via Castelpietra 2; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm) in Val Canali, suspended aquariums illustrate the park's water life and exhibitions are dedicated to the flora and fauna. To get to the villa, follow the south-bound S50 from San Martino di Castrozza for 14km and at the village of Fiera di Primiero bear east along a narrow road for a couple of kilometres. After the hamlet of Tonadico, bear left (north) to the villa.

At the park's feet huddles **San Martino di Castrozza**, a small but popular Trentino skiing resort and walking spot which is accessible via **Trentino Trasporti** (www.ttspa.it, in Italian) buses from Trento. From here local buses service the valleys.

The **San Martino tourist office** (☎ 0439 76 88 67; www.sanmartino.com; Via Passo Rolle 165; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun) is a mine of information. In summer, a chairlift and cable car from San Martino whisks walkers to the Rifugio Rosetta (2600m), from where several trails (some easy, some requiring mountaineering skills) can be picked up.

Free ski buses shuttle around the valleys in winter. In summer, the Parco Naturale

Paneveggio-Pale di San Martino runs buses around the park.

VAL DI FASSA

Val di Fassa is Trentino's only Ladin-speaking valley (there are four more in Alto Adige) yet, even here, the language has two distinct dialects – Cazét and Brach. Framed by the stirring peaks of the Gruppo del Sella to the north, the Catinaccio to the west and the Marmolada (3342m) to the southeast, the valley spins on two hubs: the buzzing ski town of **Canazei** (population 1810; elevation 1465m) and the no less attractive settlement of **Moena** (population 2660; elevation 1114m). Fassa is the nexus of Italy's cross-country skiing scene. Italian cross-country champ Christian Zorzi hails from Moena, and the town also plays host to the sport's most illustrious mass-participation race, the annual **Marcialonga** (www.marcialonga.it), a 70km march through the snow to Canazei and back through Cavalese in the adjoining Val di Fiemme. Over 6000 competitors took part in 2009.

Information

Canazei tourist office (☎ 0462 60 11 13; www.fassa.com; Piazza Marconi 5; ☹ 8.30am–12.15pm & 3.30–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–12.30pm Sun)

Val di Fassa tourist office (☎ 0462 60 95 00; www.fassa.com; Strada de Dolèda 10, Canazei; ☹ 8.30am–12.30pm & 1.30–5pm Mon–Sat, 10am–12.30pm Sun) Information on the whole valley.

Sights & Activities

Variety is the spice of life for skiers in the Val di Fassa with 120km of downhill and cross-country runs, as well as challenging Alpine tours and the Sella Ronda ski circuit (opposite). Dolomiti Superski passes are valid, alongside cheaper passes specific to the Val di Fassa, which cost €80/141 for three/six days. The Tre Valli ski pass (from €88/155 for a three-/six-day pass) covers the Fassa, Biois and San Pellegrino valleys. In summer, you can ski down the Marmolada glacier.

Walkers and skiers can approach the Gruppo del Sella from **Passo Pordoi**, where a cable car travels to almost 3000m. The best approach to the Catinaccio group is from Vigo di Fassa, 11km southwest of Canazei near Pozza di Fassa. Here, a cable car climbs to an elevation of 2000m, dropping you off near the mountain hut **Baita Checco** (☎ 0462 76 35 81; Vigo di Fassa; mains €7–12; ☹ 8am–4.30pm Dec–Mar & Jul–mid-Sep),

where staff in red-and-white gingham serve Alpine specialities such as Gorgonzola-drizzled *canederli* (bread dumplings) in the split-level stone interior or on a wind-protected sun terrace.

For gentler rambles, ask at the tourist office for a copy of the English-language brochure *Low-level Walks in the Fassa Valley*, which outlines 29 walks (1.5km to 8km long) in the valley. Of particular interest are those incorporating visits to old Ladin landmarks such as the **Botega da Pinter** (☎ 0462 57 35 74; Via Dolomiti 4, Canazei; ☹ 10am–noon & 4–7pm Mon–Sat mid-Jun–mid-Sep), an authentic reconstruction of a cooper's workshop, and 16th-century sawmill **La Sia** (☎ 0462 60 23 23; Via Pian Trevisan, Penia; ☹ 9am–noon & 3–6pm Mon–Fri mid-Mar–mid-Dec), 3km east of Canazei along the narrow S641.

Detomas Fiorenzo (☎ 0462 60 24 47; Via Pareda 31, Canazei) is one of several sports shops renting mountain bikes, as well as snowboards. Ski-rental outlets in the area are plentiful.

In Canazei's village centre, take time to pop into the workshop of traditional sculptor and toymaker **Andrea Soraperra** (☎ 0462 60 24 27; Via Dolomites 109), where you can watch him make the enchanting toys and evocative sculptures displayed in his attached shop. Among his creations are typical wooden character masks worn in the **Carnevale Fassano** that takes place in the valley in February or March each year.

Sleeping, Eating & Drinking

Beware, many hotels and restaurants close down in the off-season, ie April, May, October and November.

CANAZEI

Our pick **Garni Stella Alpina** (☎ 0462 60 11 27; www.stella-alpina.net; Via Antermont 6; d €68–128; ☐) Like nowhere else you'll ever stay (unless you happen to have a Ladin aunt), this quaint but high-quality B&B has seven cosy rooms and spadeloads of traditional Ladin character. Factor in a soothing sauna-jacuzzi, memorable hospitality and a quirky downstairs shop and wine cellar, and you're looking at a veritable bargain.

Hotel Rita (☎ 0462 60 12 19; www.hotelrita.com; Streda de Pareda 16; d half-board from €98; ☐ ☒ ☕) Looking like the gingerbread house your son/daughter made last Christmas, the sugary Rita lies 50m from the main square and not much further from the base of the ski lift. Pine furniture fills all 21 wi-fi-equipped rooms. As well as a

cocktail piano bar, there's an in-house masseuse. In winter there's a minimum stay; the length varies depending on the season.

Café Antermont (☎ 0462 60 10 40; Piazza Marconi 15; cakes around €3.10; ☎ 7am-midnight year-round) Handily situated next to the main bus stop, this woodcarved café is an authority on homebaked sponge cake with Alpine cream and a shot of espresso. Nearby, a fork-wielding Ladin cooks up German sausages at a roadside stall.

El Paél (☎ 0462 60 14 33; Streda Roma 54; set menus €27, meals €25-35; ☎ Tue-Sun) An unfancy place with a reputation, this Osteria Tipica Trentina has a traditional Ladin kitchen cooking up specialties of the valley such as nettle dumplings with spinach and Vezzena cheese, asparagus with liquorice sauce, and venison with steamed pumpkin.

Husky Pub (☎ 0462 60 11 11; www.huskypub.com; ☎ 8.30am-1.30am Tue-Sun Dec-Easter; ☎) Set in the basement of the Hotel Croce Bianca and run by a young, hip team, Husky's booths overflow with après-skiers sipping Husky Roska cocktails made from forest-fruit liqueur with vodka and crushed ice. Live-music performances (mostly contemporary covers) every night.

MOENA

our pick Central Hotel (☎ 0462 57 32 28; www.centralhotel.it; Strada L Heilmann 4; s/d €50/100; ☎) The elegant building in the centre of town with the conical tower is the Central Hotel, a veritable palace with small boutique-style rooms embellished with flat-screen TVs and window seats in the alcoves. The Vienna lounge has a wonderful woodcarved ceiling, and there's an inviting café-wine bar on the ground floor along with a moodily lit German spa.

Kusk La Locanda (☎ 0462 57 46 27; Via dei Colli 7; dishes from €7; ☎ 8am-2am Wed-Mon, closed May) Billing itself as *Il locale più trendy delle Dolomiti*, Kusk is legendary throughout the Val di Fassa for its après-ski scene. This four-way split between a pizzeria, American bar, disco and Italian restaurant is where you can spend the whole evening, chomping on wood-fired pizza while dancing to upbeat Latin and jazz.

