

# Trentino-Alto Adige

## Part One

By JIM SANO



**T**rentino-Alto Adige is a unique region where Italy, Austria, and Switzerland collide and the outcome is tremendous. Trentino-Alto Adige, the northernmost Italian region, is an autonomous region of Italy dominated by the jagged and legendary Dolomites which offer breathtaking vistas all year round.

The double name is a literal combination of two distinct regions: Trentino in the south which connects heavily with its Italian roots and Alto Adige in the north with more Germanic roots. It is situated in the very north of Italy bordering Austria and Switzerland.

This setting encloses an extraordinary variety of landscapes: magnificent snow-capped mountaintops, woods, wide valleys, streams, lakes, the enchanting play of light between the spires of the Dolomites, typical villages with soaring bell towers and the myriad shades of unadulterated nature.

Hundreds of miles of ski slopes make this region a cutting-edge tourist destination popular in both winter and summer for its natural surroundings, sport activities and fun. A land of confluence between Latin and Nordic worlds, Trentino-Alto Adige is the guardian of a remarkable cultural heritage made up of prehistoric evidence, charming castles, sanctuaries and towns with great historical and artistic significance.

The region is bordered by Austria to the northeast and north respectively, by Switzerland to the northwest and by the Italian regions of Lombardy to the west and Veneto to the south and south-east. It covers 5,254 sq. miles which ranks it as the 11th largest out of the 20 regions.



**Snow dolomites in the Alps**

Trentino-Alto Adige is one of the least densely populated Italian regions as it hosts around 1,050,000 inhabitants well below the national average, ranking it 16th out of the 20. There are significant differences between the density of inhabitants in the high mountain areas where depopulation and migration to the cities of the main valleys have occurred and that of the main valleys where Trento and Bolzano are located.



Trentino-Alto Adige became part of Italy in the Treaty of Saint-Germain at the end of World War I. The region is today among the wealthiest and most developed in both Italy and the whole of Europe.

Trentino-Alto Adige is mostly mountainous and covered by vast forests. The climate varies throughout the region from an alpine climate to a subcontinental one with warm and variable summers and cold and quite snowy winters. The region has always been a favorite destination for tourists both in winter for skiing in the high mountains and in summer for its many lakes.

The South Tyrol area is completely mountainous with vast forests. The climate is of the continental type influenced by the many mountain ranges which stand at well over 9,800 feet above sea level and the wide valleys through which flow the main river, the Adige, from north to south along with its numerous tributaries. In the city of Bolzano, capital of the province, the average air temperature is 54.0 °F.

## A Brief History

The region was conquered by the Romans in 15 BC. After the end of the Western Roman Empire, it was divided between the invading Germanic tribes in the Lombard Duchy of Tridentum (today's Trentino), the Alamannic Vinschgau and the Bavarians who took the remaining part. After the creation of the Kingdom of Italy under Charlemagne, the Marquisate of Verona included the areas south of Bolzano while the Duchy of Bavaria received the remaining part.

From the 11th century, part of the region was governed by the prince-bishops of Trent and Brixen. They were overruled by the Counts of Tyrol and Counts of Görz, who also controlled the Puster Valley. In 1363, the Countess of Tyrol ceded the region to the House of Habsburg. The regions north of Salorno were largely Germanized in the early Middle Ages. Bavaria won the area after receiving it from their alliance with France. A popular uprising over Bavarian rule yielded the southern part of Tyrol, Trentino and the city of Bolzano, to the Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy. During French control of the region, it was officially called Haut Adige (literally "High Adige", Italian: "Alto Adige"; German: "Hochetsch") in order to avoid any reference to the historical County of Tyrol. After Napoleon's defeat in 1815, the region returned to Austria.

During the First World War, major battles were fought high in the Alps and Dolomites between Austro-Hungarian Kaiserjäger and Italian Alpini, for whom control of the region was a key strategic objective. The Alpini Division's tactics were studied and used by the US Army's **10th Light Division (Alpine)** in 1943. The division, redesignated as the 10th Mountain Division, fought in 1944 during World War II in some of the roughest mountain terrain in Italy. This division's home is Ft. Drum (Watertown, NY).



