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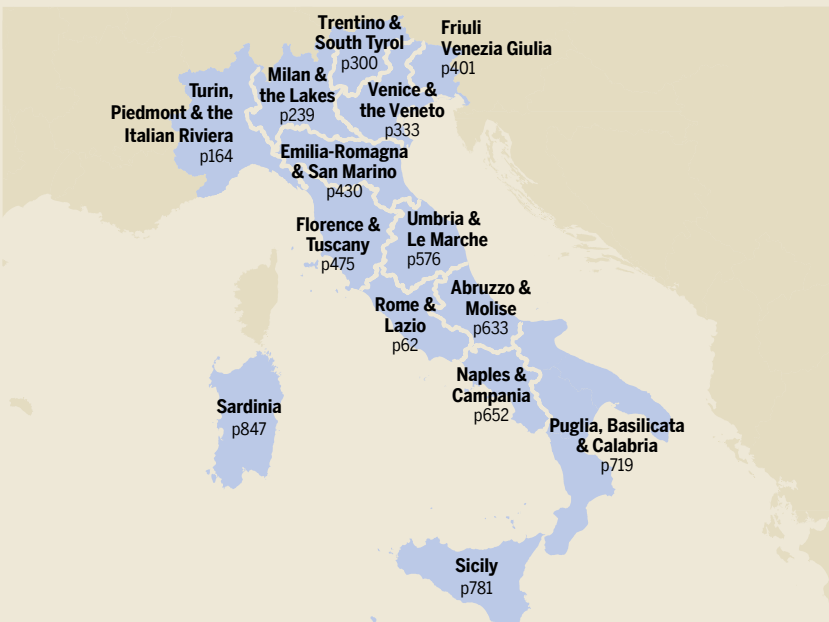
Italy



Gregor Clark, Peter Dragicevich, Hugh McNaughtan, Brendan Sainsbury, Donna Wheeler, Nicola Williams, Cristian Bonetto, Kerry Christiani, Marc Di Duca, Duncan Garwood, Paula Hardy, Virginia Maxwell, Kevin Raub, Regis St Louis

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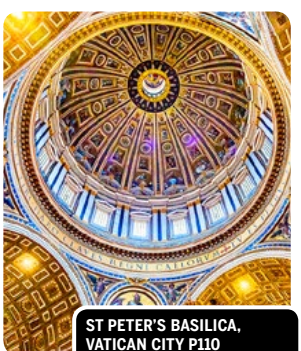

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Abruzzo & Molise

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Why Go?

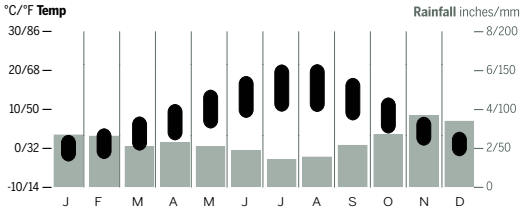
Bisected by the spinal Apennine mountains, Abruzzo and Molise make up Italy's forgotten quarter, blessed more with natural attractions than cultural colossi. A major national park building effort in the 1990s created an almost unbroken swath of protected land that stretches from the harsh, isolated Monti della Laga in the north to the round-topped Majella mountains further south.

Dotted in their midst are some of Italy's most unspoilt, picturesque mountain villages. Sometimes, a visit here feels like a trip back to the 1950s – a world of wheezing trains, ruined farmhouses and poppy-filled pastures. All this is good news for prospective walkers, who share the region's ample paths with sheepdogs, mountain goats, abundant bird life and the odd, rarely sighted, human being.

Sulmona is the best base for mountain excursions, Pescara on the Adriatic coast satisfies those with traditional beach urges, while diminutive Molise hides vestiges of the Roman past.

When to Go

L'Aquila



Jan & Feb Grab some skis and head for one of the Abruzzo-Molise ski areas.

Jul Sulmona holds its medieval festival, while Pescara hosts a major jazz festival.

May, Jun & Sep Spring wildflowers, summer sun or autumn leaves – perfect conditions for hiking.

Abruzzo & Molise Highlights

1 Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise (p644) Keeping an eye out for rare Marsican bears while hiking in this fabulous wilderness.

2 Saepinum (p649) Pacing the wildflower-strewn foundations of one of Italy's most complete provincial Roman towns.

3 Sulmona (p637) Joining the *passeggiatta* (evening stroll) to scope out which Abruzzese trattoria you'll eat in that night.

4 Museo Archeologico Nazionale d'Abruzzo (p647) Coming face to face with masterpieces of pre-Roman Italy in this museum in Chieti.

5 Pescocostanzo (p641) Breathing in the pure mountain air of this small town with stately foundations.

6 Parco Nazionale della Majella (p640) Taking a walk through history on the Sentiero della Libertà.

7 Isernia La Pineta (p650) Digging to the 700,000-year-old roots of European humankind at this intriguing archaeological site.

8 Gole di Sagittario (p642) Driving the winding switchbacks of this ravishingly beautiful gorge, between Sulmona and Scanno.

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Emilia-Romagna & San Marino

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- Bologna nel Cuore (p438)
- Alchimia B&B (p461)
- Foresteria San Benedetto (p451)

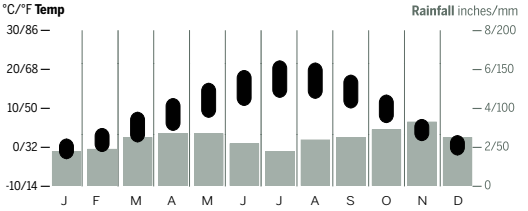
Why Go?

Sweeping north from the Apennines to the fertile Po valley, Emilia-Romagna boasts some of Italy's most hospitable people, some of its most productive land, some of its fastest vehicles (Ferrari, Ducati, Maserati and Lamborghini call Emilia-Romagna home) and most soul-satisfying food. Since antiquity, the verdant Po lowlands have sown enough agricultural riches to feed a nation and finance an unending production line of lavish products: luxury cars, regal *palazzi* (mansions), Romanesque churches, prosperous towns and a gigantic operatic legacy (Verdi and Pavarotti, no less).

You can eat like a Roman emperor here, in the birthplace of *tagliatelle al ragù*, pumpkin-filled *cappellacci* pasta, Parma prosciutto, balsamic vinegar and *parmigiano reggiano* (Parmesan). And then there's Emilia-Romagna's treasure trove of oft-neglected destinations: Bologna with its photogenic porticoes, Ravenna with its mosaics, posh Parma and the wealthy micronation of San Marino. Wherever you go, you'll be welcomed with the warmth of Emilia-Romagna's people.

When to Go

Bologna



May Enjoy pleasant cycling weather on the Po plains and avoid summer crowds on Rimini's beaches.

Jun–Aug Summer music festivals fill the agenda from Bologna to Ravenna.

Sep Ideal hiking conditions in Parco Nazionale dell'Appennino Tosco-Emiliano.

Bologna

051 / POP 380,000

Fusing haughty elegance with down-to-earth grit and one beautifully colonnaded medieval grid, Bologna is a city of two intriguing halves. One side is a hard-working, hi-tech city located in the super-rich Po valley where suave opera-goers waltz out of regal theatres and into some of the nation's finest restaurants. The other is a bolshie, politically edgy city that hosts the world's oldest university and is famous for its graffiti-embellished piazzas filled with mildly inebriated students swapping Gothic fashion tips.

No small wonder Bologna has earned so many historical monikers. *La Grassa* (the fat one) celebrates a rich food legacy (*ragù* or bolognese sauce was first concocted here). *La Dotta* (the learned one) doffs a cap to the city university founded in 1088. *La Rossa* (the red one) alludes to the ubiquity of the terracotta medieval buildings adorned with miles of porticoes, as well as the city's longstanding penchant for left-wing politics.

Sights

★San Colombano – Collezione Tagliavini MUSEUM

(051 1993 6366; www.genusbononiae.it; Via Parigi 5; adult/reduced €7/5; 11am-7pm Tue-Sun) An absolutely stunningly restored church with original frescoes and a medieval crypt rediscovered in 2007, the San Colombano hosts a wonderful collection of over 80 musical instruments amassed by the octogenarian organist Luigi Tagliavini. Many of the assembled harpsichords, pianos and oboes date from the 1500s and, even more surprisingly, are still in full working order. Listen out for regular free concerts and charge up your phone – this is one of Bologna's most photogenic museums.

★Museo della Storia di Bologna MUSEUM

(051 1993 6370; www.genusbononiae.it; Via Castiglione 8; adult/reduced €10/8; 10am-7pm Tue-Sun) Walk in a historical neophyte and walk out an A-grade honours student in Bologna's golden past. This magnificent interactive museum, opened in 2012 and skillfully encased in the regal Palazzo Pepoli, is – in a word – an 'education'. Using a 3D film, a mock-up of an old Roman canal and supermodern presentations of ancient relics, the innovative displays start in a futuristic open-plan lobby and progress through 35 chronologically themed rooms that make Bologna's 2500-year history at once engaging and epic.