Getting There & Away

The Val di Fassa can be reached by bus from Trento year-round, and by SAD bus from Bolzano and the Val Gardena from June to mid-September, with free ski buses also serving the region in winter.

GRUPPO DEL SELLA

For winter skiers, the Sella group (highest point Piz Boé at 3151m) is synonymous with the **Sella Ronda**, a ski-based circumnavigation of the mountain range – linked by various cable cars and chairlifts – that is considered one of the Alps' most iconic ski routes. The tour takes in four passes as well as the four surrounding valleys – the Val Gardena, Val Badia, Arabba (in Veneto) and Val di Fassa – all of them definitively Ladin.

Experienced skiers can bank on completing the 40km Sella Ronda in a single day (26km covered by runs and 13.5km by ski lifts). Tourist offices provide leaflets describing the clockwise (orange) and anticlockwise (green) routes, kicking off from Selva (1565m) in the Val Gardena no later than 10am. Portavescovo, at 2495m, is the highest point. You'll need a Dolomiti Superski pass (p314). In summer, a hop-on hop-off bus circles the Sella Ronda, picking up and dropping off walkers. The same trails are utilised by mountain bikers.

Both the Sella and Sassolungo walking trails can be reached from Canazei or the Val Gardena resorts by bus to Passo di Sella or Passo di Pordoi. Passo di Sella (2244m) is a mountain pass laced with hairpin bends. From the equally hair-raising Passo di Pordoi (2239m), a cable car takes you to Sasso Pordoi (2950m). Take in the breathtaking views from the café terrace of the **Rifugio Maria** (☎ 0462 60 11 78), then pick up the Alta Via No 2 trail, which crosses the group, heads down to the Passo Gardena and continues into the Parco Naturale Puez-Odle.

ALTO ADIGE

BOLZANO

pop 97,300 / elev 265m

Biergartens, pizzerias, hearty guten Morgens and flirtatious ciao bellas; where the heck are you? It doesn't take long to decipher that cultural generalisations don't apply in Bolzano, a prosperous Alpine settlement of South Tyroleans hemmed in by the steep-sided Dolomites, which often feels more like a small town than a provincial capital. More German than Trento yet more Italian than Merano, the historical city centre is a melting pot replete with Prada-wearing cyclists and strangely polite motorists who – defying standard Italian protocol – actually stop at crossings.

The spiritual capital of Italy's South Tyrol region, Bolzano's quality of life – one of the highest in Italy – is reflected in the city's all-pervading 'greenness'. Rows of mature horse-chestnut trees guide you from the busy train station into central Piazza Walther, where the aroma of Middle Europe lingers around the smart Viennese cafes and the wooden market stalls laid out with fresh produce, cheese and speck (cured ham).

Surrounded by a plethora of fairy-tale castles, Bolzano's most emblematic building is its splendid Gothic cathedral, an imposing structure backed by the equally gothic peaks of the not-so-distant Dolomites. Cycle and walking trails emanate from here, paralleling the Adige River on its course west and south and offering tantalising gateways into the surrounding mountains.

Essentially Austrian until the end of WWI, Bolzano's Italianisation was initiated by Mussolini in the 1920s. Today the city's Italian-speaking majority (73%) belies a history linked intrinsically with the Austrian Tyrol and ingrained in the legend of Tyrolean national hero Andreas Hofer.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR EURO

Serious sightseers to Bolzano can pick up a **MuseumCard** (€2.50). Valid for an entire year, the card offers discounted access at various museums, plus city tours. It is available at the tourist office and from participating museums.

Information

Hospital (☎ 0471 90 81 11; Via Lorenz Böhler) Out of the centre towards Merano.

Police station (☎ 0471 94 76 11, 0471 94 76 80; Via Marconi 33)

Post office (Piazza Parrocchia 1; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri. to 12.30pm Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 0471 30 70 00; www.bolzano-bozen.it; Piazza Walther 8; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

Sights & Activities

Just off Bolzano's main square, Piazza Walther, is the city's Gothic **cathedral** (Piazza Parrocchia; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat). Nearby, the cloisters and chapel of **Chiesa dei Domenicani**



ÖTZI – THE WORLD'S FIRST HIGH-ALTITUDE HIKER?

When two Austrian students stumbled upon a human corpse wedged into a melting glacier on Hauslabjoch Pass in 1991, they assumed they had found the remains of an unfortunate fellow hiker caught in a killer winter storm. But, when the mummified body was removed and taken to a morgue in Innsbruck a few days later, it was discovered to be over 5300 years old. The male corpse – subsequently nicknamed Ötzi, or the Iceman – is the oldest mummified remains ever found in Europe, dating from an ancient Copper Age civilisation that lived in the Dolomites 150 years before the founding of Ancient Egypt.

Though initially claimed by the Austrian government, it was later ascertained that Ötzi had been unearthed 100m inside the Italian border on the Schnalstal glacier. After a brief diplomatic dispute, the mummy was returned to Italy where it has been on display in the Museo Archeologico dell'Alto Adige in Bolzano since 1998.

What Ötzi was actually doing 3200m up a glaciated mountainside, 52 centuries before alpinism became a serious sport, is still a matter of some debate. Some maintain he was a wandering shepherd killed in a violent confrontation; others prefer to merely think of him as the world's first high-altitude hiker.

(Piazza Domenicani; ☎ 9.30am–6pm Mon–Sat) feature 14th-century frescoes by the Giotto school. Take a walk along arcaded **Via Portici**, through the charming Piazza delle Erbe, the daily fresh-produce **market**, to reach the 14th-century **Chiesa di Francescani** (Via dei Francescani). This church features beautiful cloisters and a magnificent Gothic altarpiece, carved in 1500 by Hans Klocker, in the Cappella della Beata Vergine (Chapel of the Blessed Virgin).

The star of the **Museo Archeologico dell'Alto Adige** (☎ 0471 32 01 00; www.iceman.it; Via Museo 43; adult/child under 6yr €8/free; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun) is Ötzi, the Iceman (see the boxed text, above). The so-called Iceman's clothing and equipment is on display, while his still-frozen body is kept in a separate, temperature-controlled room and can be viewed through a tiny window. Ötzi aside, the museum also has an important collection of archaeological finds.

Alto Adige's wondrous flora, fauna and geology can be discovered at the **Museo di Scienze Naturali dell'Alto Adige** (☎ 0471 41 29 64; www.museonatura.it; Via dei Bottai 1; adult/child €5/3.50; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun). The centrepiece is its gigantic saltwater aquarium.

Bolzano's newest architectural masterpiece is the **Museion** (Via Dante 2; adult/child €6/free; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun, to 10pm Thu), a funky glass cubelike building on the river that houses the museum of contemporary art. Strangely the modernist design works, both inside and out. There's a cafe, bookshop and library onsite.

A 20km-long bike path running mostly along the river connects Bolzano's castles: the 12th-century **Castel Mareccio** (Schloss

Maretsch; ☎ 0471 97 66 15; mareccio@comune.bolzano.it; Via Cdè Medici 12; ☎ 9.30am–12.30pm & 2–5.30pm Mon–Fri); the 1237-built **Castel Roncolo** (Schloss Runkelstein; ☎ 0471 32 98 08; roncolo@comune.bolzano.it; Via Castel Ried; adult/child €8/5.50; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun) – renowned for its rare 14th-century frescoes depicting scenes from secular literature such as the tale of Tristan and Isolde – and the highlight, **Castel Firmiano**, dating back to AD 945.

