

TRAVEL SECTION OF THE YEAR

The Daily Telegraph

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# TRAVEL



GETTY IMAGES

## Hit the holiday heights in the Dolomites

With saw-toothed summits, mountain lakes and flower-filled meadows, Italy's outdoor summer playground awaits, says Kiki Deere

Are summers in the Mediterranean now too hot to handle? That's the verdict of many, as evidenced by one of the newest travel trends, the "coolcation". A recent report from the European Travel Commission found that 28 per cent of travellers are now actively seeking out cooler destinations in the warmest months in order to avoid extreme heat. Fortunately there are plenty of places across the Continent that offer a respite, especially if you aim high. The prospect of a summer holiday in the mountains might not satisfy beach lovers, but the lofty trails and staggering views should more than

make up for it. You'll still end up with a tan, you just won't wilt in thermometer-busting temperatures. Head to Italy's Dolomites and you can expect a pleasant 25C on the valley floors, even in the hottest months. Yet there is so much more to recommend a holiday here. With their saw-toothed peaks and bare rock walls, they offer some of the most dramatic and beautiful scenery in Europe. A Unesco World Heritage Site, these limestone formations were once coral reefs, rising into mountains when the African and European tectonic plates began to collide 250 million years ago. The

▲ Take it all in: there's no shortage of staggering views when hiking in the Dolomites

result is a stunning patchwork of vertical rock and rolling meadows dotted with alpine lakes, medieval castles and charming mountain villages.

This striking natural setting makes the Dolomites a veritable outdoor playground, offering a wealth of open-air activities year-round. You'll also find vibrant cultural and culinary scenes here too, with some excellent contemporary galleries and museums as well as fresh and hearty local cuisine.

The Dolomites mostly lie within Italy's northernmost region of Trentino-Alto Adige, formed by two separate entities with very distinct identities: the

Italian-speaking Trentino to the south and, to the north, Alto Adige, best known as Südtirol (South Tyrol), where German is the preferred language. This itinerary is centred exclusively in Trentino-Alto Adige, designed to give you a flavour for both cultures. It would be impossible to include all of the region's highlights in this 10-day trip, but you can easily add a few days to explore other pockets, from Ladin-speaking Alta Badia to the Tre Cime di Lavaredo and the spa town of Merano.

*Continued on page 2*

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## Cover story



Continued from page 1

## Day 1

## Rovereto &amp; Pinzolo

## Head for the hills

Catch a morning flight to Verona airport, driving north to Trentino along the toll road that runs to the east of Lake Garda. If time allows, trace the lakefront road instead, taking in scenic views along the way. Your first stop is Rovereto, where you can stretch your legs halfway to your final destination as you explore the excellent Mart, one of Italy's premier contemporary and modern art museums. The collection includes more than 20,000 works, with a focus on Italian art by the likes of Francesco Hayez, Carlo Carrà and Giorgio de Chirico. For lunch, grab a bite at the museum's bistro then proceed north to the Brenta Dolomites, arriving in Pinzolo.

Visit the town's Chiesa di San Vigilio to admire its 16th-century frescoes depicting the Dance of Death, then check-in at the family-run Bio Hotel Hermitage in Madonna di Campiglio, or splash out for a pampering stay at Lefay Resort & Spa Dolomiti in Pinzolo. For dinner, try Rendetè, a contemporary-styled restaurant run by a young and dynamic team, serving flavoursome dishes that make the most of valley ingredients.

## Day 2

## Val Nambro

**Alpine lakes and stunning sunsets**  
Wake up in reasonable time for your first trek, one of the most picturesque circular hikes in the area that takes you past a string of glorious alpine lakes (five hours total). Drive to the Val Nambro, leaving your car at the Malga Vallina d'Amola car park, and hike to Rifugio Segantini in about an hour and a half. Stop off for a refreshing drink or a bite for lunch before continuing to the 33-metre-deep Lago Nero. Try to reach the lake as the sun begins to set – it's a stunning sight as the steep, rocky walls and well-defined contours of the entire Brenta Dolomites range spread out before you.