Italian Alpine troops at work on Monte Nero, 1916

# Trentino-Alto Adige

The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian war effort enabled Italian troops to occupy the region in 1918 and its annexation was confirmed in the post-war treaties which awarded the region to Italy under the terms of the Treaty of Saint-Germain.

Under the dictatorship of Benito Mussolini, the Fascist dictator who ruled Italy from 1922–1943, the German population was subjected to an increased forced program of Italianization: all references to old Tyrol were banned and the region was referred to as Venezia Tridentina between 1919 and 1947.

Hitler and Mussolini agreed in 1938 that the German-speaking population would be transferred to German-ruled territory or dispersed around Italy but the outbreak of the Second World War prevented them from fully carrying out the relocation. Nevertheless, thousands of people were relocated to the Third Reich and, only with great difficulties, managed to return to their ancestral land after the end of the war.

In 1943 when the Italian government signed an armistice with the Allies, the region was occupied by Germany until the end of the war. This status ended along with the Nazi regime. Italian rule was restored in 1945.

Italy and Austria negotiated the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement in 1946. Put into effect in 1947 when the new republican Italian constitution was formed, it granted the region considerable autonomy. German and Italian were both made official languages and German language education was permitted once more. The region was called Trentino-Alto Adige/Tiroler Etschland. The implementation of this agreement satisfied few and in 1960 the United Nations unsuccessfully stepped in. Bombings and sabotage throughout the region ended in 1971 when a new Austro-Italian treaty was signed and ratified.

The Austro-Italian treaty stipulated that disputes would be submitted for settlement to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, the province would receive greater autonomy within Italy and Austria would not interfere in the region's internal affairs. The new agreement proved satisfactory to the parties involved and the tensions soon eased. Cross border cooperation improved further with Austria's accession to the European Union in 1995.



## Did You Know?

Trentino-Alto Adige is the guardian of a remarkable cultural heritage of confluence between Latin and Nordic worlds made up of prehistoric evidence, charming castles, sanctuaries and towns with great historical and artistic significance.

As a result of the region's former status as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire from which it was reclaimed by Italy in 1919, the region is officially bilingual. Trentino is almost entirely Italian speaking while Alto Adige has a predominantly German-speaking population. The latter know their province by the name Südtirol (South Tyrol in English). A tiny minority group called the Ladins live in the Dolomites region: they speak an old Rheto-Romanic language.

The most striking natural feature is the Dolomites, the very essence of the region. The Dolomites are a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site and offer an unforgettable experience for ski and winter sports lovers. Hundreds of miles of ski slopes (shown here) make this region a cutting-edge tourist destination. This region boasts internationally famous ski resorts such as Madonna di Campiglio and Gardena Valley with its well-known resorts of Selva Val Gardena, Ortisei and Santa Cristina. Along with Fassa Valley with Canazei and Moena, the Marmolada range and San Martino di Castrozza, they all make for a magical terrain of innumerable linked slopes on one circuit for hundreds of kilometers surrounded by magnificent peaks and enchanting landscapes.

The landscape of Lake Garda (shown here) is particularly picturesque; it narrows in Trentino, appearing as a fiord between the high mountains.

The region's mostly mountainous territory is famous for its production of apples (shown here) and wines. The microclimate of the Val di Non (Valley of Apples) allows the prolific growing of the prized fruit. 300,000 tons of apples are harvested here which account for 15% of national production and 5% of that of Europe. The apples such as Golden Delicious, Stark Delicious and Kanada Renette taste particularly crunchy and sweet and their quality finds recognition even on European and international levels.



This region held the Roman Catholic Church's Ecumenical Council of Trent (depicted here) from 1545 to 1563. Prompted by the Protestant Reformation, the Council of Trent was incredibly important for its sweeping decrees on self-reform and for its dogmatic definitions that clarified virtually every doctrine contested by the Protestants. The Council played a vital role in revitalizing the Roman Catholic Church. The Council issued key statements and clarifications of the Church's doctrine and teachings including scripture, the Biblical canon, sacred tradition, original sin, justification, salvation, the sacraments, the Mass, and the veneration of saints. These changes led to the codification of the Tridentine Mass which remained the Church's primary form of the Mass for the next four hundred years until the Vatican Council changes of the 1960s.