This rambling castle and its grounds are home to the **Messner Mountain Museum** (MMM; ☎ 0471 63 31 45; www.messner-mountain-museum.it, in Italian; adult/student €8/6; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun Mar–Nov) created by mountaineer Reinhold Messner as the centrepiece of his five mountain museums. Based around man's relationship with the mountains across all cultures, this insightful museum is configured so that you climb literally hundreds of stairs, giving you the experience of shifting altitudes. You'll need to wear sturdy shoes for the uneven terrain and mesh walkways; wheelchair access is not possible. The tourist office has details of shuttle services to the castles.

Bolzano's three cable cars include the world's longest (Renon, 4556m) and oldest (Colle, 1908):

Funivia del Colle (☎ 0471 97 85 45; Via Campiglio; one-way/return €3/4)

Funivia del Renon (☎ 0471 97 84 79; Via Renon; one-way/return €2.50/3.50) It's 500m east of the train station.

Funivia San Genesio (☎ 0471 97 84 36; Via Sarentino; one-way/return €3/3.20)

REINHOLD MESSNER

While Germans make up the lion's share of hikers in the Dolomites, the man invariably venerated as the greatest hiker of them all, the distinctly Teutonic-sounding Reinhold Messner, was actually an *Italian* (albeit a German-speaking one) from the Alto Adige town of Bressanone (Brixen).

Born in 1944 at the end of WWII, Messner grew up surrounded by the sharp, crenellated peaks of the Dolomites. Scaling his first alpine summit at the age of five, he quickly took the Alps by storm and, by his early 20s, was recognized as a rising star in the tough world of mountaineering. Derisive of the siege tactics employed by traditional Himalayan expeditions in the 1960s, Messner advocated a simpler alpine-style approach to climbing that emphasised fast ascents with minimal equipment. By the '70s he had set his sights on Everest, confidently announcing his ambition to climb the mountain 'by fair means', without the use of supplementary oxygen.

The prophecy was heroically fulfilled in 1978 when Messner, and Austrian Peter Habeler, became the first men to summit the world's tallest peak without oxygen – a feat that was considered physically impossible, if not suicidal, at the time. Unsatisfied with his team effort, Messner returned two years later, and hacked his way up the mountain's north face to the summit, alone, again without oxygen – a superhuman achievement that many have put on a par with the moon landing.

Messner's position as the Tiger Woods of mountaineering has long intrigued his fellow climbers. Not only is his aerobic capacity relatively average for a man of his age, but he also spent the bulk of his climbing career hampered by the loss of three fingers and seven toes following an ill-fated Himalayan expedition in 1970 (that also tragically claimed the life of his younger brother Günter).

Undaunted by the ageing process, the iron-willed Messner logged another record in 1986 when he became the first person to scale all Eight-thousanders (the 14 mountains in the world over 8000m). Shunning a well-earned retirement, he also partook in the first unassisted crossing of Antarctica.

These days Messner treks at a gentler pace, mainly in the Dolomites. Recently retired as a Euro MP for the Italian Green Party, he tends to his quintet of Messner Mountain Museums, the centrepiece of which is located in Firmian, 6km south of Bolzano (see p331).

Tours

The tourist office organises guided expeditions of a gentle nature around Bolzano from April to early November. A half-/full-day walk costs €8/20 and places must be reserved in advance. For information on more serious hikes in Alto Adige, contact local walking association **Club Alpino Italiano** (☎ 0471 97 81 72; Piazza delle Erbe 46; ☎ 11am-1pm & 5-7pm Tue-Fri) or call the **Alpine Information Office** (Alpenverein Südtirol; ☎ 0471 99 99 55).

Sleeping

Ostello della Gioventù Bolzano (☎ 0471 30 08 65; www.jugendherberge.it; Via Renon 23; all incl breakfast dm €19.50-21.50, s €22-24; ☑) Close to the train station, the three- and four-bed dorms in this new independent hostel are configured so that bunks are set at different angles and they're partly screened by timber lockers for added privacy. And, best of all, there's no daytime lockout here.

Hotel Figl (☎ 0471 97 84 12; www.figl.net; Piazza del Grano 9; s €80-100, d €100-110; ☎ ☑) This is a

well-priced and really stylish hotel with a streamlined ground-floor bar and chic, contemporary rooms with glass-partitioned bathrooms, chocolate, caramel and white tones, and geometric furniture. It's tucked away on a pretty piazza, just footsteps from Piazza Walther. An 'Italian breakfast' (espresso and brioche) costs €3; a hot-and-cold buffet costs €11. Pick up a permit from reception for free street parking, or arrange discounted garaged parking nearby.

our pick Stadt Hotel Città (☎ 0471 97 52 21; www.hotelcitta.info; Piazza Walther 21; s €94-110, d €135-180; ☎ ☎ ☑) Taking price, location, ambience and facilities into account, the Stadt Città is the best hotel in town – no contest. Mixing Italian dynamism with German efficiency, the rooms blend funky with traditional, while the onsite café materialises like a dreamy Viennese apparition. Then there's the basement spa (free to guests), an oasis of Teutonic charm.

Parkhotel Laurin (☎ 0471 31 10 00; www.laurin.it; Via Laurin 4; s €112-172, d €170-240; ☎ ☎ ☑ ☑) Set

in its own lush gardens in the centre of town, the Laurin has been Bolzano's choicest hotel since 1910. Spacious rooms are individually styled, with large marble bathrooms and original artworks. Jazz swings in the piano bar on Friday evening, and the Laurin's restaurant is also one of Bolzano's best – mains cost €23 to €24.

Eating & Drinking

Local specialities include *Speckknödelsuppe* (bacon-dumpling soup), complemented with a red St Magdalener or Lagrein wine.

For nightlife, follow the locals heading for Piazza delle Erbe.

our pick **Fischbänke Pic-Nic Bar** (☎ 0471 97 17 14;

Via Dott Streiter 26a; dishes €5-10; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) A sign next to the speakers that reads 'This is not McDonald's' says it all. Run by artist-host-*bon vivant* Cobo on the site of the old fish market, the Fischbänke has the market's original white-marble tables that you can pull up a stool at for a glass of Tyrolean wine, and quite possibly northern Italy's most beautiful bruschetta, while Cobo shows you his artwork, which includes a series of charismatic cartoon birds. Hours can vary if Cobo feels like shutting up early or (more likely) staying open late.

Hopfen & Co (☎ 0471 30 07 88; Piazza delle Erbe 17; meals €15-20; ☎ 9.30am-1am Mon-Sat) Step back into the Habsburg era at this venerable 800-year-old inn that serves up hearty portions of traditional dishes, including sauerkraut and sausages cooked in beer. The bar is a dark wood-panelled affair, fine for sampling the cloudy, unfiltered beer that's brewed on the premises in a couple of gleaming copper vats.

Vögele (☎ 0471 97 39 38; Via Goethe 3; meals €19-24; ☎ 9am-1am) Dating back to 1277 and owned by the same family since 1840, this antiques-filled pub and restaurant serves hearty Tyrolean fare, such as schnitzels, in candlelight surroundings; otherwise you can just come by for a drink.

Restaurant Walthers' (☎ 0471 32 40 22; Piazza Walther 6; meals €20-25; ☎ 8am-1am Mon-Sat, to 7pm Sun; ☎) Take a seat on the terrace spilling onto Bolzano's main square, or head into the cool, dark interior to dine on Asian- and Mediterranean-influenced dishes such as wok-fried tagliatelle with prawns, grilled tuna with vegetables, sesame seeds and wasabi, or spit-roasted veal. Don't miss Walthers' espresso

mousse, served in a classic espresso cup and topped with fresh cream and coffee beans.

our pick **Stadt Caffè Città** (☎ 0471 97 52 51; Piazza Walther 21; snacks €7-15; ☎ 8am-1am Mon-Sat, 8am-7pm Sun; ☎) Ah, grand Viennese hospitality transplanted to within spitting distance of the dreamy Dolomites. Where do you start? The glittering *fin-de-siècle* decor, the well-groomed but cheerful waiters, the creamy coffee, the 'free' buffet snacks or – wait for it – the choice of 32 different daily newspapers in over a dozen languages. Now that's service!