There are many hidden nuggets (who knew Charles V was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in the city?). The only glaring omission is much talk of Mussolini, who was born 'down the road' in Forli.

★Basilica di Santo Stefano CHURCH

(www.abbaziasstefano.wixsite.com/abbaziasstefano; Via Santo Stefano 24; 8am-7pm) Bologna's most unique religious site is this atmospheric labyrinth of interlocking ecclesiastical structures, whose architecture spans centuries of Bolognese history and incorporates Romanesque, Lombard and even ancient Roman elements. Originally there were seven churches – hence the basilica's nickname Sette Chiese – but only four remain intact today: Chiesa del Crocefisso, Chiesa della Trinità, Chiesa del Santo Sepolcro and Santi Vitale e Agricola.

Entry is via the 11th-century **Chiesa del Crocefisso**, which houses the bones of San Petronio and leads through to the **Chiesa del Santo Sepolcro**. This austere octagonal structure probably started life as a baptistery. Next door, the **Cortile di Pilato** is named after the central basin in which Pontius Pilate is said to have washed his hands after condemning Christ to death. In fact, it's an 8th-century Lombard artefact. Beyond the courtyard, the **Chiesa della Trinità** connects to a modest cloister and a small **museum**. The fourth church, the **Santi Vitale e Agricola**, is the city's oldest. Incorporating recycled Roman masonry and carvings, the bulk of the building dates from the 11th century. The considerably older tombs of two saints in the side aisles once served as altars.

★Basilica di San Petronio CHURCH

(www.basilicadisanpetronio.org; Piazza Galvani 5; photo pass €2; 7.45am-6.30pm) Bologna's hulking Gothic basilica is Europe's sixth-largest church, measuring 132m by 66m by 47m. Work began on it in 1390, but it was never finished and still today its main facade remains incomplete. Inside, look for the huge sundial that stretches 67.7m down the eastern aisle. Designed in 1656 by Gian Cassini and Domenico Guglielmi, this was instrumental in discovering the anomalies of the Julian calendar and led to the creation of the leap year.

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Florence & Tuscany

POP 3.74 MILLION

Includes ➡

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- Essenziale (p507)
- Il Leccio (p542)
- Osteria del Castello (p533)
- L'Osteria di Casa Chianti (p528)

Best Places to Stay

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- Hotel Orto de' Medici (p502)
- La Bandita (p541)
- Podere Brizio (p541)
- Conti di San Bonifacio (p546)

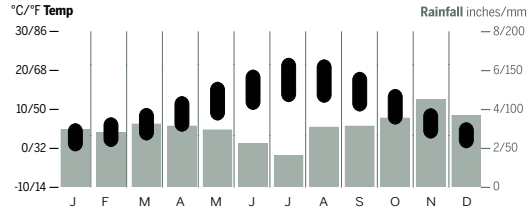
Why Go?

Florence (Firenze in Italian) and Tuscany (Toscana) are the perfect introduction to Italy's famed *dolce vita*. Life is sweet around leading lady Florence, a fashionable urbanite known for her truly extraordinary treasure trove of world-class art and architecture, and a seasonally driven cuisine emulated the world over. Away from the city the pace slows as magnificent landscapes and the gentle heartbeat of the seasons cast their seductive spell.

This part of Italy has been working on its remarkable heritage since Etruscan times, meaning there's mountains to see and do. Explore a World Heritage Site in the morning, visit a vineyard in the afternoon and bunk down in a palatial villa or overwhelmingly rural *agriturismo* (farm stay accommodation) with indigenous black pigs at night. Renaissance paintings and Gothic cathedrals? Check. Spectacular trekking and sensational Slow Food? Yep. Hills laden with vines and ancient olive groves? More than you can possibly imagine.

When to Go

Florence



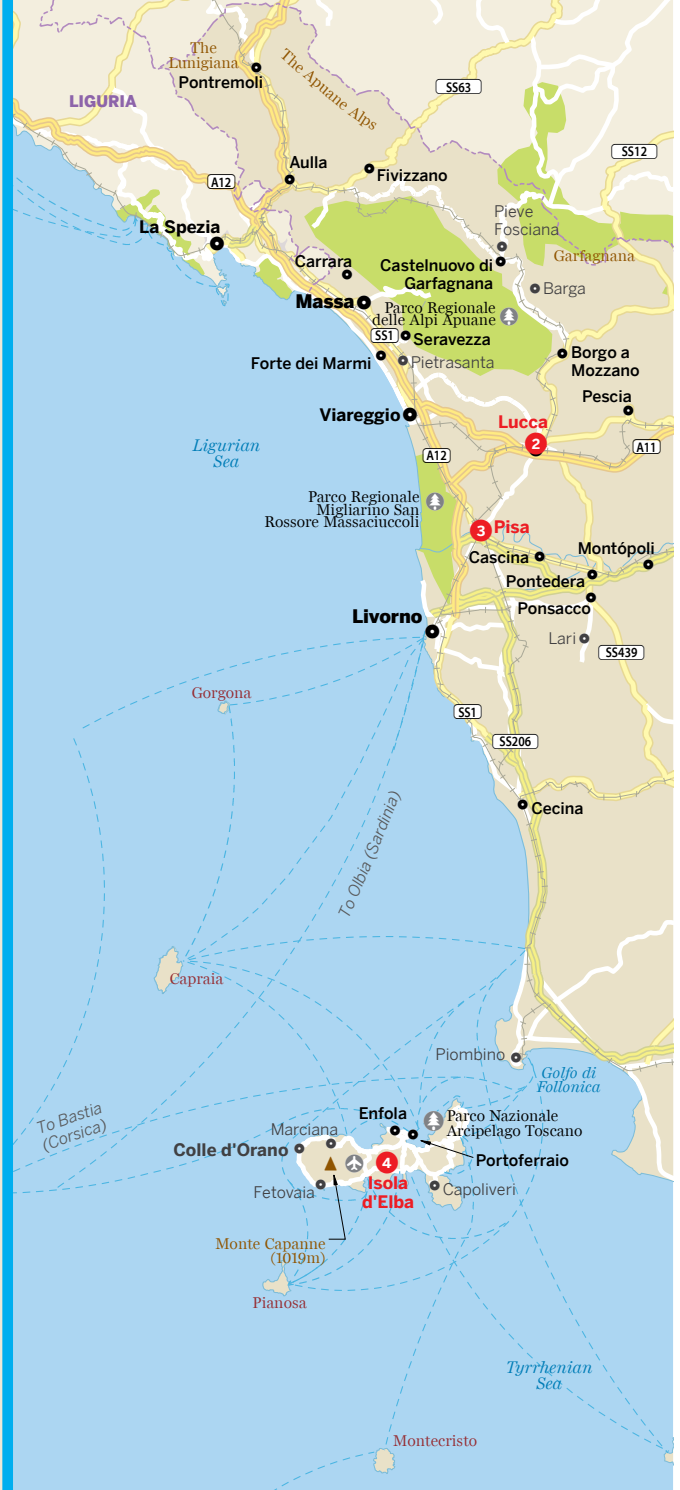
May & Jun Wildflower-adorned landscapes beg outdoor action, be it walking, cycling or horse riding.

Jul Not as madbusy as August (avoid) and with music festivals aplenty.

Sep–Nov Grapes and olives are harvested; forests yield white truffles and porcini mushrooms.

Florence & Tuscany Highlights

1. **Uffizi** (p485) Swooning over Florence's treasures: the world's finest collection of Renaissance paintings at the Uffizi and the dome of Brunelleschi's Duomo.
2. **Lucca** (p565) Pedalling and picnicking atop stone city walls.
3. **Leaning Tower** (p560) Getting lost in medieval Pisa and scaling its iconic tower at sunset.
4. **Elba** (p557) Setting sail for the Mediterranean isle and sleeping on an olive estate scented with orange blossoms and olive groves.
5. **Chianti** (p525) Vineyard-hopping tand lunching at an Antinori family estate.
6. **Siena** (p516) Gorging on Gothic architecture and almond biscuits.
7. **Abbazia di Sant'Antimo** (p541) Being spellbound by Gregorian chants in the compelling abbey near Montalcino.
8. **Città del Tufo** (p547) Exploring Etruscan heritage.
9. **Arezzo** (p571) Marvelling at frescoes in Cappella Bacci and the beautiful Tuscan square Piazza Grande.



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Friuli Venezia Giulia

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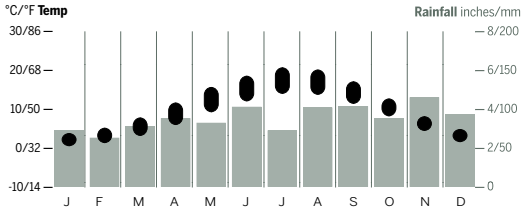
Why Go?

