

Stelvio

HIGHLIGHTS

- Juggle your German and Italian phrasebooks and get ready to intersperse *guten tags* with *salves* as you criss-cross the unmarked border between **Trentino** and **Alto Adige** (p143)
- Explore fine paths over high passes on the **Val di Rabbi to Martelltal** walk (p144)
- Wander through beautiful cool pine and larch woodlands with peek-a-boo mountain vistas above the **Val di Rabbi** (p144)
- Look out for chamois and red deer in the German-speaking **Martelltal** (p144) – famous for its summer strawberries and winter cross-country skiing

Signature food: Sauerkraut and sausages

Celebrated native: Andreas Hofer (Tyrolean patriot)

Famous for... Spas

It's not quite Yellowstone, but 1346-sq-km Parco Nazionale dello Stelvio is northern Italy's (and the Alps') largest national park, straddling the regions of Trentino-Alto Adige and Lombardy and bordering with the Parco Nazionale Svizzero in neighbouring Switzerland.

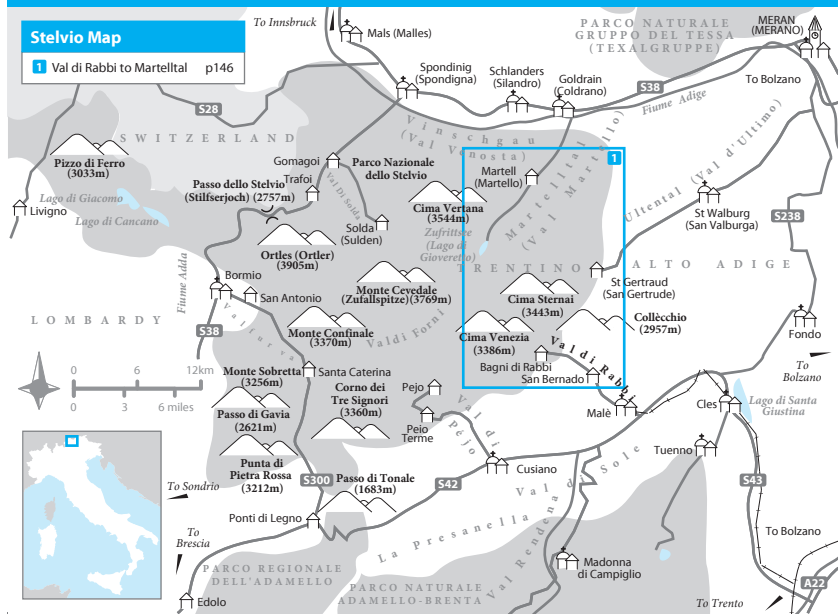
The park is primarily the preserve of walkers who come here to enjoy the extensive network of well-organised *rifugi* and marked trails which, while often challenging, don't generally require the mountaineering expertise necessary in the nearby Dolomites. Stelvio's central massif is guarded by Monte Cevedale (3769m) and Ortles (3905m) protecting glaciers, forests, numerous wildlife species and myriad cultural traditions, both Italian and South Tyrolean. Fewer than 100 years ago, this majestic land served as the front line in WWI and remnants of old defences along with a small museum bear testament to the slaughter.

Less blemished with ski facilities than other regions, Stelvio's primary run is at the Passo dello Stelvio (2757m), the second-highest road pass in the Alps. The pass is approached from the north from the hamlet of Trafoi (1543m) on one of Europe's most spectacular strips of asphalt, 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.



STELVIO



CLIMATE

Stelvio's climate is predominantly alpine in character. July and August are the wettest months (around 100mm each month). Afternoon thunderstorms are common, presaged by towering cumulus then lower, flatter nimbus clouds. The rainfall for May and September is considerably lower – as little as half that of the summer months. Heavy snowfalls typify winter, although snow can fall at any time of the year.

In summer the average temperature is into the 20s°C in the valleys but decreases markedly with altitude. It's not uncommon for summer days to dawn fine and clear, but become cloudy over the mountains during the warmest part of the day.

During April and May, in particular, the föhn, a warm, dry wind, can affect the area. The temperature rises rapidly, possibly triggering avalanches and accelerating the thaw of winter snow.

PLANNING

When to Walk

In most years snow should have retreated from all but the highest ground by mid-June,

and heavy and persistent snow shouldn't return until early October. Lower-level walks in the valleys should be accessible from May to October.

Maps

The Touring Club Italiano's 1:200,000 *Trentino-Alto Adige* is ideal for general planning and access.

PLACE NAMES

Italian names are either used exclusively or given precedence over German names in Trentino and Lombardy, but German is preferred over Italian names in Alto Adige/South Tyrol (eg Martelltal/Val Martello). However, in Stelvio you'll find some path signposts with both or only one (commonly German) version, and even with different spellings in the one language of the same place (eg Passo Soy and Forcella di Soi). The locally preferred version is given precedence in this chapter.

Books

Among the Italian-language titles, *Escursioni Parco dello Stelvio Trentino e Alto*