Pick up fruit, vegetables, bread, cheese and meats from the morning **market** (Piazza delle Erbe; ☎ Mon-Sat).

Getting There & Around

Bolzano airport (Aeroporto di Bolzano; ☎ 0471 25 52 55; www.abd-airport.it) is served by flights to Rome, Olbia and Cagliari. Cheap airport transfers are available through **Locus Coach** (www.locuscoach.com).

Buses run by **SAD** (www.sad.it) leave from the **bus station** (☎ 840 00 04 71; Via Perathoner) for destinations throughout the province, including Val Gardena (up to 12 daily), Brunico (up to 20 connections daily) and Merano (55 minutes, hourly). SAD buses also head for resorts outside the province, including Cortina d'Ampezzo. Updated timetables are on the SAD website.

Bolzano **train station** (Piazza Stazione) is connected by hourly trains with Merano (€2.40, 40 minutes), Trento (€3.35, 30 minutes) and Verona (€8, 2½ hours), with less frequent connections to Brunico (1½ hours, six daily) in the Val Pusteria.

Bicycles can be picked up at the open-air **bike-rental stall** (☎ 0471 99 75 78; Via della Stazione 2; ☎ 7.30am-8pm Easter-Oct) near the train station. Bikes cost a giveaway €1 for six hours, but must be returned overnight; have money for a deposit and bring some ID. The tourist office also rents bikes for €5 per day (plus deposit). Bolzano is up there with Amsterdam in terms of bike-friendliness and you can exit the city without touching a road on countless willow-lined bike paths.

MERANO

pop 34,300 / elev 323m

Leafy boulevards, exotic palm trees and the sound of birds singing in the town centre – Merano is where Middle Europe meets the Mediterranean over spaghetti, strudel and a

contorno (side dish) of Dante and Nietzsche. Long lauded for its balmy climate, the town evolved into a spa in the 19th century, when wealthy pre-Jane Fonda era health freaks filled the burgeoning suburbs with regal parks and palatial villas, including the grandiose Castel Trauttmansdorff. Positioned in the town centre, the Terme Merano still draws visitors to its modern pool complex overlooking a classic riverside promenade.

Having spent 90% of the last millennium under Viennese influence, Merano is a long way from Sicily and other traditional Italian destinations. German is often more useful than Italian here (although everyone is bilingual) and the locals are usually more at home tucking into beer and sausages than tackling wine and fettuccine.

Orientation & Information

The train and bus stations are a 10-minute stroll from the centre. Exit the train station, turn right into Via Europa and at Piazza Mazzini take Corso Libertà – past the tourist office and several banks with ATMs – to reach the historic centre. Pedestrianised Via dei Portici is the main shopping street.

Ospedale Civile Tappeiner (☎ 0473 26 33 33; Via Rossini 5) For medical emergencies.

Post office (Via Roma 2) On the other side of the Passirio river from the old town.

Tourist office (☎ 0473 23 52 23; www.meraninfo.it; Corso Libertà 35; ☎ 9am–12.30pm & 2–6pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–12.30pm Sat)

Sights

The historic centre of town surrounds arcaded Via dei Portici and Piazza del Duomo – take any of the streets off Corso Libertà near the tourist office (leading away from the river).

Exhibits chronicle 200 years of female fashions at the **Museo della Donna** (☎ 0473 23 12 16; Via dei Portici 68; adult/child €4/3; ☎ 10am–noon & 2–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–12.30pm Sat Jan–Oct, to 6pm Sat–Mon Nov & Dec), with plenty of period costumes and accessories. The small but intriguing **Museo Ebraico** (☎ 0473 23 61 27; Via Schiller 14; admission free; ☎ 3–6pm Tue & Wed, 9am–noon Thu, 3–5pm Fri) is housed in Merano's synagogue, built in 1901, and recounts the history of the town's Jewish population from the early 19th century through to WWII.

Just outside the town of Tirol, **Castel Tirol** (Schlosstirol; ☎ 0473 22 02 21; www.schlosstirol.it; adult/child €6/3; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sun mid-Mar–Oct, to 6pm Aug)

is the new home of the Castel Tirol Museum, which spans the history of the entire Tyrol. In the keep you'll find exhibits interpreting the turbulent history of South Tyrol during the 20th century. Many of the displays are rotated on a regular basis. The castle can be reached by taking the chairlift from Merano to Tirol (opposite); trains and buses also serve the village.

Exotic plants, an aviary and a rainbow of 100,000-odd tulips (in season) surround **Castel Trauttmansdorff** (www.trauttmansdorff.it; Via San Valentino 51a), a mid-19th-century castle where Empress Sissi stayed while taking the waters at Merano. Inside the castle, the **Touriseum** (Tourism Museum; ☎ 0473 27 01 72; www.touriseum.it; garden & museum adult/child €10.20/7.50; ☎ 9am–6pm mid-Mar–Apr & Oct–mid-Nov, to 9pm May–Sep) charts the last two centuries of Alpine tourism, from Baedeker-wielding aristocrats to woolly-hatted snowboarding junkies. A garden-set restaurant and a cafe by the waterlily pond both offer a chance to soak up the lush surrounds.

Beer lovers should book in for a tour of the **Forst Brewery** (☎ 0473 26 01 11; Forst), just outside Merano. The tourist office has details; tours are by advance reservation only.

Activities

For centuries **Terme Merano** (Therme Meran; ☎ 0473 25 20 00; www.kurbadmeran.it; Piazza Terme 1; swimming pools per 2hr adult/child €10.50/7, all day €15/10; ☎ 9am–10pm) has been Merano's main draw. The spa was recently renovated and now revolves around a futuristic glass cube. There's a staggering 13 indoor and 12 outdoor pools (including a sea-water pool with underwater music), though only a couple of them use the town's actual thermal waters. The range of treatments on offer is equally lengthy, with everything from a South Tyrolean sheep's-wool bath (€29, 20 minutes) to multiday detox packages. The spa complex is also home to a restaurant and a four-star hotel. Though it has a staff of 100, treatment bookings need to be made at least one month in advance.

Some 6km east of town, the **Funivia Val di Nova** (adult half-/full-day ski pass €16/25; ☎ 9am–noon & 1.15–5pm) cable car, operated by **Funivie Monte Ivigna** (☎ 0473 23 48 21; www.merano2000.com, in Italian; Via Val di Nova 37), carries winter-sports enthusiasts up to Piffling in **Merano 2000**, a small ski station at 2000m, with 30km of slopes served by five chairlifts, a gondola and a couple of drag lifts. Skiing on the mountain is limited

and is best suited to beginners. Bus 1B links Merano train station with the Val di Nova cable car.

The tourist office runs guided walks between July and September, and distributes a free map, marked up with various parks and walks, including the popular *Passeggiata Tappeiner*, which kicks off on Via Laurin and meanders for 4km around Monte Benedetto (514m) before dropping down to the banks of the Passirio. The **chairlift** (☎ 0473 92 31 05; Via Laurin; ☎ 9am-6pm Sep-Jun, to 7pm Jul & Aug), next to the start of the footpath, links Merano with the village of **Tirolo**, from where a **cable car** (☎ 0473 92 34 80) carries on up the mountain to **Muta**. Another itinerary, the *Passeggiata Gilf*, makes for a pleasant riverside stroll – a different poem is carved on each of the 24 wooden benches lining the footpath.

Sleeping & Eating

Ostello della Gioventù Merano (☎ 0473 20 71 54; www.jugendherberge.it; Via Carducci 77; dm €19.50, s €22; (P) (Q)) An easy stroll from the train station and less than a block from the riverside promenade, this spotless independent hostel has a pool table, table football (for rainy days), a laundry, as well as 59 beds in ensuite dorms sleeping a maximum of four.