With its triple-barrelled moniker, Friuli Venezia Giulia's multifaceted nature should come as no surprise. Cultural complexity is cherished in this small, little-visited region, tucked away on Italy's far northeastern borders with Austria and Slovenia. Friuli Venezia Giulia's landscapes offer profound contrasts too, with the foreboding, perpetually snowy Giulie and Carnic Alps in the north, idyllic grapevine-filled plains in the centre, the south's beaches, Venetian-like lagoons and the curious, craggy karst that encircles Trieste.

While there's an amazing reserve of often uncrowded historical sights, from Roman ruins to Austro-Hungarian palaces, this is also a fine destination for simply kicking back with the locals, tasting the region's world-famous wines and discovering a culinary heritage that will broaden your notions of the Italian table. Serene, intriguing Trieste and friendly, feisty Udine make for great city time – they're so easy and welcoming you'll soon feel as if you're Friulian, Venezian or Giulian too.

When to Go

Trieste



Feb Discover the uncrowded slopes of the Carnic and Giulie Alps.

Jun Feast on prosciutto at San Daniele's Aria di Festa.

Oct Watch sails fill the horizon at Trieste's Barcolana Regatta.

Friuli Venezia Giulia Highlights

1 **Trieste** (p403) Communing with the literary ghosts in this extraordinary city.

2 **Basilica di Santa Maria Assunta** (p416) Being enthralled by the extraordinary 4th-century mosaic floors of this Aquileia church.

3 **Frasca di Citta** (p423) Relaxing Udinese-style, with late-night wine and *frico* (fried cheese).

4 **Tempietto Longobardo** (p424) Marvelling at the 8th-century Lombard chapel in Cividale del Friuli.

5 **Grado** (p417) Strolling the lively old town of this sun-drenched beach resort.

6 **Zidarich** (p414) Tasting your way through the wild and wonderful wines of the Carso.

7 **Sauris** (p426) Discovering the lakes, forests, peaks and prosciutto of this little-visited region.

8 **Sella Nevea** (p427) Skiing some of Europe's snowiest and least crowded slopes.

History

The semi-autonomous region of Friuli Venezia Giulia came into being as recently as 1954; its new capital, Trieste, had already traded national allegiances five times since the beginning of the century. Such is the region's history, a rollicking, often blood-stained one of boom, bust and conquest that began with the Romans in Aquileia, saw Cividale rise to prominence under the Lombards, and witnessed the Venetians do their splendid thing in Pordenone and Udine. It was Austria, however, that established the most lasting foothold, with Trieste as its

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Behind the Scenes

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OUR READERS

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- Cracco (p254)
- Seta (p254)
- Casabella (p266)
- Materia (p279)

Best Places to Sleep

- Lido Palace (p286)
- Atellani Apartments (p251)
- Hotel Silvio (p275)
- Hotel Garni Villa Maria (p286)
- Da Vittorio (p292)

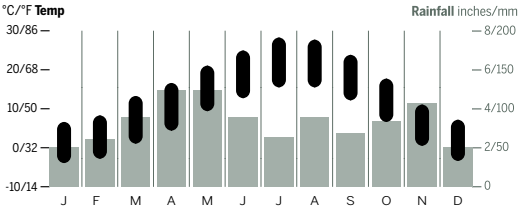
Why Go?

Wedged between the Alps and the Po valley, the lakes of Lombardy (Lombardia) were formed at the end of the last ice age, and have been a popular holiday spot since Roman times. At the region's heart is Milan, capital of the north and Italy's second-largest city. Home to the nation's stock exchange, one of Europe's biggest trade-fair grounds and an international fashion hub, it is also Italy's economic powerhouse.

Beyond Milan pretty countryside unfolds, dotted with patrician towns including Pavia, Monza, Bergamo, Cremona and Mantua; all are steeped in history, hiding Unesco monuments and world-class museums. To the north a burst of Mediterranean colour and a balmy microclimate awaits around lakes Orta, Maggiore, Como, Garda and Iseo. Ringed by hot-pink oleanders in tiered gardens, the lakes are powerfully seductive. No wonder European aristocrats, Arab princes and Hollywood celebrities choose to call this home.

When to Go

Milan



Spring (Mar–Jun) Peak season – delightful weather, Salone (Furniture Fair) and Fashion Weeks are in progress.

Summer (Jul & Aug) Low season in Milan. The city is hot and everyone heads to the lakes and mountains.

Winter (Nov–Feb) Opera season starts (December); followed by Christmas fairs.

Milan & the Lakes Highlights

1 The Last Supper (p247) Pondering the power of Leonardo Da Vinci's ageless painting.

2 Il Duomo (p243) Climbing Milan's marble cathedral for views of spires and flying buttresses.

3 Museo del Novecento (p243) Discovering the modernists who shaped Milan.

4 Accademia Carrara (p291) Coming face to face with Old Masters in Bergamo's newly renovated gallery.

5 Isola Bella (p265) Strolling in Lago Maggiore's most spectacular island garden.

6 Lago di Como (p270) Touring this famous lake James Bond–style, in your own cigarette boat.

7 Riva del Garda (p285) Sailing, surfing and kayaking beneath the snowcapped peaks.

8 Palazzo Ducale (p295) Marvelling at sumptuous Renaissance frescoes in this Mantuan palace.

9 Orta San Giulio (p268) Discovering lake-side bliss in this enchanting town on Lago d'Orta.

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Naples & Campania

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- La Cantina del Feudo (p714)
- Salumeria (p670)
- Soul & Fish (p701)

Best Places to Sleep

- Atelier Ines (p670)
- Casa Mariantonia (p679)
- Albergo il Monastero (p683)
- Hotel Piazza Bellini (p670)
- Palazzo Marziale (p700)

Why Go?

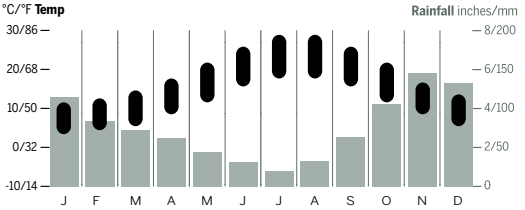
Campania is the Italy of your wildest dreams; a rich, intense, hypnotic *ragù* of Arabesque street life, decadent palaces, pastel-hued villages and aria-inspiring vistas.

Few corners of Europe can match the cultural conundrums here. Should you spend the morning waltzing through chandeliered Bourbon bedrooms or the frescoed villa of a Roman emperor's wife? And which of Caravaggio's canvases shouldn't you miss: the multi-scene masterpiece inside Naples' Pio Monte della Misericordia, or the artist's brooding swansong inside the city's belle époque Palazzo Zevallos?

Mother Nature let loose in Italy's south, creating a thrilling playground of rugged mountains, steaming fumaroles, and ethereal coastal grottoes. Horse ride the slopes of Mt Vesuvius, sail the Amalfi Coast or simply soak at a thermal beach on Ischia. Afterwards, local feasts await; bubbling, wood-fired pizza in Naples, long lunches at Cilento *agriturismi* (farm stays), and lavish pastries at celebrity-status Amalfi Coast *pasticcerie* (pastry shops).

When to Go

Naples



May Best month to visit the region. Warm days, with many special events on.

Jun & Sep Generally deliver summer heat without the August crowds and traffic.

Aug Hottest month; many shops and restaurants close while locals go on holiday.

NAPLES

081 / POP 970,200

Italy's third-largest city is one of its oldest, most artistic and most appetising. Naples' *centro storico* (historic centre) is a Unesco World Heritage Site, its archaeological treasures are among the world's most important, and its palaces, castles and churches make Rome look positively provincial.

Then there's the food. Blessed with rich volcanic soils, a bountiful sea, and centuries of culinary know-how, the Naples region is one of Italy's epicurean heavyweights, serving up the country's best pizza, pasta and coffee, and many of its most celebrated seafood dishes, street snacks and sweet treats.

Certainly, Naples' urban sprawl can feel anarchic, tattered and unloved. But look beyond the grime, graffiti and occasional gruffness and you'll uncover a city of breathtaking frescoes, sculptures and panoramas, of unexpected elegance, of spontaneous conversations and profound humanity. Welcome to Italy's most unlikely masterpiece.

History

After founding nearby Cuma in the 8th century BC, the ancient Greeks settled the city in around 680 BC, calling it Parthenope. Under the Romans, the area became an ancient Miami of sorts: a sun-soaked spa region that drew the likes of Virgil. Dampening the bonhomie was Mt Vesuvius' eruption in AD 79.

Naples fell into Norman hands in 1139 before the French Angevins took control a century later, boosting the city's cred with the mighty Castel Nuovo. By the 16th century, Naples was under Spanish rule and riding high on Spain's colonial riches. By 1600, it was Europe's largest city and a burgeoning baroque beauty adorned by artists like Luca Giordano, Giuseppe de Ribera and Caravaggio.

Despite a devastating plague in 1656, Naples' ego soared under the Bourbons (1734–1860), with epic constructions such as the Teatro San Carlo and the Reggia di Caserta sealing the city's showcase reputation.