From here, the route leads to the nearby Cornisello Lakes, from where you can admire the peaks of the Adamello-Presanella range, before completing your loop. If you're keen to experience a night in a *rifugio*, try Rifugio Cornisello, which offers half-board; alternatively drive back to your hotel. Enjoy an aperitivo with a view courtesy of Sunsets at High Altitude, which sees participants enjoy a pre-dinner drink accompanied by live music at designated mountain venues.

## Day 3

## Adamello Brenta Nature Park

**Protected landscapes and picnics**  
Today, you'll trek to the heart of the Adamello Brenta Nature Park, Trentino's largest protected area, home to more than 1,300 species of plants, with chamois, deer, ibex and foxes a common sight; brown bears have also been reintroduced. With over 700km of



- ▲ Pause and reflect: the Brenta Dolomites shimmer in Lago Nero
- ▶ Family favourite: Muse, Trento's science museum, showcases natural history
- ▼ Future facing: the Messner Mountain Museum Corones was designed by famed architect Zaha Hadid

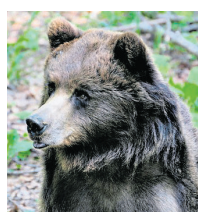


trails, there's plenty to explore, including the Bosco Val Brenta, thick woods of towering larch and spruce trees.

Set off from Prà de la Casa, an agriturismo run by Matteo and Dorian, who rustle up homemade fare using mountain herbs, and make for the Malga Brenta Bassa and Malga Brenta Alta, two ample clearings where you can sit back and unwind with a picnic lunch. You can take part in educational foraging trips through the woods with acclaimed forager Eleonora "Noris" Cunaccia or, if

▲ The high life: traditional mountain chalets are scattered over Seiser Alm, Europe's largest high-alpine plateau

▶ Bear in mind: the animals have been reintroduced to Adamello Brenta Nature Park, Trentino's largest protected area



you're up for trying something a little more unconventional, the Val Brenta is also home to eight natural wellness paths, including yoga, bare-footing, tree-hugging and natural Kneipp paths, with itineraries that can be carried out independently or led by experts.

Come evening, treat yourself to a Michelin-starred dinner at the excellent Stube Hermitage at the hotel in Madonna, with a cosy wood-clad dining area set out to resemble a traditional alpine *stube* living area.

## Expert tips

## Getting around

Renting a car is the best way to travel, allowing you to explore at your own pace, winding along scenic mountain roads and stopping off at sights along the way. There are good train links between Trento and Bolzano – Trentino and South Tyrol's main cities – and several services run through South Tyrol's main valleys. Otherwise rail transport is limited, with buses mostly connecting mountain villages

## Clothing

Make sure you pack appropriate clothes and outdoor gear, including comfortable walking shoes, sunscreen and a hat. Even in high summer, it gets chilly when hiking at high altitude – you should be prepared for wind, rain and even snow

## Climbing routes

Dotted throughout the Dolomites are via ferratas; climbing routes with ladders, rungs and steel cables. Some are designed for novices and even young children, although note that most are for experienced climbers

## Place names

Some locations have two – and sometimes three – names. In South Tyrol, you'll find towns with both German and Italian names. Bolzano, for example, is known by its German name Bozen, while the Alpe di Siusi plateau is Seiser Alm. Some towns also have names in Ladin, a Rhaeto-Romanic language spoken by some 30,000 people around the Sella massif

## Air travel

Several airports are conveniently placed, although flying to the wrong one means lengthy transfers along winding mountain roads. Verona Airport is within easy reach of southern Trentino; Milan Linate and Milan Bergamo are good choices to explore the south and the west of the region; Venice is best for exploring the eastern Dolomites; while Bolzano Airport and Innsbruck are most convenient for South Tyrol