Hotel Graf von Meran (☎ 0473 23 21 81; www.tedimerano.com; Via delle Corse 78; s €48-60, d €76-100; (P)) Near Merano's elegant shopping strip Via dei Portici, rooms at this choice hotel are done out in elegant yet sparing decor. Half-/full-board at the timber-panelled restaurant costs an extra €11/18 per person.

Vigilius Mountain Resort (☎ 0473 55 66 00; www.vigilius.it; Lana; s €225-235, d €310-345; (P) (Q)) Sick of driving? Dump the car in Vigilius' private garage in the valley and take a seven-minute cable-car ride – the only way to reach this eco-spa resort above Merano. Built from natural materials (clay walls, slatted timber), this mountain haven has spa treatments that will distress the weariest traveller, including pinecone reflexology, polenta peels, a glassed-in Jacuzzi overlooking the peaks, and two restaurants (one traditional, one gourmet). Prices include cable-car tickets and activities such as yoga and Nordic walking.

Café König (☎ 0473 23 71 62; Corso della Libertà 168) Merano's best *pasticceria* (pastry shop) is an old-fashioned local gathering spot, with a tempting takeaway counter up front, and comfy tables down the back. Great for an es-

presso and slice of strudel or something more filling. Snacks cost from €3.50.

Vinoteca Pizzeria Relax (☎ 0473 23 67 35; Via Cavour 31; pizzas around €7-9; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 6pm-12.30am) This bottle-lined bar-restaurant is a great place to try a glass or two of Alto Adige's fine wines, as well as steaming hot pizzas.

our pick Forsterbräu (☎ 0473 23 65 35; Corso della Libertà 90; meals around €20; ☎ Wed-Mon) Set around an atmospheric courtyard, this typically Tyrolean restaurant cooks up a lovely *Gulaschsuppe* (goulash soup) and a choice of fresh trout dishes. The place is actually part of the Forst brewery concern, making a pint of Forst beer a must.

Getting There & Around

SAD buses connect Merano **bus station** (Piazza Stazione) with Monte Santa Caterina and other villages that give access to the Gruppo del Tessa, as well as to Silandro and the valleys leading into the Parco Nazionale dello Stelvio and the Ortles range.

The train ride to Bolzano (€2.40, almost hourly) is an easy 40-minute journey from Merano **train station** (Piazza Stazione). At **Bici Val Venosta** (☎ 0473 20 15 00; ☎ 8am-8pm Apr-Nov), next door to the station, you can buy an **Event Card** (adult/child €16/8) allowing a day's bike hire (plus helmet) along with unlimited train travel between Bolzano–Merano–Malles. Bike trails track the whole 65km route.

PARCO NAZIONALE DELLO STELVIO

It's not quite Yellowstone, but 1346 sq km **Parco Nazionale dello Stelvio** (☎ 0469 0 30 46; www.parks.it/parco.nazionale.stelvio) is northern Italy's (and the Alps') largest national park, spilling into the next-door region of Lombardy and bordering with the Parco Nazionale Svizzero in neighbouring Switzerland.

The park is primarily the preserve of walkers who come here to enjoy the extensive network of well-organised *rifugi* and marked trails which, while often challenging, don't require the mountaineering know-how necessary elsewhere in the Dolomites. Stelvio's central massif is guarded over by Monte Cevedale (3769m) and Ortles (3905m) protecting glaciers, forests, numerous wild-life species and myriad cultural traditions, both Italian and South Tyrolean. Less than 100 years ago, this majestic land served as the frontline in WWI and remnants of old

defences along with a small museum bear testament to the slaughter.

Although less blemished with ski facilities than other regions, Stelvio has a couple of well-serviced runs at Solda and the **Passo della Stelvio** (2757m), both of which offer the novelty of year-round skiing. The latter is the second-highest pass in the Alps and is approached from the north from the hamlet of Trafoi (1543m) on one of Europe's most spectacular roads, a series of tight switchbacks covering 15km, with some *very* steep gradients. The road is also famous among cyclists, who train all winter to prepare for its gut-wrenching ascent (it has often featured in the *Giro d'Italia*).

Stelvio can be approached from Merano (from where you have easy access to the Val d'Ultimo, Val Martello, Val di Solda and the Passo Stelvio), or from the Val di Sole in Trentino.

Bormio

elev 1125m

Lying immediately south of Passo della Stelvio, the small medieval town of Bormio is technically in Lombardy but acts as an unofficial northern HQ for Stelvio National Park. Its curative springs have been famous since Roman times.

Bormio is an active ski resort thanks to its proximity to some of Italy's highest runs. Cima Bianca rises just above the town, while nearby the emblematic year-round Pista Stelvio drops 1800m over 8km and hosts the annual Downhill World Cup.

The **Bormio tourist office** (☎ 0342 90 33 00; www.bormioonline.com; Via Roma 131b, Bormio; ☎ seasonal, vary) is a good source of park information. Nearby is the **park headquarters** (☎ 0342 91 91 99; Via Roma 26) with maps, weather forecasts and trekking advice.

Aquatic harmony can still be sought at the **Bormio Terme** (☎ 0342 90 13 25; www.bormioterme.it; Via Stelvio 10; admission 1hr €8-11; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon & Wed, to midnight Fri, to 8pm Thu, Sat & Sun, closed May), which offers numerous pools along with scads of spa treatments (inhalations, mud therapies and so on).

For a higher level of hedonism, stay at the **Hotel Bagni Vecchi** (☎ 0342 91 01 31; www.bagnidibormio.it; Via Statale Stelvio; d €208-268; (P) ☎), a luxurious spa complex on the old Roman bathing site, with 30 hot springs, 11 outdoor pools and a host of interesting treatments. The rather steep hotel rates include unlimited

spa access, or you can arrive independently. Leonardo da Vinci took a (much cheaper) dip here in 1493.

Val di Solda

The village of **Solda** (1906m), at the head of the Val di Solda, is a low-key ski resort that acts as a base for walkers and climbers in summer. Challenging trails lead quickly to high altitudes, including trail No 28, which crosses the Passo di Madriccio (3123m) into the Val Martello. Solda's **tourist office** (☎ 0473 61 30 15; Solda; ☎ seasonal, vary) has information on summer and winter activities.

Located – quite literally – inside a hill, the unique **Messner Mountain Museum – Ortles** (☎ 0473 61 32 66; adult/child €5/3; ☎ 2-6pm Wed-Mon, closed May & Nov) articulates the theme of 'ice' with artistically displayed exhibits on glaciers, ice-climbing and pole expeditions. Nearby stands the **Yak & Yeti** (Località Solda 55), a 17th-century farmhouse that Messner has transformed into a restaurant.

For reasonably priced and easily accessible digs try the family-run **Hotel Post** (☎ 0473 61 30 24; Via Principale 24; d from €80; (P) ☎ ☎), an extension of a 100-year-old inn amplified to include a full quota of 'wellness' facilities.

SAD buses connect Solda with Merano Monday to Friday during the summer only; you need to change at Spondigna.

Val Martello

Every Alto Adige valley has its speciality. In Martello it's strawberries; there's even an annual **Strawberry Festival** held here each June, inaugurated with a giant cake.

Martello is a convenient gateway to Stelvio National Park, with gentle rambles and more hard-core hiking adventures available. Trail No 20 up into the Val di Peder is an easy walk, with some lovely picnic spots along the way; look out for chamois and deer. Alternatively you can cobble together a three-day hike over to Val di Rabbia (and through the German/Italian language divide) heading out on trail No 4/No 142 towards Lago Fontana Bianca and ultimately Paso di Rabbi. Overnight accommodation is available in the Canziani and Stella Alpine *rifugi*.

Unspoiled by ski lifts and downhill ski runs, Martello specialises instead in cross-country skiing in the winter. Climbers can attempt the valley's frozen waterfalls from January to March.

