

Day Trips from Venice

Riviera Brenta p183

See where Venetian elites gambled away their summers in Palladian-style villas.

Padua p185

This vibrant university town is also a treasure trove of fresco cycles from its medieval golden age.

Vicenza p192

Palladio's adopted home is defined by the architect's classical restraint, while the countryside is dotted with his elegant villas.

Prosecco Road Trip p198

Share a glass of *prosecco* with hardworking locals in one of the Veneto's most under-appreciated areas.

Verona p201

Romeo and Juliet might have been fictional, but Verona's real history is evidenced by its Roman arena, Romanesque churches and Renaissance gardens.

Verona's Wine Country p208

Valpolicella yields up some of Italy's biggest, boldest reds. Soave is synonymous with crisp whites.

Riviera Brenta

Explore

For centuries, summer officially started on 13 June as a flotilla of fashionable Venetians headed for their summer residences along the banks of the Brenta. There were once over 3000 villas in the Venetian hinterland, built between the 15th and the 18th century; now fewer than 80 survive and of those four are open as museums, including Palladio's exquisite La Malcontenta and the grand Villa Pisani. They can be seen in a day, especially on a river cruise aboard the traditional *burchiello*. If on your own, note that sites are scattered, so cars are a better option than trains – this very flat country also begs for biking. If you decide to linger, seek shelter in a villa-turned-B&B – or spend the night in nearby Padua, where the cruise ends.

The Best...

- ➔ **Sight** Villa Foscari (p183)
- ➔ **Place to Eat** Da Conte (p185)
- ➔ **Place to Drink** Da Conte (p185)

Top Tip

The Riviera Brenta is best seen from the decks of flat-bottomed riverboats – the same way Venetians did, at least until Napoleon's troops shut down the centuries-long party in 1797.

Getting There & Away



- ➔ **Boat** Organised boat tours leave from both Venice and Padua (p184).
- ➔ **Train** Regional trains between Venice and Padua stop at Dolo (€2.85, 30 minutes, one to two per hour) en route to Padua.
- ➔ **Bus** ACTV's Venezia-Padova Extraurbane bus 53 leaves from Venice's Piazzale Roma about every half-hour, stopping at key Brenta villages en route to Padua.
- ➔ **Car** Take SS11 from Mestre-Venezia towards Padua (Padua), and take the Autostrada A4 towards Dolo/Padua.

Need to Know

- ➔ **Area Code** 041
- ➔ **Location** 15km to 30km west of Venice

THE BRENTA BY BIKE

Speed past four boats along 150km of cycling routes along the Brenta Riviera. Veloce (p283) offers a handy pick-up and drop-off service at railway stations and hotels in many Veneto towns, including Padua, Venice and Mira. City and mountain bikes are available, along with GPS units pre-loaded with multi-lingual Brenta itineraries (€10).

- ➔ **Tourist Office** ( 041 560 0690; Via Nazionale 420, Villa Widmann Foscari, Mira Porte;  10.30am-1pm, 1.30-4.30pm)

SIGHTS

The Brenta River had long acted as a commercial waterway between inland farms and Venice, transporting meat, fruit, vegetables, flour and even fresh water to the city, and exporting its spices, cloth, soap, glass and fish inland. But the river's regular and ferocious torrents, coupled with a pre-1345 decree forbidding Venetians to own mainland property, meant the area remained largely undeveloped until the 15th century.

That all changed in 1407, when Padua came under Venetian control and the Brenta's flow was finally tamed by hydraulic intervention. Almost immediately life on the river began to change as aristocratic families set up fabulous country estates, enhancing their incomes with farming and indulging in wild parties. Famous artists and architects were brought in to design and decorate their homes, and soon the river was traffic-logged with nobles who spent the days cruising between villas, engaging in what became known as *villeggiatura*.

VILLA FOSCARI

HISTORIC BUILDING

( 041 520 39 66; www.lamalcontenta.com; Via dei Turisti 9, Malcontenta; adult/student €10/8;  9am-noon Tue & Sat, closed Nov-Apr) The most romantic Brenta villa, the Palladio-designed 1555-60 Villa Foscari got its nickname 'La Malcontenta' from a grande dame of the Foscari clan who was reputedly exiled here for cheating on her husband – though these bright, highly sociable salons hardly constitute a punishment. The villa was abandoned for years, but Giovanni Zelotti's