## Free travel opportunities

The Trentino Guest Card or a Südtirol Guest Pass (these only work in their respective areas) give users free bus and train travel along with free or reduced rates for activities and sights. Find out more at [visitrentino.info](http://visitrentino.info) and [suedtiroel.info](http://suedtiroel.info)

## Day 4

## Trento &amp; San Martino di Castrozza

## A medieval capital

First, drive east to the picture-postcard Lago di Toblino, with its 16th-century namesake fortress and castle jutting out into the lake on a rocky spur. Take a gentle stroll along the lakefront promenade and grab a mid-morning coffee at Castel Toblino's café, then continue your drive east to the delightful regional capital of Trento.

Spare some time to visit the Castello del Buonconsiglio, which affords lovely views of the medieval centre. History buffs won't want to miss the ruins of the ancient Roman city of Tridentum that lie below the historic area, and which now forms part of the SASS Underground Archaeological Space. If you're travelling with children, make sure you visit Muse, Trento's science museum, which sheds light on alpine ecosystems and the geology of the Dolomites range.

Enjoy a late lunch at Osteria Il Cappello or try Il Libertino, then continue your drive east to San Martino di Castrozza in the Parco Naturale Paneveggio, the jumping-off point for treks in the Fale di San Martino, the Dolomites' largest massif. Overnight at the family-run Chalet Prà delle Nasse, enjoying supper at Ristorante Da Anita.

## Day 5

## Pale di San Martino

## Via ferratas and rifugios

The Dolomites' largest massif, the Pale di San Martino, is prime hiking territory, offering the most dramatic scenery of the Parco Naturale Paneveggio. From San Martino di Castrozza, a cable car whisks passengers up to Colverde, from where the Rosetta funicular cradles you safely up the mountainside to reach Rifugio Rosetta, the starting point for several trails of varying difficulty, some equipped with via ferratas.

A particular favourite is the 7.5km Riviera di Manna that winds along the plateau in less than three hours, which served as inspiration for acclaimed Italian novelist Dino Buzzati's *The Tartar Steppes*. Experienced hikers could try the Anello dell'Altopiano, a loop that passes Rifugio Pradidali and crosses two mountain passes in just under five hours. For dinner, head to Malga Ces, a traditional mountain restaurant about a five minutes' drive from San Martino di Castrozza.

## Days 6, 7 &amp; 8

## Bolzano

## Wine routes and Michelin stars

After breakfast, travel north-west to Bolzano, the provincial capital of German-speaking South Tyrol. As you cross into South Tyrol from Trentino, you'll notice road signs in both Italian and German, and you'll immediately sense the region's distinctive Central European culture.

As you approach Bolzano, join the Strada del Vino wine route, passing through exquisite vineyard landscapes where you can combine sightseeing with wine tasting. To the south of





Bolzano, San Michele d'Appiano has a handful of great restaurants, including two Michelin-starred establishments, while perching above the town's Castel d'Appiano (Burg Hocheppan), worth visiting for its beautifully preserved secular frescoes and views of the surrounding area. Drive to Bolzano in the late afternoon and check in at Parkhotel Mondschein or try Hotel Greif; if you'd

rather stay outside the city, the boutique Berghoferin offers a peaceful location. Savour elegant alpine dishes and Italian classics at Löwengrube, where the 13th-century wine cellar houses over 1,000 wines.