The self-styled 'berry-accommodation' is **Hotel Bergfrieden** (☎ 0473 74 45 16; Meiern 84, Martell; d €70-90; P ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎).

The road into the valley is open year-round, and SAD bus 107 runs to Martello village from Silandro.

VAL GARDENA

Despite its proximity to Bolzano, Val Gardena's historical isolation amid the castlelike turrets of Gruppo del Sella and Sassolungo has left it harbouring many staunch pre-tourist era traditions. This is one of only five valleys in the Dolomites where Ladin is a majority tongue. The cultural idiosyncrasies also extend to its world-famous woodcarvers. Scour the shops of Ortisei or Santa Cristina and you'll find plenty of deftly sculpted wooden toys – an archetypal Gardena souvenir. In more recent times, the valley has become an 'everyman' ski area, less preoccupied with celebrity-spotting and more concerned with classic runs and fine powder.

The valley's main trilingual towns, **Ortisei** (population 5700; elevation 1236m), **Santa Cristina** (population 1840; elevation 1428m) and **Selva** (population 2580; elevation 1563m), all have good facilities.

Information

The valley is covered by www.valgardena.it.

Ortisei tourist office (☎ 0471 77 76 00; Via Rezia 1; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am or 10am-noon & 5-6.30pm Sun)

Santa Cristina tourist office (☎ 0471 77 78 00; Via Chemun 9; ☎ 8am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am or 9.30am-noon Sun)

Selva tourist office (☎ 0471 77 79 00; Via Mëisules 213; ☎ 8am-noon & 3-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am or 9am-noon & 4.30pm or 5-6.30pm Sun)

Tourist medical service Ortisei (☎ 0471 79 77 85; Selva (☎ 0471 79 42 66)

Activities

In addition to its own fine downhill ski runs, the valley forms part of the Sella Ronda (p329), for which you will need a Dolomiti Superski pass. Ski passes covering the Val Gardena and Alpe di Siusi are marginally cheaper – €36/102/180 for one/three/six days (high season €40/113/198).

Vallunga, near Selva, is one of the best spots for cross-country skiing. There are stunning trails around Forcella Pordoi and Val Latties in the Gruppo del Sella, and on the Sassolungo.

This is also a walkers' paradise with endless possibilities, from the challenging Alte Vie of the Gruppo del Sella and the magnificent Parco Naturale Puez-Odle, to picturesque strolls for walkers of all abilities in spots such as the Vallunga. Those seeking guidance can contact the nearest office of the **Scuola di Alpinismo Catores** (☎ 0471 79 82 23; www.catores.com; Piazza Stettenect 1, Ortisei; ☎ 5.30-7pm) or the **cultural centre** (☎ 0471 78 41 33; Selva; ☎ 5.30-7pm). Both Alpine guide schools can organise botanical walks, as well as climbing courses, glacier excursions and treks.

In summer cable cars carry walkers into the mountains from all three towns in the valley. From Ortisei you can ride a cable car to Seceda which, at 2518m, offers an unforgettable view of the Gruppo di Odle, a cathedral-like series of mountain spires. From Seceda, trail No 2A passes through a typical Alpine environment – impossibly green, sloping pastures dotted with wooden *malghe* (Alpine huts) used by herders as summer shelters.

Sleeping & Eating

Tourist offices have full lists of sleeping and eating options in the valley; Ortisei in particular has plenty for anyone seeking a bit of luxury.

Hotel Am Stetteneck (☎ 0471 79 65 63; www.stetteneck.com; Via Rezia 14, Ortisei; d from €78; P ☎ ☎ ☎) A short walk from both cable cars, this historic hotel dates from 1913. During WWI Italian troops were bivouacked here and in WWII it served as a military hospital. These days it presents a more benign face with cheery rooms, big bay windows and a Tyrol-meets-Mediterranean restaurant.

Hotel Posta Al Cervo (☎ 0471 79 51 74; www.hotelpostaalcervo.com; Via Meisules 116, Selva; d half-board €80-100; P ☎ ☎) Right in Selva's village centre, the Posta al Cervo is a friendly and reasonably priced little place with cosy, woody rooms and a fine restaurant serving Ladin and Italian cuisine. Full board costs an extra €11 per person.

Charme Hotel Uridl (☎ 0471 79 32 15; www.uridl.it; Via Chemun 43, Santa Cristina; d half-board €98-190; P) This Santa Cristina hotel looks an absolute picture on chilly nights when it's covered with snow and its lights are glowing inside. A free ski bus from the hotel drops you at the slopes, and in summer there's a sun-drenched garden to loll about in. Dinner at the sweet little restaurant is served by candlelight.

Ristorante Concordia (☎ 0471 79 62 76; Via Roma 41, Ortisei; meals €20-24) You're sure of getting the real deal here: all the pasta served in Concordia's wood-panelled dining room is made by hand, as are the breads, including olive, vegetable and nut varieties; the ham, too, is smoked on the premises and the wines come from the surrounding vineyards.

Getting There & Around

The Val Gardena is accessible from Bolzano and Bressanone by SAD buses year-round, and the neighbouring valleys in summer. In summer the hop-on, hop-off Sella Ronda bus, travelling around the circuit, costs €10/5 per adult/child; the Val Gardena card gets you a week's unlimited transport for €64. Regular buses connect the towns along the valley and you can reach the Alpe di Siusi by either bus or cable car. Full timetables are available at the tourist offices.

In winter the Val Gardena Ski Express shuttle bus service links the various villages and lifts in the valley; a €5 ticket covers a week's unlimited travel.

ALPE DI SIUSI & PARCO NATURALE SCILIAR-CATINACCIO

In mainland Europe, there are few more jarring or beautiful juxtapositions than the undulating green pastures of the Alpe di Siusi – the continent's largest plateau – ending dramatically at the base of the towering Sciliar Mountains. To the southeast lies the more jagged Catinaccio range, best described by its German name 'Rosengarten' for the eerie pink hue given off by the mountain's dolomite rock at sunset. The two areas are protected in the **Parco Naturale Sciliar-Catinaccio**, established in 1974. Other quirks include the region's distinctive onion-domed churches and curative hay baths (see the boxed text, p340).

Village tourist offices (☎ 8am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Compaccio (☎ 0471 72 79 04); Castelrotto (☎ 0471 70 63 33; Piazza Kraus 1); Fiè allo Sciliar (☎ 0471 72 50 27; Via Bolzano 4); Siusi (☎ 0471 70 70 24; Via Sciliar 16) have reams of information on winter activities such as downhill skiing, ski-mountaineering, cross-country skiing and walking trails (with snowshoes) in the area, which is part of the Dolomiti Superski network.

Hiking is a joy here, and you don't need to be a mountaineer to reach great heights. The gentle slopes of the Alpe di Siusi are perfect for families with kids, and average

stamina will get you to the **Rifugio Bolzano** (☎ 0471 61 20 24; dm/d €18/30), one of the Alps' oldest mountain huts, which rests at 2457m, just under Monte Pez (2564m), the Sciliar's summit. Take the Panorama **chairlift** (one-way/return €3.50/5) from Compaccio to the Alpenhotel, followed by paths S, No 5 and No 1 to the *rifugio*; from here it's an easy walk to Monte Pez (three hours total). The more jagged peaks of the Catinaccio group and the Sassolungo are nearby. These mountains are revered among climbers worldwide, and harbour several *vie ferrate* (see p341) and loads of good trails for mountain bikers. They're usually accessed from Vigo in Val di Fiemme.