An ill-fated attempt at republican rule in 1799 was followed by a short stint under the French and a final period of Bourbon governance before nationalist rebel Giuseppe Garibaldi inspired the city to snip off the puppet strings and join a united Italy in 1860.

Although the Nazis took Naples in 1943, they were quickly forced out by a series of popular uprisings between 26 and 30 September, famously known as the *Quattro giornate di Napoli* (Four Days of Naples). Led by locals, especially by young *scugnizzi* (Neapolitan for 'street urchins') and ex-soldiers, the street battles paved the way for the Allies to enter the city on 1 October.

Despite setting up a provisional government in Naples, the Allies were confronted with an anarchic mass of troops, German prisoners of war and bands of Italian fascists all competing with the city's starving population for food. Overwhelmed, Allied authorities turned to the underworld for assistance. As long as the Allies agreed to turn a blind eye to their black-market activities, the Mafia was willing to help. And so the Camorra (Neapolitan Mafia) was given a boost.

On 23 November 1980, a devastating earthquake struck the mountainous area of Irpinia, 100km east of Naples. The quake, which left more than 2700 people dead and thousands more homeless, caused extensive damage in Naples. It is believed that US$6.4 billion of the funds poured into the region to assist the victims and rebuilding ended up in the pockets of the Camorra.

In 2011, Neapolitan voters elected the city's current mayor, Luigi de Magistris, a youthful former public prosecutor and vocal critic of both the mafia and government corruption. Determined to improve the city's liveability, de Magistris has pushed through a number of initiatives, including the transformation of the Lungomare from a traffic-clogged thoroughfare into a pedestrian and bike-friendly waterfront strip.

Sights

Centro Storico

★Complesso Monumentale di Santa Chiara BASILICA

(Map p658; 081 551 66 73; www.monastero disantachiara.com; Via Santa Chiara 49c; basilica free, Complesso Monumentale adult/reduced €6/4.50; basilica 7.30am-1pm & 4.30-8pm, Complesso Monumentale 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2.30pm Sun; M Dante) Vast, Gothic and cleverly deceptive, the mighty **Basilica di Santa Chiara** stands at the heart of this tranquil monastery complex. The church was severely damaged in WWII: what you see today is a 20th-century recreation of Gagliardo Primario's 14th-century original. Adjoining it are the basilica's **cloisters**, adorned with brightly coloured 17th-century majolica tiles and frescoes.

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Welcome to Italy

Home to many of the world's greatest works of art, architecture and gastronomy, Italy elates, inspires and moves like no other place.

Cultural Riches

Epicentre of the Roman Empire and birthplace of the Renaissance, this European virtuoso groans under the weight of its cultural cachet: it's here that you'll stand in the presence of Michelangelo's *David* and Sistine Chapel frescoes, Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and *Primavera* and da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. In fact, Italy has more Unesco World Heritage cultural sites than any other country on Earth. Should you walk in the footsteps of ancient Romans in Pompeii, revel in Ravenna's glittering Byzantine treasures or get breathless over Giotto's revolutionary frescoes in Padua? It's a cultural conundrum as thrilling as it is overwhelming.

Inimitable Style

In few places do art and life intermingle so effortlessly. This may be the land of Dante, Titian and Verdi, but it's also the home of Prada, Massimo Bottura and Renzo Piano. Beauty, style and flair furnish every aspect of daily life, from those immaculately knotted ties and seamless espressos to the flirtatious smiles of striking strangers. The root of Italian psychology is a dedication to living life well, and effortless as it may seem, driving that dedication is a reverence for the finer things. So slow down, style up and indulge in a little *vita all'italiana* (life, Italian style).

Endless Feasts

It might look like a boot, but food-obsessed Italy feels more like a decadently stuffed Christmas stocking. From delicate *tagliatelle al ragù* to velvety *cannoli,* every bite can feel like a revelation. The secret: superlative ingredients and finely tuned know-how. And while Italy's culinary soul might prefer simplicity, it's also ingenious and sophisticated. Expect some of the world's top fine-dining destinations, from San Pellegrino 'World's Best 50' hot spots to Michelin-starred musts. So whether you're on a degustation odyssey in Modena, truffle hunting in Piedmont or swilling powerhouse reds in the Valpolicella wine region, prepare to loosen that belt.

Spectacular Landscapes

Italy's fortes extend beyond its galleries, wardrobes and dining rooms. The country is one of mother nature's masterpieces, with extraordinary natural diversity matched by few. From the north's icy Alps and glacial lakes to the south's fiery craters and turquoise grottoes, this is a place for doing as well as seeing. One day you're tearing down Courmayeur's powdery slopes, the next you could be galloping across the marshes of the Maremma, or diving in coral-studded Campanian waters. Not bad for a country not much bigger than Arizona.

BARRY WINIKER/GETTY IMAGES ©

Why I Love Italy

By Cristian Bonetto, Writer

Italy's 20 regions feel more like 20 independent states, each with its own dialects, traditions, architecture and glorious food. From nibbling on *knödel* in an Alto Adige chalet to exploring souk-like market streets in Sicily, the choices are as diverse as they are seductive. Then there's the country's incomparable artistic treasures, which amount to more than the rest of the world put together. It's hard not to feel a little envious sometimes, but it's even harder not to fall madly in love.

For more about our writers, see p992

Above: Mercato di Ballarò (p789), Palermo, Sicily

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Puglia, Basilicata & Calabria

Includes ➡

Bari 722
Isole Tremiti 734
Valle d'Itria 736
Salento 743
Matera 757
Venosa 766

Best Places to Eat

- Dedalo (p763)
- Al Trabucco da Mimì (p734)
- Trattoria Il Rifugio della Buona Stella (p747)
- Trattoria Terra Madre (p737)
- Paglionico Vini e Cucina (p724)
- La Cantina del Macellaio (p776)

Best Places to Sleep

- Hotel Il Belvedere (p761)
- Locanda delle Donne Monache (p767)
- Palazzo Rollo (p746)
- Relais Parallelo 41 (p729)
- Il Frantoio (p740)

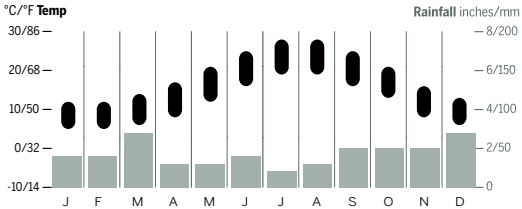
Why Go?

The Italian boot's heel (Puglia), instep (Basilicata) and toe (Calabria) are where the 'Mezzogiorno' (southern Italy) shows all its throbbing intensity. Long stereotyped as the poorer, more passionate cousins of Italy's sophisticated northerners, these regions are finally being appreciated for their true richness. You *will* see washing on weather-worn balconies, scooters speeding down medieval alleys and ancient towns crumbling under Mediterranean suns. But look past the pasta-advert stereotypes and you'll find things altogether more complex and wonderful; gritty, unsentimental cities with pedigrees stretching back thousands of years; dramatically broken coastlines that have harboured fisherfolk and pirates for millennia; and above all, proud and generous people, eager to share these delights with you.

Puglia is defined by its coast, the longest in Italy; little Basilicata touches two seas, but is known for forests and mountains; while Calabria, last stop before Sicily, is a hodgepodge of Greek, Latin, African and Norman influences.

When to Go

Bari



Apr–Jun Spring wildflowers are blooming: perfect for hiking in the Pollino National Park.

Jul & Aug Summer is beach weather and festivals blossom in towns such as Lecce and Matera.

Sep & Oct Crowds have thinned, the weather is mild, and mushrooms are emerging in Sila National Park.