Trentino-Alto Adige is the keeper of incredible artistic treasures, monuments and architectural works which combine Gothic from Austria with that of the Italian Renaissance. The route to discover this region starts in Trento. Known as the meeting place of the Ecumenical Council (1545-1563), the city boasts a Lombard Romanesque cathedral, Duomo of Trento with the Piazza del Duomo. The Saint Romedio sanctuary, the Basilica of Saint Vigilio, the Palazzo del Ben and dell'Annona in Rovereto, the Palazzo Geremia, the Palazzo Roccabruna and the Buonconsiglio Castle can also be found here.

Bolzano is the "Gateway to the Dolomites" and symbol of the fusion of Latin and Germanic cultures, as can be seen in its Gothic cathedral. Another important place is Rovereto with its museums, castles, the Saint Colombiano Hermitage, the great "bell of peace", the MART Museum, the new modern art hub, Riva del Garda, the Pretorio Palace and the austere, yet elegant, 13th-Century fortress, the Rocca.

The castles of the region are exceptionally enchanting. The castles of Tirolo, Roncolo, Appiano and Beseno all have breathtaking views.



Steeped in tradition, Trentino-Alto Adige is home to a wide array of events from the traditional Christmas markets of Bolzano and Merano (shown here) to the festival of San Vigilio in Trento as well as local festivals and countless fairs dedicated to wine, chestnuts, mushrooms and other excellent local products.





# Trentino-Alto Adige

## Part Two

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**Speck Sandwich**

### *Food and Wine*

The cuisine of Trentino-Alto Adige is a tasty blend of Mediterranean flavors, mountain cooking and German influences. Trentino thrives on polenta, usually made from corn but also from potatoes or buckwheat. It's used in a sort of cake called smacafam which is baked with sausage, salt pork, and sometimes cheese.

A traditional meal will often involve some type of cured meat, the most famous in Trentino-Alto Adige being speck. First, this boneless part of meat is cut in small square pieces and placed in saltpeter with garlic, laurel, juniper, pepper and other herbs. Speck is then hung in an aerated smokehouse and smoked at a low temperature over a wood fire. The smoke grazes the meat for a few hours a day. The meat is then cured for an average of 20 to 24 weeks. It can be eaten sliced by itself or used in recipes. Panino con lo speck (speck sandwich-shown here) is a popular option with hikers when out on a trek for the day.



**Smacafam**



Mortandela, a smoked pork salami shaped like a meatball (shown here) can be eaten raw by itself, or cooked with polenta, potatoes, sauerkraut or boiled vegetables. Other typical cured meats of Trentino-Alto Adige which are excellent served as a cold appetizer are Carne salada (salted meat) generally made with the beef's thigh (sometimes with horse or calf) and Ciughe. Ciughe was a "cold cut of the poorest cuts" or pork. These days only the best cuts of pork are used with added cooked turnips (to a lesser percentage than in the past). Formed as sausages and smoked, the ciughe are eaten boiled or, after longer aging, they are sliced like normal sausages.



**Mortandela**

Canederli are flour and bread dumplings which can be eaten in broth or with butter and flavored with speck, cheese or spinach in the classic versions. Spatzle, small gnocchi made with eggs, flour, and water can be eaten with a simple butter and chives condiment. They can also be made with spinach. Schlutzkrופן, or mezzelune, a semi-circular stuffed pasta, like ravioli, is usually filled with ricotta and spinach. Beyond conventional ravioli and tagliatelle, first courses include bigoi and strangolapreti (literally "priest strangler") which is gnocchi of spinach, flour, eggs, and cheese.



**Primiero Butter**

There are too many cheeses in Trentino-Alto Adige to list them all. Trentino's prominent cheese is Grana Trentino followed by Spressa delle Giudicarie. This DOP cheese started life as a waste by-product from butter making. Even today, it remains a comparatively poor

beautiful floral pattern printed on the surface. (shown here).

More than 250 varieties of mushrooms are sold and used to make scrumptious sauces served with polenta and pasta or used as the base for certain meat dishes. Broccoli from this area is known for its color, turning a yellow color rather than green. The leaves are used to make dumplings or soups.



cheese that is obtained from semi-skimmed raw milk. Puzzone di Moena DOP, a washed-rind cheese, is best known for its challenging odor and intense flavor. Alto Adige's many local cheeses include the grainy, sharp Graukaese, soft, mild Pusteria and Pustertaler and goats's milk Ziegenkaese.