The Alpe di Siusi is accessible by SAD bus from Bolzano, the Val Gardena and Bressanone. By car, exit the Brenner motorway (A22) at Bolzano Nord or Chiusa. The world's longest **aerial cableway** (www.seiseralmbahn.it; one-way/return €9/12; ☎ 8am-7pm mid-Dec-Mar & mid-May-Oct) is a dizzying 15-minute, 4300m trip (800m ascent) from Siusi to Compaccio. The road linking the two is closed to normal traffic when the cableway is open; visitors with a hotel booking in the zone can obtain a permit from Compaccio's tourist office, allowing them to drive between 4pm and 10am. Organise your pass before arriving in the area. Regular buses operated by **Silbernagl** (☎ 0471 70 74 00; www.silbernagl.it) serve the area from Castelrotto and Siusi.

Hotel Alla Torre/Gasthof Zum Turm (☎ 0471 70 63 49; www.zumturm.com; Kofelgasse 8, Castelrotto; s/d €42/88; ☎) has two names, hinting at a split personality, but this place, within bell-ringing distance of Castelrotto's onion-domed church, is anything but schizophrenic. With its neat rooms, apple strudel-friendly garden café and eclectic Tyrolean artefacts, your biggest dilemma will probably be choosing which superlatives to write in the guestbook when you leave.

ourpick Hotel Heubad (Hotel Hay Bath; ☎ 0471 72 50 20; www.hotelheubad.com, in Italian; Via Sciliar 12, Fiè allo Sciliar; d half-board €122-190; ☎ closed Nov; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) is the area's most charming spot to sleep. Beautifully renovated, the hotel is a haven for Tyrolean hay baths (see the boxed text, p340). Spacious rooms blending light timber and splashes of bright colour open out onto balconies with views of the Alpe di Siusi. The carved-timber restaurant serves mountains of traditional Tyrolean fare.

THE LADIN TRADITION

At one point the entire Tyrol was Ladin but today five remote valleys – Val Gardena and Val Badia in Alto Adige, Val di Fassa in Trentino, and the Arabba and Ampezzo areas near Cortina in the Veneto – safeguard ancient Ladin traditions.

Ladin language and culture can be traced back to around 15 BC, when the people of the Central Alps were forcibly united into the Roman province of Rhaetia. The original inhabitants modified the Romans' Latin language to such an extent that by the 5th century it had evolved into an independent Romance language, known as Rhaeto-Romanic.

Ironically, it's partly because of the split between Italian and German in the region that Ladin has endured, with a total of 20,000 first-language speakers today, of which 9000 live in the Val Gardena. It is not only older folk who speak it: alongside German and Italian, 50% of the local schooling is in Ladin, and the survival of the Ladin cultural and linguistic identity is protected by law. According to one Val Gardena local in her 20s, to be Ladin is 'a way of feeling. I've grown up speaking the language; I don't feel Italian, or South Tyrolean, I feel Ladin.'

Ladin, which has completely different dialects across its five strongholds, remains a small but thriving language. Contemporary media includes the newspaper **La Usc di Ladins** (The Voice; www.lauscdiladins.com, in Ladin & Italian), a five-minute daily TV news bulletin on national broadcaster **RAI** in Ladin (alternating between the different dialects each day), and the radio station **Radio Gherdëina** (94.2 FM), which is broadcast from the Val Gardena, and is great to tune into while you're here (and plays better music than your average Italian radio station, too).

The following are some excellent places to discover the culture's vibrant poetry and legends; peopled by fairies, elves, giants and heroes:

Istitut Cultural Ladin (☎ 0462 76 42 67; www.istladin.net; Via della Chiesa 6, Vigo di Fassa, Val di Fassa) Extensive library and film archive; also runs Ladin-language courses.

Museo Ladin di Fasia (☎ 0462 76 01 82; museo.istladin.net; Via Milano 5, Pozza di Fassa, Val di Fassa; admission free; ☎ 10am-noon & 3-7pm Jul & Aug, 3-7pm Tue-Sat Sep-Jun)

Museo Ladin (Ortisei) (☎ 0471 79 75 54; Piazza San Antonio, Ortisei, Val Gardena; admission free; ☎ 10am-noon & 3-7pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug, 3-6.30pm Tue-Fri Jun, Sep & Oct, 3-6.30pm Tue & Fri Nov-Apr) Ask here or at the tourist office for information on woodcarving courses during July and August.

Museo Ladin (San Martino) (☎ 0474 52 40 20; www.museumladin.it; Via Tor 72, San Martino, Val Badia; adult/child €6/4.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat, 2-6pm Sun mid-Mar–Oct, 2-6pm Wed-Fri end Dec–mid-Mar) Atmospherically set in a castle 15km south of Brunico.

VAL BADIA & ALPE DI FANES

British writer JRR Tolkien was so overawed by Val Badia and the Alpe di Fanes that he is said to have used them for inspiration in *Lord of the Rings*. He wasn't the first or only mystic. For centuries potent Ladin legends have resonated across this lush and magical land, which since 1980 has been protected by the **Parco Naturale di Fanes-Sennes-Braies**. Not surprisingly, the valley and the adjoining high plains of Fanes are often touted as one of the most evocative places in the Dolomites. You can access the latter either on foot or by cable car from Passo Falzarego.

Villages in the valley – Colfosco (1645m), Pedraces (1324m), La Villa (1433m), San Cassiano (1537m) and Corvara (1568m) – together form the Alta Badia ski area, which is part of the Dolomiti Superski domain. Of the Alta Badia's 130km of slopes, it

is the Gran Risa ski slope, 4.5km north of Corvara in La Villa, that is undoubtedly the most legendary.

Information

All villages have tourist offices; the largest are in Corvara and La Villa. The closest public hospital is in Brunico.

Associazione Guide Alpine Val Badia (☎ 0471 83 68 98; guide.valbadia@rolmail.net; Via Burje, Corvara) Advice on skiing, heli-skiing, ice climbing and advanced walking trails. Phone lines are only staffed between 6pm and 7pm.

Corvara tourist office (☎ 0471 83 61 76; www.alta-badia.org; Via Colt Alt 36; ☎ 8am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 3-6pm Sat, 10.30am-12.30pm Sun) A good source of information.

Helicopter mountain rescue (☎ 0471 79 71 71)

La Villa tourist office (☎ 0471 84 70 37; www.alta-badia.org; Via Colz 75; ☎ 8am-noon & 3-7pm Mon-Sat,

TO HEAVEN IN A HAY BATH

The diametric opposite of going to hell in a handcart is surely a soak in the hay.

Hay baths originate from farmers taking a quick, refreshing snooze on their freshly cut hay. The mountain meadows of the Alpe di Siusi's lower slopes – with their aromatic cocktail of grasses, plants and medicinal herbs, such as lavender and thyme – have the best grass. It's cut when damp and left to ferment for several days.

When it's bath time, you strip off your gear (yep, all of it), then lie directly on a mattress strewn with warm, wet hay, which is suspended over a bathtub. More wet hay is massed on top of you, covering everything but your face. The mattress is then lowered into the tub, and as you lie cocooned in the hay, it heats up until you're sweating profusely. Just when you think that you'd rather be out of it (around 15 minutes or so), the mattress is lifted up out of the bath and you're given a towel to wipe off the hay. Then you lie down on a regular bed and are wrapped Egyptian mummy-like in blankets. And even though you're no longer in contact with the warm hay, your body heats up a second time, and you find yourself sweating all over again. Despite residual hay invariably still sticking to your skin, it's best not to take a shower for several hours to let the herbs work their magic. Taking a hay bath (or ideally, a program of seven) is said to cure all sorts of ailments, but sheer relaxation is reason enough: afterwards, the sensation is almost like floating.

You'll find hay baths in many of the province's spas, but you can't do better – for price or atmosphere – than its first-ever hay-bathing station, **Hotel Heubad** (p338). Opened in 1903, today the hotel is run by its founder's great- and great-great-grandchildren. Even if you're not staying here, you can drop by the hotel for a heavenly hay bath (€30, around 45 minutes all up), provided you book in advance.

10am-noon & 4-6pm Sun Dec-Mar & mid-Jun-mid-Sep)
Has reduced hours outside these months.