Puglia, Basilicata & Calabria Highlights

1 Matera (p757) Marvelling at the contrast between miserable caves and soaring cathedrals in this ancient city.

2 Lecce (p743) Learning to love the flowery excesses of the city's baroque architecture.

3 Valle d'Itria (p736) Eating the best of the Mediterranean diet in the valley's gorgeous hilltowns.

4 Vieste (p728) Searching for early-morning photo ops around the cream-coloured lanes of this divine coastal town.

5 Maratea (p767) Driving with the top down and the sea in your nostrils around an impossibly

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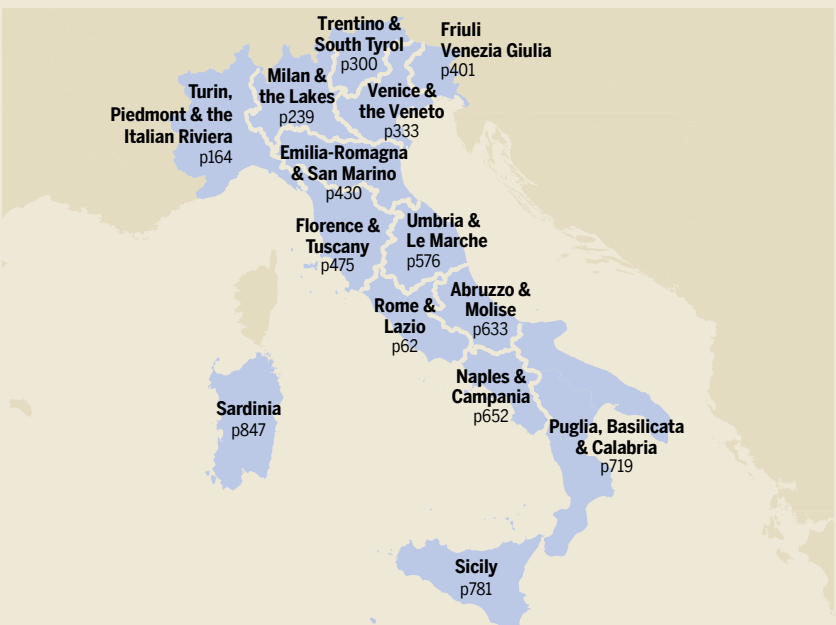
On the Road



Rome & Lazio

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Tivoli 153
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- Pianostrada (p129)
- Pizzarium (p136)
- La Nostra Paranza (p162)
- Gli Archi (p163)
- Antico Ristorante Pagnanelli (p161)
- Sbanco (p132)

Best Places to Sleep

- Palm Gallery Hotel (p128)
- Generator Hostel (p123)
- Inn at the Roman Forum (p122)
- Residenze Gregoriane (p155)
- Villa Ersilia (p163)

Why Go?

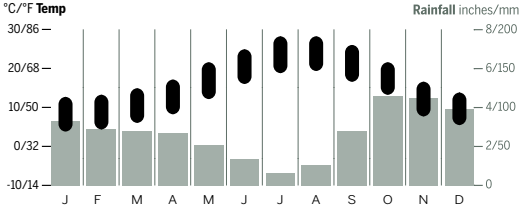
From ancient treasures and artistic gems to remote hilltop monasteries, sandy beaches and volcanic lakes, Lazio is one of Italy's great surprise packages. Its epic capital needs no introduction. Rome has been mesmerising travellers for millennia and still today it casts a powerful spell. Its romantic cityscape, piled high with martial ruins and iconic monuments, is achingly beautiful, and its museums and basilicas showcase some of the world's most celebrated masterpieces.

But beyond the city, Lazio more than holds its own. Cerveteri and Tarquinia's Etruscan tombs, Hadrian's vast Tivoli estate, the remarkable ruins of Ostia Antica – these are sights to rival anything in the country.

Nature has contributed too, and the region boasts pockets of great natural beauty – lakes surrounded by lush green hills, wooded Apennine peaks and endless sandy beaches. Add fabulous food and wine and you have the perfect recipe for a trip to remember.

When to Go

Rome



Apr–Jun
The best time for visiting Rome is spring. Easter is busy in Rome and peak rates apply

Jul–Aug
Lazio's beaches and lakes get very busy in the peak summer months.

Sep–Oct
Autumn is a good time for visiting regional sites. Festivals and outdoor events are on.

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Sardinia

Includes ➡

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- Il Portico (p883)
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Best Places to Sleep

- Casa Solotti (p883)
- B&B Domus de Janas (p880)
- Angedras Hotel (p870)
- Hotel Nautilus (p854)
- B&B Lu Pastruccialeddu (p878)
- Agriturismo Codula Fuili (p889)

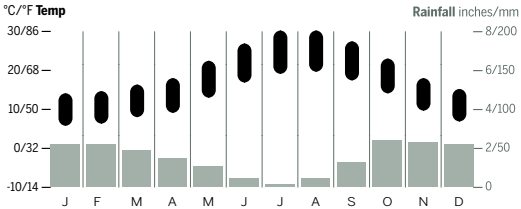
Why Go?

As DH Lawrence so succinctly put it: 'Sardinia is different'. Indeed, where else but on this 365-village, four-million-sheep island could you travel from shimmering bays to near-alpine forests, granite peaks to snow-white beaches, rolling vineyards to one-time bandit towns – all in the space of a day? Sardinia baffles with its unique prehistory at 7000 nuraghic sites, dazzles with its kaleidoscopic blue waters, and whets appetites with island treats like spit-roasted suckling pig, sea urchins, crumbly *pecorino* cheese, Vermentino whites and Cannonau reds.

Over millennia islanders have carved out a unique identity, cuisine, culture and language. And whether you're swooning over the mega-yachts in the Costa Smeralda's fjord-like bays or kicking back at a rustic *agriturismo* (farm stay accommodation), you can't help but appreciate this island's love of the good life. Earthy and glamorous, adventurous and blissfully relaxed, Sardinia delights in being that little bit different.

When to Go

Cagliari



Feb Pre-Lenten shenanigans, from Carnivale madness to medieval jousting at Oristano's Sa Sartiglia.

Mar-May Spring wildflowers, Easter parades, and hiking without the heat and crowds.

Jun-Aug Sun-kissed beaches, open-air festivals and folksy fun at Nuoro's Sagra del Redentore.

Sardinia Highlights

1 Gola Su Gorropu (p885) Walking on the wild side in Sardinia's most spectacular gorge.

2 Costa Verde (p861) Feeling the lure of the sea on the windswept beaches of Sardinia's southwest coast.

3 Il Castello (p851) Wandering the medieval backstreets of Cagliari's rocky citadel.

4 Costa Smeralda (p878) Rubbing bronzed shoulders with the rich and super-famous.

5 Nuraghe Su Nuraxi (p861) Boning up on prehistory at Sardinia's sole World Heritage Site.

6 Golfo di Orosei (p888) Dropping anchor in brilliant

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Sicily

Includes ➡

Palermo 785
Cefalù 796
Vulcano 803
Stromboli 807
Taormina 809
Catania 814
Mt Etna 820
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Best Places to Eat

- Accursio (p832)
- Il Barcaiolo (p812)
- Ristorante Crocifisso (p830)
- Osteria La Bettolaccia (p844)
- Punta Lena (p809)

Best Places to Stay

- Hotel Ravesi (p806)
- B&B Crociferi (p817)
- Stanze al Genio Residenze (p791)
- Villa Quartarella (p831)
- Pensione Tranchina (p841)

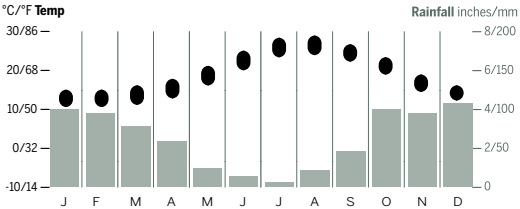
Why Go?

More of a sugar-spiked espresso than a milky cappuccino, Sicily rewards visitors with an intense, bittersweet experience. Overloaded with art treasures and natural beauty, undersupplied with infrastructure, and continuously struggling against Mafia-driven corruption, Sicily's complexities sometimes seem unfathomable. To really appreciate this place, come with an open mind – and a healthy appetite. Despite the island's perplexing contradictions, one factor remains constant: the uncompromisingly high quality of the cuisine.

After 25 centuries of foreign domination, Sicilians are the heirs to an impressive cultural legacy, from the refined architecture of Magna Graecia to the Byzantine splendour and Arab craftwork of the island's Norman cathedrals and palaces. This cultural richness is matched by a startlingly diverse landscape that includes bucolic farmland, smouldering volcanoes and kilometres of island-studded aquamarine coastline.