Primiero is a butter from the pastures of Primiero. The "Slow Food" foundation is trying to recover the traditional processing technique which has been almost completely lost. The finished butter is unique for the

In Alto Adige, the cuisine has a German influence and lacks the typical Italian flavors. Popular soups contain barley and tripe such as Orzetto or Gerstensuppe, a barley soup with onion, garlic, vegetables and herbs simmered with speck and Minestra di trippa, tripe soup with onion, carrot, celery, garlic, potatoes, grated bread and tomato sauce. Sausage called Hauswurst is served with sauerkraut, pickles and horseradish. Noodles (Spaetzli) often go with beef dishes such as peppery Rindsgulasch and Sauerbraten which is pot roast with onions,

wine and vinegar. From the lofty wilds come brook trout, venison, and rare chamois and mountain goat. Birolidi con crauti is a blood sausage stuffed with chestnuts, walnuts and pine nuts. It's flavored with nutmeg, cloves and cinnamon and is served with sauerkraut. Blau forelle, trout poached in white wine with vinegar, lemon, bay leaf and clove, served with melted butter is another specialty. Gemsenfleisch is a Tyrolean style dish with chamois, red wine vinegar, salt pork, herbs and sour cream served over toasted country bread



Desserts are often made with apples, pears or plums as these fruits are widely cultivated in the region. Two of the most famous pastries in Trentino-Alto Adige's cuisine are strudel and fritters called Apfelkuechel. Krapfen are baked or fried pastries with jam that go well with soft and frothy whipped cream on top of fragrant hot chocolate.

One cannot resist a strudel or a slice of zelten, a kind of pizza dough Christmas cake (shown here) made from rye flour with candied fruit, nuts, honey, cinnamon and grappa that is consumed for the entire winter. Sweets in this cold climate are served for more than tradition. Sugar, whipped cream, chocolate and dried fruit fight the cold better than a wool sweater. Other popular treats include the sachertorte, a chocolate cake, Soffiato alla Trentina, a meringue, and kaiserschmarren, a shredded pancake with blueberry jam, a favorite of the Austrian emperor Franz Joseph.

Just as the natives of Alto Adige and Trentino have two distinct cultures, they also have two distinct wine zones. Alto Adige is quite mountainous; many of the grapevines grow on south or east-facing slopes on the western hillsides. Only 15 percent of the land is cultivable. The most popular grape variety is a red one, Schiava, more commonly known in South Tyrol by its German name, Vernatsch. This variety accounts for over 60 percent of Alto Adige's wines and is the basis of locally popular, light-bodied red wines.

If you love a fruity light wine like Zinfandel, then you should like Schiava. Lagrein is an ancient varietal that's been mentioned as early as the 1500's (yep, it's older than Cabernet Sauvignon). With only about 1,100 acres in Alto Adige and perhaps the world, Lagrein is relatively hard to find.

The white pinots of Alto Adige account for over 20% of the total wine production and are a hallmark of the area. Alto Adige's white Pinot Grigio and Pinot Bianco rival the best Austrian Grüner Veltliner and German Riesling. A wine from Alto Adige will have higher acidity and less fruit flavors than American Pinot Grigio. The most highly regarded of these is Santa Maddalena, grown on the picturesque slopes overlooking Bolzano.



**Lake Caldaro**

The best-known wine is Caldaro or Kalterersee, (shown here) produced from vines around the pretty lake of Caldaro at the rate of nearly 15 million bottles a year. Some of the world's finest Pinot Bianco, Sauvignon, Pinot Grigio, Mueller-Thurgau, and Gewuerztraminer wines also come from Alto Adige.

Trentino, which boasts Italy's largest production of Chardonnay, is a leader with sparkling wines by the classical method, many of which qualify under the prestigious Trento DOC. Trentino boasts one of Italy's best sparkling wine houses, Ferrari. It is also known for some fine red wines from its local variety, Teroldego, and from Sauvignon and Merlot, as well as some good quality white wines. In both provinces, increasing space has been devoted to Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

The region also produces some of the finest roses, the most impressive being Lagrein Kretzer. Two dessert wines worth mentioning are the sweet, rare and prized Moscato Rosa, with its gracefully flowery aroma as well as Vino Santo, made from local Nosiola grapes.

