

REGIONS OF ITALY

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VENETO



Veneto is a region found in northeastern Italy. Home to 4,857,210 people, it is the 5th largest region in Italy in terms of population. Veneto is comprised of the provinces of Venezia, Padova, Rovigo, Verona, Vicenza, Treviso, and Belluno. It is bordered by Trentino–Alto Adige (north), Emilia-Romagna (south), Lombardia (Lombardy; west), Austria (northeast), and Friuli–Venezia Giulia and the Adriatic Sea (east). Veneto's regional capital is Venice. Veneto is the 8th largest region in Italy, with a total area of 7,103.9 sq. miles. Lake Garda, Italy's largest and most visited lake, is located in Veneto. The southern shores offer beautiful beaches with rocky cliffs in the north and villages and castles in between. The Dolomites, known for their stunning rocky peaks, dominate this mountainous region.

A Quick History Lesson

Initially inhabited by Indo-European Veneti and Euganei tribes, Veneto was conquered by the Romans in the 3rd century B.C. After the fall of Rome, Goths and Lombards invaded the region. Many Venetians fled into the lagoon's swamps and established settlements there; Venice was born to escape these invaders. The Doge Republic of Venice conquered the eastern Mediterranean

and became the most important trading power in Europe. The rise of the Ottomans in the 14th century led to the slow decline of the Doge Republic. For two centuries, Venice was the most important trade city in Europe. Numerous bloody conflicts strengthened their hold on the area and occupied cities as far away as Lombardy and Apulia. With France's help, the Austrians in the 16th century put the Venetian expansion efforts to an end. With this defeat, the slow phase of decline began, which resulted in the loss of independence in 1815. During the war of independence (Risorgimento), significant battles happened in Veneto. The area was eventually liberated and joined Italy's Kingdom in 1866.

During World War One, Veneto was again the location of extremely bloody battles between the Habsburgs and Italy, who were fighting each other along the Alpine crest. Many monuments remind us today of the hundreds of thousands of soldiers who died in these battles. The Second World War did not produce a tremendous amount of damage here, though Treviso and Verona suffered heavy bombardment. After the Second World War, Veneto was a poor and backward region, shaped by centuries of feudal rule. Within the past 40 years, Veneto has become one of the wealthiest and most developed regions of Italy through expansive economic growth and tourism.

Did You Know?

There are several reasons why Veneto sees more tourists every year than any other part of Italy. One of those reasons is the region's influential culture, partly inspired by the region's incredible natural beauty. One primary source of inspiration is Venice, which is among the most artistically vibrant cities globally and has been for centuries. There was a reason why Shakespeare set several of his best plays in Venice. Today, it retains its artistic focus and is filled with breathtaking architecture as well.

Venice is one of Italy's most visited and most unique cities. Saint Mark's Square and Cathedral, and the Grand Canal are the top sights in Venice, but many monuments, canals, and squares are also worth seeing. The major islands of Venice are famous for various characteristics. Lido and Pellestrina are known to have the best beaches in Venice. Lido is crowded during the summer as visitors stream from across the globe to enjoy the sandy beaches. Fishermen inhabit the island of Pellestrina. Unlike Lido, Pellestrina is quiet with a cozy atmosphere. The Island of Murano on the northern shore of Venice is known globally for its glass-making techniques. Holiday decorations made of glass fill the city during Christmas. Visitors stream to the island mainly to buy gifts. Burano is an island also on the northern shore of Venice. It is famous for brightly colored streets and lace making.

Verona is famous for being the setting of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" and most folks make a pilgrimage there if only to visit the Juliet statue and see the famous balcony. There's lots more to see here including a Roman arena used for outdoor opera performances and a beautiful medieval center. Soave is a small wine town enclosed by medieval walls that rise to a castle at the top.

Just 30 miles away from Venice, Vicenza boasts its own amazing architecture and both Padua and Verona are home to several city blocks' worth of art museums and collections. Though it isn't quite the fashion capital that Milan is, Vicenza and Treviso are major fashion powerhouses. They feature two of the most respected and recognizable fashion-setting companies globally, namely Diesel and Benetton. Benetton has long had a presence in Treviso, with several generations of the family calling the city home.