When to Go

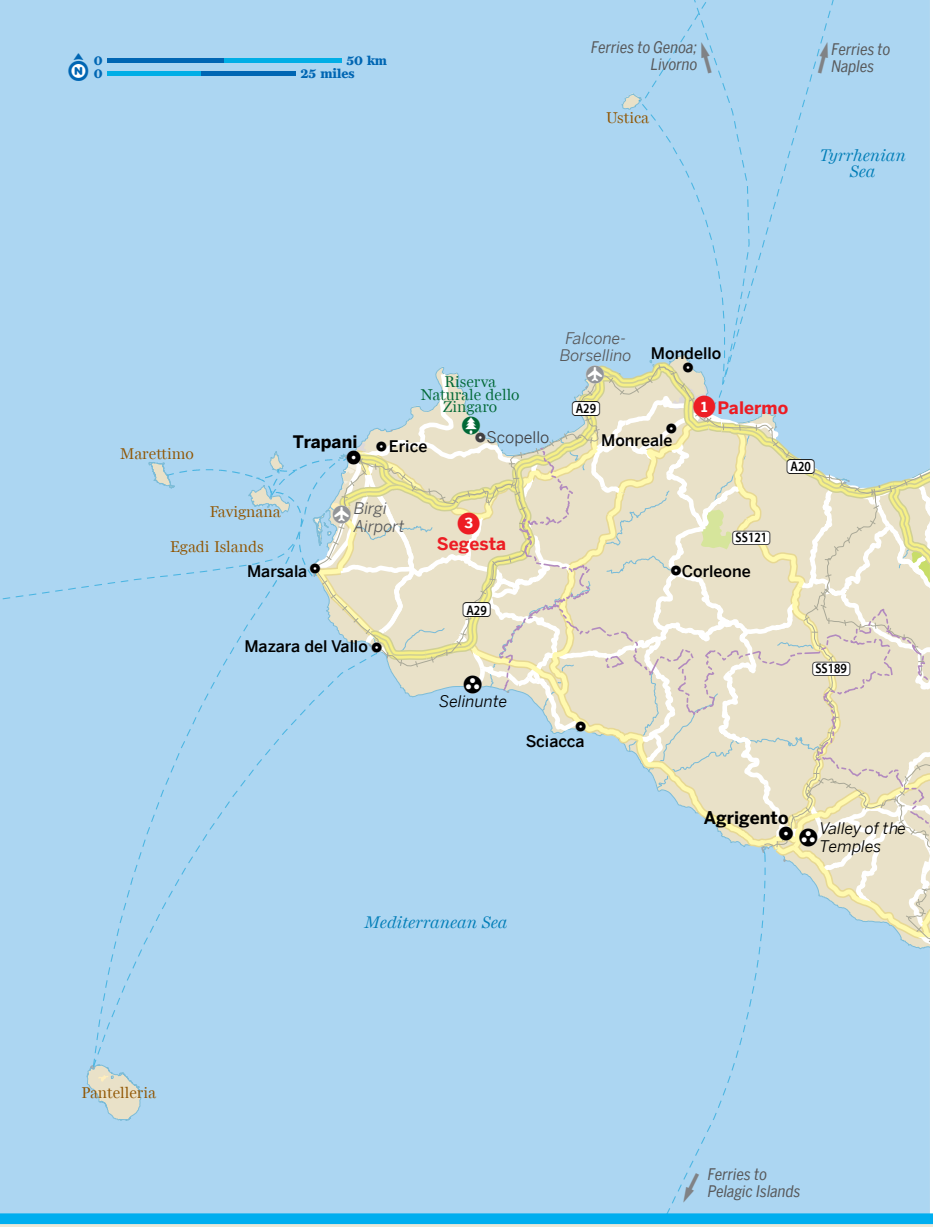
Palermo



Easter Colourful religious processions and marzipan lambs in every bakery window.

May Wildflowers, dreamy coastal walking and Syracuse's festival of classic drama.

Sep Warm weather and seaside fun without summer prices.



Sicily Highlights

1 Teatro Massimo (p791) Joining the ranks of impeccably dressed opera-goers at this elegant theatre in Palermo.

2 Catania (p814) Bargaining with fish vendors at dawn, climbing Europe's most active volcano in the afternoon, and returning to buzzing nightlife.

3 Segesta (p846) Marvelling at the majesty of the 5th-century ruins, whose Doric temple sits in splendid isolation on a windswept hillside.

4 Taormina (p809) Watching international stars perform against Mt Etna's backdrop at summer festivals.

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Trentino & South Tyrol

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Bolzano (Bozen).....312
Merano (Meran).....319
Parco Nazionale Dello Stelvio 321
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Best Places to Eat

- Zur Kaiserkron (p316)
- Paradeis (p318)
- Restaurant Ladinia (p329)
- St Hubertus (p329)
- Locanda Margon (p307)
- Pur Südtirol (p332)

Best Places to Stay

- Ottmanngut (p320)
- Niedermairhof (p332)
- Park Hotel Azalea (p323)
- Das Wanda (p318)
- Le Pedevilla (p332)
- Miramonti (p320)

Why Go?

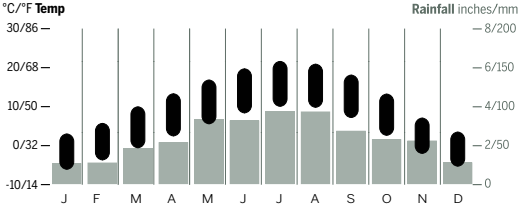
Home to Italy's most spectacular mountains, the Dolomites, the two semi-autonomous provinces of Trentino and South Tyrol (Südtirol or Alto Adige) offer up a number of stunning wilderness areas where adventure and comfort can be found in equal measure. The region has had a faithful fan club of skiers, hikers, climbers, poets and fresh-air fanciers for at least the last few centuries; today the region's ridiculously scenic Sella Ronda is one of the world's most iconic ski circuits.

Wooden farmhouses dot vine- and orchard-covered valleys and the region's cities – the southerly enclave of Trento, the Austro-Italian Bolzano and the very Viennese Merano – are easy to navigate, cultured and fun. From five-star spa resorts to the humblest mountain hut, multigenerational hoteliers combine genuine warmth with extreme professionalism.

Nowhere are the oft-muddled borders of Italy's extreme north reflected more strongly than on the plate: don't miss out on tasting one of Europe's most fascinating, and tasty, cultural juxtapositions.

When to Go

Bolzano



Jan Grab a bargain on the slopes between the Christmas and February highs.

Jul Hit the high-altitude trails and mountain huts of the Alte Vie.

Dec Get festive at Tyrolean Christmas markets in Bolzano, Merano and Bressanone.

TRENTINO

Trento

0461 / POP 117,300 / ELEV 194M

The capital of Trentino is quietly confident, liberal and easy to like. Bicycles glide along spotless streets fanning out from the atmospheric, intimate Piazza del Duomo, students clink *spritzes* by Renaissance fountains and a dozen historical eras intermingle seamlessly among stone castles, shady porticoes and the city's signature medieval frescoes. While there's no doubt you're in Italy, Trento does have its share of Austrian influence: apple strudel is ubiquitous and beer halls not uncommon. Set in a wide glacial valley guarded by the crenellated peaks of the Brenta Dolomites, amid a patchwork of vineyards and apple orchards, Trento is a perfect jumping-off point for hiking, skiing or wine tasting. And road cycling is huge: 400km of paved cycling paths fan out from here. Those with an interest in early-modern history will also find Trento fascinating: the Council of Trent convened here in the 16th-century, during the tumultuous years of the Counter-Reformation, dishing out far-reaching condemnations to uppity Protestants.

Sights

★MUSE MUSEUM

(Museo della Scienze; 0461 27 03 11; www.muse.it; Corso del Lavoro e della Scienza 3; adult/reduced €10/8, guided tours (in English by appointment) €3; 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, to 9pm Wed, to 7pm Sat & Sun;) A stunning new architectural work, care of Renzo Piano, houses this 21st-century science museum and cleverly echoes the local landscape. Curatorially, the museum typifies the city's brainy inquisitiveness, with highly interactive exhibitions that explore the Alpine environment, biodiversity and sustainability, society and technology. Highlights are a truly amazing collection of taxidermy, much of it suspended in a multistorey atrium, along with a fabulous experiential kids' area. During the week the museum's working laboratories are open to visitors – check the website for session times.

★Civica GALLERY

(Galleria Civica di Trento; 0461 98 55 11; www.mart.tn.it/galleriacivica; Via Belenzani 44; €2; 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Tue-Sun) This city gallery–project space is the current Trento campus of MART (Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto; p308) and focuses on 20th-century and contemporary art, architecture and design of the region. The small space's seasonal program is always fascinating and tightly curated and there's an interesting little merchandise **shop** in the entrance.

Villa Margon HISTORIC BUILDING

(0461 972 416; www.ferraritrento.it; Via Margone; 9am-4pm Wed-Sat Apr-Oct, by appointment) Built by a Venetian family as a summer house in the 1540s, Villa Margon is one of the most beautiful historic sites in Trentino. Frescoes documenting the life of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V line a series of reception rooms and are both startling for their narrative content and for their vivid, and entirely unretouched, colour. The setting is no less lovely with a backing of mountains and a tight circle of forest making it feel far more remote than it actually is.

Duomo CATHEDRAL

(Cattedrale di San Vigilio; 0461 23 12 93; www.cattedralesanvigilio.it; Piazza del Duomo; archaeological area adult/reduced €1.50/1; 6.30am-6pm) Once host to the Council of Trent, Romanesque cathedral displays fragments of medieval frescoes inside its transepts. Two colonnaded stairways flank the nave, leading, it seems, to heaven. Below is a paleo-Christian **archaeological area**, which includes the 4th-century temple devoted to San Vigilio, patron saint of Trento, and a number of Christian martyrs murdered by pagans in the nearby Val di Non.

Piazza del Duomo PIAZZA

Trento's heart is this busy yet intimate piazza, dominated, of course, by the *duomo*, but also host to the **Fontana di Nettuno**, a flashy late-baroque fountain rather whimsically dedicated to Neptune. Intricate, allegorical frescoes fill the 16th-century facades of the **Casa Cazuffi-Rella**, on the piazza's northern side.