Activities

The Alta Badia is located on the Sella Ronda (p329), with the best access from Corvara, and forms part of the Dolomiti Superski network (see p314). A cheaper pass for Alta Badia slopes costs €36/104/160 for one/three/five days; passes are sold at the **ski pass office** (☎ 0471 83 63 66; Via Col Alt 88c). Ski schools are listed online at www.altabadiaski.com.

From the Passo Falzarego (2105m), 20km east of Corvara, a **cable car** ascends into the Parco Naturale di Fanes-Sennes-Braies. Alternatively, pick up trail No 12 from near La Villa or trail No 11, which joins Alta Via No 1 at the Capanna Alpina, a few kilometres off the main road between Passo Valparola and San Cassiano. Either trail takes you up to the Alpe di Fanes and the two *rifugi*, Lavarella and Fanes.

A combination of cable car and chairlift will take you from Corvara up the Gruppo del Sella at Vallon (2550m), where you'll get a spectacular view across to the Marmolada glacier.

Horseback riding, mountain biking and hang-gliding are other popular valley activities. Tandem flights with paragliding school

Centro Volo Libero Alta Badia (☎ 0471 84 75 92; www.cvl-altabadia.com, in Italian; Via Bosc da Plan 46, La Villa) start at €65. Tourist offices have a list of places where you can hire mountain bikes; hotels often have bikes for guests.

Sleeping & Eating

Most hotels and restaurants open from early December to early April and mid-June to early October. Tourist offices have more information.

Hotel La Villa (☎ 0471 84 70 35; www.hotel-lavilla.it; Boscdaplan 176, La Villa; d €70-130, half-board d €86-152; (P) (A) (S)) Fully renovated in 2006, La Villa (in the village of La Villa) sports larch-wood furniture and a cosy Ladin ambience. There's a wellness centre, kids playroom and onsite restaurant serving traditional Ladin cuisine. Altogether a good bang for your buck.

Posta Zirm Hotel (☎ 0471 83 61 75; www.postazirm.com; Via Col Alt 95, Corvara; s half-board €99-145, d half-board €178-270; (P) (A) (S)) Dating back to 1808, this landmark hotel is situated at the top of the street next to Corvara's Sport Kostner shopping complex. The restaurant is highly regarded, and the tavern has the best après-ski scene in town.

St Hubertus (☎ 0471 84 95 00; www.rosalpina.it; Strada Micura de Ru 20, San Cassiano; set menus from €80, mains

€27-35; 🍷 dinner Wed-Mon) Set in the superluxurious Rosa Alpina Hotel & Spa (don't even look at the rates here unless you're planning on re-mortgaging your house), the two-Michelin-star St Hubertus offers the kind of 'event' meal that you've been scrimping your whole trip to afford. If you're going to invest your under-the-bed savings in one romantic blow-out, this could be the place. Try the local beef wrapped in mountain hay.

Getting There & Away

Hourly **SAD buses** (☎ 800 846047; www.sad.it) link Alta Badia's villages with Bolzano (2½ hours) and Brunico (1¼ hours) in winter and summer, with fewer in spring and autumn. Less-frequent services link Corvara with the Val Gardena, Passo Sella and Passo Pordoi, Canazei and the Passo Falzarego. Buses re-route in winter to avoid crossing high mountain passes.

VAL PUSTERIA

The narrow, verdant Val Pusteria – also known as the 'green valley' – appears more pastoral and less crowded than its southern counterparts. Running from Bressanone

(Brixen) east to San Candido (Innichen), the region is profoundly German-speaking and some of the dual German-Italian town names don't sound remotely alike. The area's *pièce de résistance* is the ethereal **Parco Naturale delle Dolomiti di Sesto**, harbourer of some of the most famous Dolomite peaks – among them the much-photographed Tre Cime di Lavaredo.

The valley's main centre, **Brunico** (Bruneck in German; population 13,700; elevation 835m), is a busy if unremarkable market town linked by cable car to the **Plan de Corones** ski area 4km to the south. Ample green and blue runs make this nexus ideal for beginners. The Dolomiti Superski pass can be used here, and gear can be hired in Brunico and Plan de Corones. Brunico's **tourist office** (☎ 0474 55 57 22; www.brunico.com; Piazza Municipio 7; 🕒 9am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) is the main point of contact for the region, and has detailed information on sleeping and eating options in the town and its surrounding villages and countryside. In the town centre, try **Hotel Blitzburg** (☎ 0474 55 57 23; www.blitzburg.it; Via Europa 10; d half-board €90-148; 🍷), an atmospheric old place offering big, bright rooms and a sauna.

WIE FERRATE – THE IRON WAYS

During WWI, while the British and French were drowning in the mud of Flanders, their Italian allies were engaged in an equally terrifying conflict against their Austrian foes along a battlefield that cut across the Dolomites from Passo di Monte Croce in the east to Marmolada in the west. But, hidden in the swirling mountain mist, two far more foreboding enemies awaited: the freezing winter weather and the precipitous terrain.

The scars of this brutal and lengthy WWI campaign are still evident in the Dolomites today, etched indelibly over a mountain landscape littered with ingeniously sculpted tunnels, trenches and emplacements. But it is the high-altitude trails that have left the most lasting legacy.

In order to maximise ease of movement in the rugged peaks, the two armies attached ropes and ladders across seemingly impregnable crags in a series of fixed-protection climbing paths known as *vie ferrate* (iron ways). Renovated with steel rungs, bridges and heavy-duty wires after the war, *vie ferrate* evolved into a cross between standard hiking and full-blown rock-climbing that allowed nonmountaineers access to areas otherwise out of bounds.

To tackle one of these exhilarating trails you'll first need to don basic climbing equipment (helmet, pads and gloves) and carry a special Y-shaped harness fitted with two karabiners (coupling link with safety closure). Due to technical difficulties and high levels of exposure on many *vie ferrate*, hikers must first lock themselves onto the metal supports with the karabiners in order to arrest potential falls and assure high standards of safety.

Vie ferrate exist all over the Dolomites and you don't have to be a Himalayan Sherpa to enjoy them (routes are graded 1 to 5 according to difficulty). Madonna di Campiglio and Cortina d'Ampezzo are the gateways to some of the more spectacular routes. Aside from offering a vertigo-inducing adrenaline rush, the trails also have an important historical value and remain closely associated to their WWI origins. Visit the large open-air museums at Lagazuoi and Cinque Torri (in Veneto and on the Alta Via 1) that showcase various tunnels, emplacements and the restored forts.

Easy to reach from the Val Pusteria, Lago di Braies is a peaceful spot for a lakeside stroll. More serious walkers might like to tackle part of the Alta Via No 1, which starts here. Parco Naturale di Fanes-Sennes-Braies is more easily approached from the Val Badia or from Passo Falzarego.

THE SESTO DOLOMITES

At the other end of the valley, towards Austria, are the Sesto Dolomites, where there are some spectacular trails. The Valle Campo di Dentro, near San Candido, and the Val Fiscalina, near Sesto, are both crisscrossed with walking and cross-country skiing trails. From the Val Fiscalina it's a long but easy walk along trail No 102 to Rifugio Locatelli (2405m), from where you will be able to get a great view of the Tre Cime di Lavaredo.

Most trails around the Tre Cime are easy enough for inexperienced walkers and families, although they get very crowded in July and August with walkers on the tourist trail. Rafting and mountain biking are on tap in the warmer months.

Getting There & Away

SAD buses travel to Brunico (45 minutes, hourly) and Cortina (one hour, four daily) from San Candido. From Bolzano, there are buses to and from Merano, Val Badia, San Vigilio di Marebbe and Val Gardena (on the Innsbruck bus). From either town sporadic buses and trains go to Dobbiaco, from where buses run to Lago di Braies.

The Val Pusteria is reached by train from Bolzano with a change at Fortezza (40 minutes from Fortezza).

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