Art historians spend a portion of their studies at the Venetian School of Painting, and for a good reason. The Venetian school, which was at its zenith during the 16th century, was on the leading edge of painting expression at the time and inspired artists for centuries following its departure. Venice still possesses a great many masterpieces from that era, providing a bounty for art enthusiasts. Veneto has its fair share of famous sculptors, as well. Standing at the top was Antonio Canova, who quickly rose to fame with his delicately rendered depictions of nude figures.

Veneto's cities are filled with impressive architecture, but none more so than Vicenza. One of history's greatest Renaissance architects, Andrea Palladio, was born in Vicenza and designed dozens of meticulous, grand buildings, most of them featured in Veneto. Vicenza has the most impressive collection of Palladio buildings globally, with 23 villas, basilicas, and palazzos, each a work of genius and each worth closer study. Of note are the Palazzo Barbaran da Porto which houses the Palladio Museum and the Basilica Palladiana, which Palladio himself believed could be compared to any great work of architecture that had come before. Another must-see example of Palladio architecture is the Teatro Olimpico, one of only three Renaissance theatres still in existence. Palladio's prolific and unmatched career was so impressive that he is considered the father of modern Italian architecture.

Literature may take a backseat to the incredible painters and architects of Veneto, but it shouldn't be underestimated. A few highly influential writers made their home in Venice. The most famous of them all was Marco Polo, whose travels along the Silk Road and into China were thoroughly documented in *Il Milione*. Polo's detailed description of his explorations inspired other explorers to come, including Christopher Columbus.

Perhaps Polo also inspired Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot) another citizen of Venice and the first European to discover the North American mainland in 1497 officially.

If painting is the art form Veneto is best known for, then music is right behind it. Several famous names in classical music made their home in the region, none more talented than Antonio Vivaldi. Nicknamed "The Red Priest," Vivaldi was a virtuoso with a command of the violin and the composition sheet. One of the most iconic Baroque music pieces, The Four Seasons, was created by Vivaldi and remains a standard among symphonies today.

Antonio Salieri is known as the rival to Mozart; a rivalry depicted both on stage and the big screen. However, there is little evidence that Salieri and Mozart were anything more than friendly rivals, and there appears to have been genuine mutual respect between the two.

Today, Patty Pravo is among Italy's most famous and beloved modern singers. She is a huge pop star inside of Italy and is also well known outside of the country.

Cuisine and Wine

Veneto's cuisine is as varied as its geography, but throughout the region, four essential elements are specific to Veneto food, polenta, rice, beans and baccalà. Polenta is a type of corn flour bread with a yellow color, white in the Venice area, which is usually eaten as a side dish with an array of juicy sausages or accompanied by the typical cold cuts of Veneto. In this case, the polenta is grilled. This maize flour bread, in the past considered food for the poor, is so popular that Northern Italians are often nicknamed polentoni or polenta eaters by other Italians.

In 1432, Venetian captain, Pietro Querini, wrecked on Norway's Lofoten Island with his sailors. They stayed about four months in tight contact with the natives. Their primary food was cod and the Venetians observed how they treated the cod, drying it and making it more appealing to the palette. Pietro brought home some cod and the cooks from Vicenza developed a recipe based on the ideas they had learned in Norway. This dried codfish (baccala) had the advantage of being both less expensive and less easily perishable than other fish. It was ideal for long sea voyages that Venetian sailors so often took.

Rice was brought to Venice through contact with the Arabs. The rice, Vialone Nano, is now grown in the Verona area and is extremely fine in its consistency. It boasts of a D.O.P certificate, which is a guarantee of origin and protected designation. When combining the rice and radicchio, a dark red, bitter vegetable, an excellent risotto, risotto con il radicchio, can be baked to perfection. A few other dishes are made with risotto that feature seafood like lobster, prawns, shrimp or mussels.



Risotto con il Radicchio

One of the tastiest and unique Venetian recipes is risotto al Nero di seppia made with cuttlefish ink; this risotto has an unmistakable black color.

