



The Veneto

From the look of it, you'd think Venice spent all its time primping. The Grand Canal's Gothic palaces generously allow visitors to bask in their reflected glory and San Marco's glittering mosaics entice the sunset to linger in Piazza San Marco. Gorgeous though it is, make no mistake: this city is a cultural powerhouse. At the height of its maritime trading empire, Venice's dominion stretched from Constantinople to Croatia, and inland to Lombardy. From Brenta river villas to fortified hill towns across the Veneto, you'll spot Venice's emblem, the winged lion of St Mark, resting on an open book.

Yet despite its fame and influence, the Veneto isn't quite an open book. With so many masterpieces, the Veneto's splendours are constantly being revealed from under the veil of restoration: Palladios in Vicenza, Giotto's in Padua, Mantegnas in Verona. Some private villas and palaces are now open to the public, offering tantalising glimpses of heaven in Tiepolo ceilings and Veronese frescoes around Vicenza and Venice.

No matter how well you know Italian food and wine, the Veneto offers unexpected delights. Several of Italy's most prized wines are available only at small wineries in the Valpolicella and Soave regions, and there's only one way to settle age-old debates over who does local seafood, wild duck, *bigoli* (wheat pasta) and *risi e bisi* (risotto with peas) best: eat your way across the Venetian countryside. Once you do, you'll be back – it may not always be visible, but the Veneto has a way of leaving its mark on you.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Join the collective gasp at the golden mosaic domes of Venice's **Basilica di San Marco** (p355)
- Shout 'Brava!' for opera diva encores at Verona's **Roman Arena** (p393) and Venice's **La Fenice** (p357)
- See the Renaissance coming through the tears in Giotto's moving **Scrovegni Chapel frescoes** (p383)
- Let the spirits move you from white to red in Verona's legendary **wine country** (p397)
- Compare Titian's radiant colours and Tintoretto's lightning-strike brushstrokes in **I Frari** (p360) and **Scuola Grande di San Rocco** (p360)
- Villa-hop like a 1600s Venetian socialite along the **Brenta Riviera** (p381)
- Walk through Alpine wildflower meadows and craggy peaks in the **Dolomites** (p399)



■ POPULATION: 4.83 MILLION

■ AREA: 18,378 SQ KM

REGIONAL ITINERARY

VILLAS & VINO

Three days / Brenta Riviera / Venice

Drift along the **Brenta Riviera** (p381) on an easy bike ride or in a *burchiello* (flat-bottomed boat), stopping by the grand Veneto villas along the riverbanks like a Venetian socialite c 1600. Don't miss Palladio's '**La Malcontenta**' (Villa Foscari; p381), the Tiepolo frescoes of **Villa Pisani Nazionale** (p381) and the Shoemakers' Museum at 18th-century **Villa Foscari Rossi** (p382).

Boat trips end in **Padua** (p383), where you can spend the night in a **hotel** (p387) overlooking the shrine of **St Anthony** (Sant'Antonio; p385), patron saint of miracle cures and lost and found objects. But don't miss the small wonders next door in honour of St George: the frescoed **Oratorio di San Giorgio** (p386) and the Titian-filled **Scoletta del Santo** (p386). With advance booking, you can see Padua's crowning glory: Giotto's frescoed **Cappella degli Scrovegni** (p383), or head for the historic centre to linger at a cafe in Padua's arcaded twin piazzas or tour its ground-breaking **university** (p385), including Galileo's lecture hall and the six-tiered anatomy theatre.

Hop the 15 to 30 minute train to **Vicenza** (p388) and spend the afternoon watching sunlight ripple across the soaring facades of Palladio's *palazzi* and illuminate the storybook **Villa Valmarana 'ai Nani'** (p390), covered floor to ceiling with frescoes by Giambattista and Giandomenico Tiepolo. Enjoy happy hour in the long shadow of Palladio at 12th-century wine bar **Antica Casa della Malvasia** (p391) and spend the night in the designer-chic palace **Relais Santa Corona** (p391).

Next day head to **Verona** (p392), where mornings mean Mantegnas at **Basilica di San Zeno Maggiore** (p395), afternoons call for window-shopping on Via Mazzini and coffee breaks in the **Piazza delle Erbe** (p393), and summer evenings bring opera to the ancient **Roman Arena** (p397). *Romeo and Juliet* was set on Verona's romantic balconied backstreets and you shouldn't leave town without trying the local love potion Amarone at a **bar** (p396). Bunk in for the night at nearby **Anfiteatro** (p396) if you're here for opera or head back to **Venice** (opposite) by train.

