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.

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**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.

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.

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)