Rice, beans, and polenta are staples in every one of Veneto's provinces. With the Adriatic Sea and Lake Garda flanking the region, there is always a bounty of fresh fish available. Although clams, mussels, anchovies, and crabs are harvested from the lake and the sea, Veneto cod serves as the centerpiece for protein.

The cod is a respected fish in Veneto, and though it is incorporated into many recipes, it reaches its full potential as mantecato. In this version, the cod is cooked until it is turned into a dense cream, mixed with a generous amount of olive oil, garlic, and parsley.

Though it delivers distinct flavors, mantecato cod is delicate enough to spread on crostini or fried polenta, a popular dish known as stoccafisso mantecato con polenta. Another traditional cod dish is baccala alla Vicentina. It features the region's delectable cod, bathed for two days and slow-cooked with milk, olive oil, and onions. It is served with polenta for a firm texture and flavor contrast.

While Parma is the king of prosciutto, Veneto has its version, crafted in the town of Montagnana. Prosciutto Crudo Veneto Berico Euganeo is the official name, and Montagnana makes it a bit differently than the masters in Parma. Because of its unique flavor and craftsmanship, it is a popular appetizer among those in Veneto.

Every town in Veneto favors the Fiori di Zucca fritti or fried courgette flowers. It's crispy, delectable, and so popular that it is typical street food in the region. If there is one appetizer that is wholly Veneto, though, it is sarde in saor. It is the go-to starter in restaurants and show-cases one of the jewels of the Adriatic, the sardine. Sarde in saor is a traditional meal put together by fishermen while on their boats and is a combination of deep-fried sardines that are stewed and then lightly fried with onions and vinegar. It is served with nuts, raisins, or other add-ons and can also be served on crostini.

One of the most celebrated Venetian recipes originating on Veneto's mainland is the pasta e fagioli or pasta and



Pasta e Fagioli

beans. It's a heavy mixture that is very filling. This beloved winter dish will put meat on the bones. It is slowly cooked and served on a pasta base, with beans, garlic, lard, onion, and celery.

In Veneto, the signature pasta is bigoli, which is much like it sounds. Bigoli are like spaghetti in appearance, though much thicker. It is regularly featured

in bigoli in salsa which consists of pasta and a thick sauce made from anchovies and onions. It can also be combined with game and meat sauces, depending on what ingredients are on hand.

Cheese and Italy are inextricably linked and Veneto produces one of the country's most beloved. Asiago is a favorite among cheese fanatics the world over and Veneto cheesemakers have mastered it. That's not a surprise, as Veneto has been a center of cheese crafting for more than 1,000 years. Asiago is served everywhere in Veneto and is a popular pairing with pasta, charcuterie, or wine. Many of Italy's most famous PDO-protected cheeses are produced in Veneto, the most well-known being Grana Padano (although this is also produced in neighboring regions along the Po Valley). Asiago is made in Veneto's northern mountainous areas and is prized for its mild buttery taste and firm texture.



The Piedmont and Tuscany regions are best known for the country's black truffles, but Veneto, specifically the Iberici hills, produces a robust variety of black truffles.

Finish off your meal with a great dessert and try the famous Tiramisù, made of ladyfingers, coffee, and mascarpone cheese. The name translates to 'pick me up,' thanks to coffee's inclusion, and it became wildly popular in the 1960s. It was invented in the Veneto town of Treviso.



Fugazza Vicentina

Pandoro is everywhere during the Christmas holidays and is a necessity with Panettone. Pandoro is made from sweet yeast bread which is formed into a star. It takes an experienced baker's touch to create. That's why it is usually only available through bakeries or grocery stores.

It's the Fugazza Vicentina that serves as the seasonal dessert during Easter, and it would be fair to call it sweet bread or focaccia. It is like other Italian sweet bread desserts, including Panettone, in that the bread itself is not overly sweet. It's the addition of vanilla and lemon zest that provides a touch more sweetness and flavor. Golosessi is a general term for the smorgasbord of biscuits that Italian bakeries produce and Veneto bakers focus on a few of the most delicious. The fritelle, I buratelli, I baicoli, and gli zaletti are among them and they make for an ideal pairing with a sweet wine.