Museo Diocesano Tridentino MUSEUM

(Palazzo Pretorio; 0461 23 44 19; www.museodiocesanotridentino.it; Piazza del Duomo 18; adult/reduced incl archaeological area €5/3; 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Wed-Mon summer, 9.30am-12.30pm, 2-5.30pm Mon, Wed-Sat winter) Sitting alongside the Duomo, this former bishop's residence dates from the 11th century. It now houses one of Italy's most important ecclesiastical collections with enormous documentary paintings of the Council of Trent, along with Flemish tapestries, exquisite illustrated manuscripts,

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Turin, Piedmont & the Italian Riviera

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- La Sosta di Ottone III (p188)

Why Go?

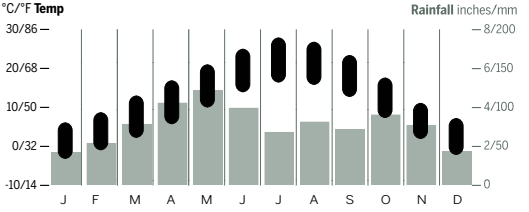
The beauty of northwestern Italy is its diversity. Piedmont's capital, Turin, is an elegant, easy city of baroque palaces, cutting-edge galleries and fittingly fabulous dining. While the region has been one of Italy's 20th-century industrial success stories, it has also retained deep, lasting links to the soil, its wines and culinary offerings earning it the name of the 'new Tuscany'.

To the south, Liguria's slim, often vertical, sliver is home to Italy's Riviera, the fabled port city of Genoa and the beguiling villages of Cinque Terre. Expect dramatic coastal topography, beautifully preserved architecture and one of Italy's most memorable cuisines.

Head north and you'll soon hit the Alps and the semi-autonomous region of Aosta, where you can ski or hike beneath Europe's highest mountains while discovering its delightful French-tinged traditions along the way.

When to Go

Turin



Jan–Mar Most reliable snow cover for skiing in the Alps.

Apr Fewer crowds and fine days on the Ligurian coast.

Sep & Oct Autumn food festivals in Turin and the Langhe.

THE ITALIAN RIVIERA

Italy's famed crescent of Mediterranean coast, where the Alps and the Apennines cascade into the sea, is defined by its sinuous, giddy landscapes. The region of Liguria is shaped by its extreme topography – its daily life is one of ascents and descents, always in the presence of a watery horizon.

Anchored beside the region's best natural harbour is noble Genoa. Known as La Superba (the Superb One) to biased locals, it's a city that ruled over one of the finest maritime empires in medieval Europe. Fanning out on either side is the Riviera (western 'Ponente', eastern 'Levante'), including the Portofino peninsula, along with legendary Cinque Terre.

This is both a deeply historic destination and a fabulously in-the-moment pleasure-seeking one, where you can explore lavish *palazzi* or humble village churches and then simply swim, eat, walk or stare at the sea.

Genoa

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Italy's largest sea port is indefatigably contradictory, full at once of grandeur, squalor, sparkling light and deep shade. But a gateway to the Riviera for many travellers today, a weighty architectural heritage speaks of its former glory – the Most Serene Republic of Genoa ruled over the Mediterranean waves during the 12th to the 13th centuries – and history feels alive in Genoa. No more is this true than in its extensive old city, an often confronting reminder of pre-modern life with its twisting maze of narrow *caruggi* (streets), largely intact. Emerge blinking from this thrillingly dank heart to Via Garibaldi and the splendid Enlightenment-era gold-leaf halls of the Unesco-listed Palazzi dei Rolli.

The city's once-tatty port area now hosts museums and a number of eating and drinking options. Its old town, too, has had its own far more organic revitalisation, with a bright new crop of fashionable shops, restaurants and bars lighting the way.

Sights

Old City AREA

(Centro Storico) The heart of medieval Genoa – bounded by ancient city gates Porta dei Vacca and Porta Soprana, and the streets of Via Cairoli, Via Garibaldi and Via XXV Aprile – is famed for its *caruggi* (narrow lanes). Looking up at the washing pegged on lines everywhere, it becomes obvious that these dark, cave-like laneways and blind alleys are still largely residential, although the number of fashionable bars, shops and cafes continues to grow.

Parts of the *caruggi* can feel somewhat unnerving, especially after dark. Although it's not particularly dangerous, do take care in the zone west of Via San Luca and south to Piazza Banchi, where most street prostitution and accompanying vice concentrates. East of the piazza is Via Orefici, where you'll find **market** stalls.

★Musei di Strada Nuova MUSEUM

(Palazzi dei Rolli; 010 557 21 93; www.museidigenova.it; Via Garibaldi; combined ticket adult/reduced €9/7; 9am-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-7.30pm Sat & Sun summer, to 6.30pm winter) Skirting the northern edge of what was once the city limits, pedestrianised Via Garibaldi (formerly called the Strada Nuova) was planned by Galeazzo Alessi in the 16th century. It quickly became the city's most sought-after quarter, lined with the palaces of Genoa's wealthiest citizens. Three of these *palazzi* – Rosso, Bianco (p168) and Doria-Tursi (p168) – today comprise the Musei di Strada Nuova. Between them, they hold the city's finest collection of old masters. Whether you visit the actual museums or not, the street is a must to wander.

Buy tickets to the Musei di Strada Nuova at the bookshop inside Palazzo Doria-Tursi.

Palazzo Rosso MUSEUM

(www.museidigenova.it; Via Garibaldi 18; combined ticket adult/reduced €9/7; 9am-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-7.30pm Sat & Sun summer, to 6.30pm winter) Lavishly frescoed rooms in Palazzo Rosso, part of the Musei di Strada Nuova, provide the backdrop for several portraits by Van Dyck of the local Brignole-Sale family. Other standouts include Guido Reni's *San Sebastiano* and Guercino's *La morte di Cleopatra* (The Death of Cleopatra), as well as works by Veronese, Dürer and Bernardo Strozzi.

Franco Albini Apartment ARCHITECTURE

(www.museidigenova.it; Palazzo Rosso, Via Garibaldi 18) One of Italy's best-loved 20th-century architects, Franco Albini was a key figure in the restoration of Genova's *palazzi* in the post-war period. The third floor of the Palazzo Rosso hides an Italian mid-century gem – an apartment Albini designed for the

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Umbria & Le Marche

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- Alla Madonna del Piatto (p598)

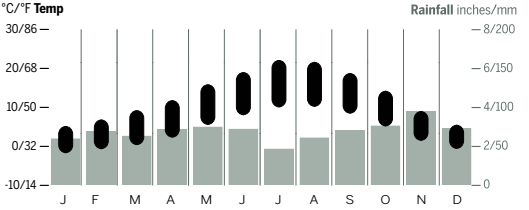
Why Go?

For years Italophiles have waxed lyrical about Tuscany's natural, artistic and culinary wonders, without so much as a passing nod to its neighbours, Umbria and Le Marche. How they have missed out! This phenomenally beautiful yet unsung region is Italy in microcosm: olive groves, vineyards, sun-ripened wheat fields stippled with wildflowers and hills plumed with cypress trees rolling gently west to the snow-dusted Apennines and east to the glittering Adriatic. In between, castle-topped medieval hill towns await, glowing like honey in the fading light of sundown.

The region scores highly on the artistic front, too, as the birthplace of Renaissance masters Raphael and Perugino, and sprightly composer Rossini. St Francis of Assisi, St Benedict and St Valentine all hail from here and make a spiritual pilgrimage to this area a profound one. So next time you glance at the map and your eyes alight on old favourite Tuscany, why not press on east? You won't regret it.

When to Go

Perugia



Feb Celebrate all things truffle at Norcia's Mostra Mercato del Tartufo Nero festival.

May Hit Le Marche's beaches, as wildflowers bloom on the Piano Grande.

Jun & Jul Get lost in music at the Spoleto Festival and Perugia's Umbria Jazz.

UMBRIA

Italy's green heart, Umbria is a land unto itself, the only Italian region that borders neither the sea nor another country. Removed from outside influences, it has kept alive many of Italy's old-world traditions. You'll see grandmothers in aprons making pasta by hand and front doors that haven't been locked in a century.

Separated from Le Marche by the jagged spine of the Monti Sibillini, it contrasts wild, in-your-face beauty with the gentle fall and rise of overlapping hills and wildflower-flecked meadows. The Etruscans, Romans and medieval feuding families have left their indelible imprint on its pretty hill towns, where history seems to creep up on you at every corner – from the Gothic wonder of Orvieto to Assisi's saintly calling.

Foodies are in their element here, with the rich earthiness of the *tartufo* (truffle), fine cured meats from Norcia and full-bodied local wines finding their way onto menus.

History

Umbria is named in honour of its first inhabitants, the Umbri tribe, who settled east of the Tiber around 1000 BC, establishing the towns of Spoleto, Gubbio and Assisi. They jockeyed for regional supremacy with the Etruscans to the west of the river – the founders of Perugia and Orvieto – until the 3rd century BC, when the Romans came marching through, conquering them both.

Following the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, the region spent much of the Middle Ages being fought over by Holy Roman Empire advocates (Ghibellines) and supporters of the Pope (Guelphs). Intriguingly, it was during this turbulent period that peace-loving St Francis came to prominence in Assisi.