**City culture and the Ice man**  
Spend the day exploring Bolzano, one of the Dolomites' most beautiful cities.

## What to book

**On a budget**  
Inntravel (inntravel.co.uk) offers a one-week "A stroll in the Italian Dolomites" package from £1,160pp, including seven nights' half-board accommodation, luggage transfers, local travel, and route notes and maps. Flights not included

**A 'boutique' experience**  
Original Travel (originaltravel.co.uk) offers Bootiquing in the Dolomites from £3,150 to £5,200pp, including four nights' half-board accommodation, five days' guided walking, luggage transfers, return flights and airport transfers

**The luxury option**  
Cartology Travel (cartologytravel.com) offers bespoke trips in the Dolomites from £7,000pp, including nine nights' half-board accommodation, private transfers between resorts, six days with a private guide, activities and selected experiences at each hotel. Flights not included

## When to go

Outside of the winter season, the best time to visit is from June to September; if you can, avoid August when Italians take the bulk of their holidays – even the remotest of mountain paths can get congested. Note that many hotels and cable cars close after the winter season for a month or so, reopening in June



Start at Piazza Walther, the central square lined with pastel and butter-scotch palazzi, and stroll along the narrow Via dei Portici. The city's prized attraction is the Museo Archeologico, housing the mummified body of Otzi the Iceman, who was discovered in 1991 a few kilometres from the Austrian border.

For lunch, tuck in to local specialties at Vögele, a historic restaurant serving traditional dishes in partitioned wood-clad dining areas. Around mid-afternoon, catch the Funivia del Renon (Renon cable car) from Piazza Walther to Soprabolzano, which offers fabulous views of the city and the jagged, saw-toothed peaks of the Catinaccio massif. A narrow-gauge railway connects Soprabolzano to Collalbo, from where you can follow trail 24 to reach a viewing platform. Come late afternoon, soak up sunset views with a drink at Gloriette Guesthouse or Parkhotel Holzner, where you can also enjoy dinner before catching the funicular back to Bolzano.

**Mountaineering legends and beer halls**  
Bolzano serves as the perfect base for several day trips, with plenty of sights within striking distance of the centre. Renowned mountaineer and explorer Reinhold Messner hailed from Villnöss north-east of Bolzano, setting up a network of six museums in the region that shed light on alpine landscapes, the his-



You'll notice road signs in both Italian and German, and sense the distinctive Central European culture

tory of mountaineering and mountain peoples. The Messner Mountain Museum at Castel Firmiano is the closest to the city; it has a striking setting, with a network of walkways and stairways taking you past displays and installations in one of the region's oldest castles. The views of the Gruppo di Tessa mountains are a delight too.

Return for your last night in the city

◀ Dolomity: the Duomo di Bolzano rises above the beautiful provincial capital

▼ Hot potato: Tyrolean specialties, if wine is more your thing, then head to Lisa Wineboutique.



– try Batzen Häusl, one of Bolzano's historic beer houses that also serves Tyrolean specialties. If wine is more your thing, then head to Lisa Wineboutique.

## Day 9

### Seiser Alm

**The largest alpine plateau in Europe**  
Drive east to the Seiser Alm grasslands, the largest alpine plateau in Europe, where verdant summer pastures and meadows offer gentle trekking through scenic landscapes. Treat yourself to the stylish Adler Lodge, which offers warm and cocooning rooms along with an excellent spa. There are scores of hiking paths in the area, and there's no shortage of biking routes to suit all levels.

Following your hike or bike ride, unwind with a bay bath, an age-old tradition from the nearby village of Fiè allo Sciliar that sees participants lie in a tub wrapped in freshly cut hay enhanced with aromatic herbs such as thyme, gentian and mountain anise.

### Adrenaline kicks

Spend your last day in the fresh mountain air on a scenic outdoor activity, whether climbing or golfing in the nearby Seis am Schlern at the foot of the Seiser Alm – you can also explore this high-alpine pasture from the comfort of a horse-drawn carriage. If you're looking to end your stay on a high, try a tandem paragliding flight or swoosh through meadows and woods on the Monte Pana Zipline in neighbouring Val Gardena.

Enjoy a traditional lunch in lush green surroundings at one of the area's mountain restaurants such as Heualm or Malga Schgagüler Schwaige, before driving to Bolzano Airport or Innsbruck Airport for your return flight home.

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