Venetian street foods are rich and hearty and combine protein and carbohydrates in a mouthwatering fashion. The Panino con il pastin e formai is a perfect example. Most often prepared in the Belluno area, though not uncommon elsewhere, it is a sandwich of pork or beef patties, along with an infusion of white wine, garlic, and spices. Cheese and polenta are standard sides, and the sandwich can be eaten raw or grilled.



Sfilacci di Cavallo

A more adventurous offering is the sfilacci di cavallo or frayed dried horse meat. Though it can be eaten as a lean, protein-dense snack, it is a treasured ingredient in sandwiches or on pizzas. The radicchio Trevigiano all griglia is a subtle spotlight onto Veneto cuisine, as it brings together the laudable Treviso chicory, which can be grilled or fried.

Cicchetti is a sampling of many finger foods, side dishes, and miniature sandwiches which features a medley of meat, vegetables, and seafood all served on bread or fried polenta.

It's not Italian cuisine without wine and Veneto has much to boast about here. Perhaps its most famous wine is Grappa (though locals refer to it as Graspera or Sgnapa), as it is a trendy after-dinner drink, or "digestive." Originally made in Bassano del Grappa's town, it is a grape pomace brandy with powerful fragrant notes and an alcohol by volume rating between 75 and 120 proof. (37.5-60% alcohol). Although it makes for a perfectly fine sipping wine or digestive, many also add it to the last bit of espresso, swirl it around and slurp it up. When people talk about Italy's great wine regions, they don't often refer to these parts. Veneto is slightly smaller than Italy's other central wine-producing regions (Piedmont, Tuscany, Lombardy, Puglia, and Sicily), yet it generates more wine than any of them. The Soave is the top white wine and can be paired with just about any meal. Other notable white wines include Gambellara and Vespaiolo. Under the red wine ledger, the intense Amarone is the champ, as it brings a luscious, impenetrable red color, along with a strong body. Bardolino, the fruity red Valpolicella Rosso and the sweet Recioto are other red wines that shouldn't be missed.

If you believe that prosecco is an inferior cousin of champagne, a visit here will show you why 2,000 years of wine-making in these very hills can't be wrong. The Strada del Prosecco is Italy's oldest wine route, formally established in 1966. This hilly highway is known for producing the best prosecco, both because of the unique climate and soils in which the grapes grow and the carefully prescribed methods they are harvested and fermented. Only those produced in the 15 towns along the Strada del Prosecco (a 42-kilometer stretch of meandering road) can be called Prosecco Superiore.

The common factor that unites almost all wine zones in northeastern Veneto is the Glera grape (typically known as Prosecco). Unlike champagne, which is better aged, prosecco needs to be consumed sooner than later before its fresh green fruitiness starts to turn bitter with age.

The Veneto region can be roughly split into three geographical areas, distinguished by their topography and geology. In the northwest, the cooler, alpine-influenced climate yields fresh, crisp whites are made under the Bianco di Custoza and Garda titles while refreshing, unassuming Bardolino from the shores of Lake Garda makes a case for Veneto's lightest reds. Just east of Verona's lake and north is Valpolicella and its sub-region Valpantena; the fabled "Valley of Many Cellars" produces 500,000 hectoliters of fruity red wine yearly. In terms of production volume, Valpolicella is the only wine to rival Tuscany's famous Chianti.



East of Valpolicella is Soave, home to the eponymous dry white wine that now ranks among Italy's most famous products. Beyond that, Gambellara serves as an eastern extension of Soave, both geographically and stylistically. Garganega and Trebbiano are the key white wine grape varieties here. In central Veneto, these hills produce vast quantities of wine. Only the better-quality wines from more elevated areas have gained DOC status. International varieties such as Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Pinot Noir, and even Carmenere have proved successful.

Grappa may be the star, but Veneto has a deep lineup of



impressive white and red wines, enough to tempt any wine lover. Ask any wine expert, and they'll likely brand Veneto as one of Italy's wine capitals.