Eventually the region became one of the Papal States, though this was not to its long-term benefit. Indeed, historians like to say that time stopped in Umbria in 1540 when the pope imposed a salt tax. The resulting war brought Umbrian culture to a standstill, which is partly why the medieval hearts of Umbrian towns are so well preserved.

Perugia has a strong artistic tradition. In the 15th century it was home to fresco painters Bernardino Pinturicchio and his master Pietro Vannucci (known as Perugino), who would later teach Raphael. Its cultural tradition continues to this day in the form of the University of Perugia and the famous Università per Stranieri (University for Foreigners; p583), which teaches Italian, art and culture to thousands of students from around the world.

USEFUL WEBSITES ON UMBRIA

Bella Umbria (www.bellaumbria.net) Accommodation and restaurant listings for Umbria. Search for festivals and events by location or date.

Regione Umbria (www.umbriatourism.it) The official Umbrian tourist website.

Sistema Museo (www.sistemamuseo.it) Get the inside scoop on Umbria's museums and upcoming events.

Umbria Online (www.umbriaonline.com) Find information on accommodation, events and itineraries.

Getting Around

While having your own wheels certainly makes it easier to reach those off-the-radar hill towns and rural corners of Umbria, it is possible to get to many places by public transport with a little pre-planning.

Buses head from Perugia to most towns in the area; check at the tourist office or the bus station for exact details. **Trenitalia** (www.trenitalia.com) sparsely criss-crosses Umbria, but **Busitalia** (www.fsbusitalia.it) fills in the blanks with bus and ferry services.

Your first port of call for mountain biking and road-cycling itineraries should be **Bike in Umbria** (http://bikeinumbria.it).

Perugia

POP 162,100

Lifted by a hill above a valley patterned with fields, where the River Tiber runs swift and clear, Perugia is Umbria's petite and immediately likeable capital. Its *centro storico* (historic centre) rises in a helter-skelter of cobbled alleys, arched stairways and piazzas framed by magnificent *palazzi* (mansions). History seeps through every shadowy corner of these streets and an aimless wander through them can feel like time travel.

Back in the 21st century, Perugia is a party-loving, pleasure-seeking university city, with students pepping up the nightlife and filling cafe terraces. The hopping summer event line-up includes one of Europe's best jazz festivals.

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Venice & the Veneto

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- Ristorante Quadri (p366)

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- Oltre Il Giardino (p364)
- Agriturismo San Mattia (p388)
- Hotel Gabbia d'Oro (p388)

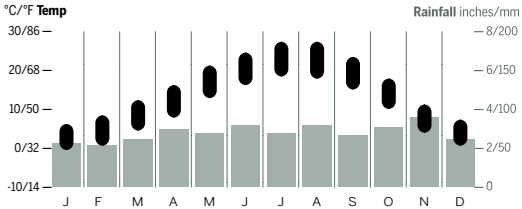
Why Go?

Venice really needs no introduction. This incomparable union of art, architecture and lagoon-based living has been a fabled destination for centuries. No matter how many photographs, films or paintings you've seen, the reality is more surprising and romantic than you could ever imagine. Many of the world's most famous writers and artists have visited to admire the mosaics of San Marco, the masterpieces in the Accademia and the city's maze of *calle* (lanes) and canals. They've written and painted Venice into the world's imagination, so it is no wonder that tourists outnumber locals by two to one on summer days.

Beyond Venice, the remainder of the Veneto region is often overlooked, but it is no less enticing. Giotto's spectacular frescoes in Padua, Palladio's elegant architecture in Vicenza, Verona's romantic riverside location and the Unesco-designated landscapes of the Dolomites would be unmissable anywhere else. So take our advice: love Venice then leave her. You won't regret it.

When to Go

Venice



Dec–Feb Snow-covered gondolas, skiers in the Dolomites and Carnevale parties.

Apr–Jun Warming weather, canalside dining and Biennale openings.

Sep–Nov Venice International Film Festival, wild duck pasta and palatial accommodation for less.

Venice & the Veneto Highlights

1 **Venice** (p336) Finally realising what all the fuss is about in this extraordinary city of canals, churches and palaces.

2 **Padua** (p378) Gazing in awe at the Cappella degli Scrovegni then kicking back with the students in statue-lined Prato della Valle.

3 **Verona** (p382) Experiencing opera in the astonishing 1st-century amphitheatre, right in the heart of the city centre.

4 **Treviso** (p396) Tasting some of Italy's best gelato in this pretty mid-sized city.

5 **La Strada del Prosecco** (p398) Taking a wine-fuelled tour of the vineyards strung out between Conegliano and Valdobbiadene.

6 **Valpolicella** (p390) Sampling one of Italy's boldest red wines, Amarone, at cutting-edge wineries.

7 **Vicenza** (p392) Indulging in art and Palladian architecture in one of Italy's most underrated cities.

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Understand Italy

ITALY TODAY 892

Despite problems unchanged for years, not to mention ever-increasing numbers of refugees and earthquakes, winds of change are making themselves felt in the *bel paese* (beautiful country).

HISTORY 894

Incestuous emperors, scheming popes and a delusional dictator: Italy's story is prime-time drama.

ITALIAN ART & ARCHITECTURE 909

For centuries Italy has set the aesthetic standard, from Caravaggio's canvases to dazzling contemporary architectural creations.

THE ITALIAN WAY OF LIFE 929

Fashionable, fastidious and *molto, molto* sexy – meet the people who put the *dolce* in *vita.*

ITALY ON PAGE & SCREEN 937

From divine comedies to darling divas, Italian creativity is the stuff of legend.

THE ITALIAN TABLE 941

In Italy food is sacred. Loosen your belt, pop the *prosecco* and get set for the feast of your life.

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Italy Today

Despite the approach of the 2020s, many of Italy's problems have remained unchanged for years. High unemployment and nepotism continue to drive ambitious young Italians out of the country, while ever-increasing numbers of refugees risk their lives to reach Italian shores. Meanwhile, geological instability has rattled central Italy with a string of destructive earthquakes. Thankfully, it's not all doom and gloom, with positive developments including cutting-edge urban renewal in Milan and hints of a southern Italian revival.

Best Blogs

Becoming Italian Word by Word (http://becomingitalianwordbyword.typepad.com) Italian language.
Parla Food (www.parlafood.com) Savvy food blogger Katie Parla.
Italian Food Forever (www.italianfoodforever.com) Umbria-based, delicious recipes.

Best on Film

La Grande Bellezza (Great Beauty; 2013) Paolo Sorrentino's Fellini-esque tribute to Italy.
La Dolce Vita (The Sweet Life; 1960) Federico Fellini capturing Italy's 1950s zeitgeist.
The Leopard (1963) Luchino Visconti's portrayal of the decaying Sicilian nobility.
Ladri di Biciclette (Bicycle Thieves; 1948) Vittorio De Sica's moving portrait of post-WWII Italy.

Best in Print

The Italians: A Full Length Portrait Featuring Their Manners and Morals (Luigi Barzini; 1964) Revealing portrait of the Italian character.
The Leopard (Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa; 1958) Masterpiece about tumultuous 19th-century changes.
The Italians (John Hooper; 2015) Italy correspondent assesses modern Italy.
Gomorrah (Roberto Saviano; 2006) Unputdownable epic about the Neapolitan Camorra (mafia).

Regions Rattled

Between August 2016 and January 2017, eight major earthquakes rattled the Appenine areas of Lazio, Le Marche, Umbria and Abruzzo in central Italy. The deadliest was a 6.2-magnitude quake on 24 August 2016. The earthquake caused close to 300 fatalities. Most of these were in the Lazio town of Amatrice, where the collapse of buildings deemed seismically sound exposed a lax approach to building codes. Four strong earthquakes struck Abruzzo on 18 January 2017. Of the 34 people killed, 29 perished when a post-quake avalanche slammed into a luxury mountain resort.

According to Italy's Civil Protection Agency (Dipartimento Protezione Civile), the damage bill from the eight quakes exceeds €23 billion. The tremors have delivered a particular blow to the regions' tourism and agricultural industries, considered backbones of their local economies. While both the Italian government and the EU have poured millions of euros into recovery efforts, some of Italy's fashion giants are also pitching in. Among these is luxury footwear company Tod's, whose new factory in Le Marche plans to boost employment in the local area. Meanwhile in Umbria, fashion mogul Brunello Cucinelli announced plans to finance the restoration of the Benedictine monastery flanking Norcia's medieval basilica.

Italexit?

While the UK's Brexit vote has solidified support for the Europe Union across much of the continent, Italy is bucking the trend. Figures released by the Pew Research Centre in 2017 revealed Italy to be the only EU nation where support for the bloc weakened over the previous year. A significant 35% of Italians are now in favour of leaving the EU, compared to 11% in Germany and 22% in France. Italy's figure matches that of Greece, making